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Subject choices in schools

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Education and Skills Committee

To consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

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Introduction

1. The Education and Skills Committee ("the Committee") agreed at its meeting on 30 January 2019 to undertake an inquiry into subject choices in schools.

2. The crux of the Committee's inquiry centred on whether or not the number of subject choices available to pupils had narrowed in the fourth year of secondary school ("S4"); if so, what the reasons and context were for this, and whether the principle of a broad education or any particular subjects were adversely affected by the change in curriculum.

3. However, over the course of its inquiry, other evidence emerged regarding a number of related issues. The Committee believes this evidence is important and has a duty to report on to provide a full picture of its findings.

4. The Committee issued a call for views on 4 February 2019, which received 37 responses. These responses were sent by parents and carers, teachers, academics, teacher unions/representative bodies and other organisations and were of great value to the inquiry. The responses are listed in the Annex, and can be read here.

5. The Committee also wrote to all local authorities and Higher Education Institutions ("HEIs") to make them aware of the inquiry and to seek information. The responses received from local authorities and HEIs can also be found in the Annex and on the Committee's website.

6. The Committee took evidence from eight separate panels of witnesses on seven occasions between 3 April and 29 May 2019. These panels included teacher representatives, parents and carers representatives, academics, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority ("the SQA"), and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills ("the Cabinet Secretary"), and full details of witnesses can be found in the Annex.

Engagement work

7. The Committee issued three online surveys to gather views about subject choices from pupils, parents and carers and teachers. The Committee also issued a survey to head teachers, while the Scottish Youth Parliament held workshops which contributed to the Committee's inquiry.

8. The Committee also held focus groups with pupils, parents,carers and teachers across the country. The focus groups with parents, carers and teachers were attended by MSPs and held in Dunfermline, while the Scottish Parliament's Community Outreach Team held sessions with young people in Fortrose, Edinburgh and Stevenston. The areas for the Outreach Team sessions, which were chosen to provide a broad range in terms of geography, rurality and affluence, were held in three similar size schools.

9. The surveys issued to pupils, parents, carers and teachers asked similar questions to those posed in the call for views, and were open during the same time-frame. 241 pupils, 375 parents and 1100 teachers - approximately 4% of secondary

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teachers in Scotland - responded to the surveys. SPICe analysed the returns of these surveys and produced briefings for each, links to which can be found in the Annex.

10. SPICe noted in its analysis of the teachers survey that:

> - staffing was most frequently cited as a factor that influences subject availability. School size and timetabling were also commonly referenced factors.
> - Respondents noted a decrease in the uptake of languages over the last five years; while Modern Studies was noted as having seen an increase in uptake. [1]

11. 76% of parents who responded to the survey stated that their child was not able to take all the subjects they wanted to at school, with National 5 qualifications particularly affected, while pupils cited column clashes and timetabling as key reasons why they could not study the subjects they wanted to. [2]

12. Most of the schools that responded to the SPICe survey of head teachers offer either six or seven subjects in S4, with very few offering eight. The recruitment of teachers and timetable capacity were cited as the most common factors constraining the number of subjects offered. [3]

13. The following report draws on evidence gathered through these separate strands of inquiry work and makes a series of recommendations, mainly to the Scottish Government, regarding how schools and local authorities can best be supported in providing a curricular model which supports pupils and enables teachers.

14. The Committee would like to thank everybody who contributed to the inquiry, whether by submitting written evidence, giving evidence in Parliament, completing a survey or taking part in a focus group.

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Curriculum for Excellence: curricular structure and development of the Senior Phase

15. The Senior Phase was the last element of the Curriculum for Excellence ("CfE") to be implemented. It was phased in from 2013-14 to 2015-16. The previous national qualifications of Access, Standard, Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher were replaced by National courses and new Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications.

16. Prior to CfE, secondary school tended to be structured in three two-year groupings ("2+2+2"): S1-2, S3-4, and S5-6. CfE changed the structure of secondary school to two 3-year groupings ("3+3"): S1-S3 and S4-S6. S1 - S3 is described as the broad general education ("BGE"), and S4-S6 as the Senior Phase.

17. Witnesses sought to explain the logic behind these changes from the previous system. The Cabinet Secretary summed up the new system:

> The broad general education was envisaged to extend over the period from secondary 1 to S3 and would ensure that young people acquired a breadth of experience across eight curricular areas: expressive arts; health and wellbeing; languages, including English; mathematics; religious and moral education; sciences; social studies; and technologies.
>
> The senior phase was envisaged as a three-year experience in which young people would be encouraged to remain at school for longer and engage in deeper learning with a broader range of opportunities to develop skills that are relevant to the wider world.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 32[1]

18. In its written submission, Education Scotland also highlighted that the Senior Phase allowed for a mix of qualifications to be undertaken by pupils:

> There are no pre-conceived notions about the number or types of qualifications taken at which stage of the senior phase. The guiding principle is that qualifications, awards and achievements are taken at the right stage for the individual young person over the senior phase which can be up to three years. This allows learners to build up a bespoke portfolio of qualifications, awards and skills by the time they leave school and move on to their next stage of learning in, for example, apprenticeships, employment, further or higher education. It follows from this that the right time to view the overall achievements of young people is at their point of exit from the senior phase, rather than in any individual year. This is a key difference in approach to the previous system. [4]

19. The SQA is responsible for delivering and developing the new qualifications undertaken in the new curriculum:

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> The SQA's role in CfE was to develop for the senior phase new qualifications that would reflect the principles of CfE and build on the experiences and outcomes of the broad general education that was introduced for the early years through to secondary school until the end of secondary 3...
>
> In addition to the nationals, Highers, and Advanced Highers, the SQA has a wide range of other qualifications and awards at all Scottish credit and qualifications framework levels, many of which can support the diverse interests and needs of young people in the senior phase.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Janet Brown (Scottish Qualifications Authority), contrib. 77[2]

20. The SQA is also responsible for the guidance which informs teachers of the notional hours of learning required for each qualification, the impact of which is explored later in the report.

21. The Committee heard from Dr Alan Britton of the University of Glasgow about the autonomy of headteachers under CfE:

> It is in the spirit of curriculum for excellence for schools' headteachers to be empowered and autonomous to make decisions relating to the curriculum. Moreover, that is part of the general ethos of Scottish education.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Alan Britton (University of Glasgow), contrib. 16[3]

22. Larry Flanagan of the Educational Institute for Scotland ("EIS") sounded a note of caution about the reality versus the intention:

> ...CfE was not meant to be about a change to qualifications. It was meant to be a pedagogical change about the how we facilitate learning for our young people and was predicated on the idea that young people must have more than just qualifications and need a skill set that makes them resilient in an ever-changing market in the 21st century. That is where the space for depth in learning was meant to be pitched, but implementation of the senior phase has left us some way short of achieving that ambition. In considering subject choice, we must also look at the broader objectives and put subject choice in that framework.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan (Educational Institute of Scotland), contrib. 6[4]

Consultation and the structure

23. Professor Jim Scott of the University of Dundee contended in a paper, published in 2018, that the change to the structure of secondary education was implemented without adequate consultation. He also said that while the age 3-15 curriculum was subject of a great deal of work during the development of CfE, the Senior Phase was left to the SQA which he described as "a qualifications body rather than a curricular agency". [5]

24. The Committee was told by the National Parent Forum of Scotland ("NPFS") that it had been a member of the CfE management board, but it was:

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> not really consulted on the design, although we were party to some of the discussions about how it would work.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy (National Parent Forum of Scotland), contrib. 8[5]

25. Marjorie Kerr, President of the Scottish Association of Geography Teachers ("SAGT"), told the Committee that the way in which CfE was implemented in secondary schools was problematic in that the BGE was implemented first and qualifications second, which meant that the first three years were developed without a clear idea of the end-points.

26. The Cabinet Secretary defended the consultation process for the implementation of the new curriculum:

> In excess of 1,000 teachers were involved in the consultation and development work to design the new qualifications. There was extensive engagement with the profession. I know that there was an issue that predates my time in post, when the EIS sought a one-year delay in the application of the qualifications. My understanding and interpretation of that was that it was about the pace, rather than the substance of the reforms.
>
> There was extensive consultation.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 34[6]

27. Professor Jim Scott provided the Committee with some statistics:

> With respect to subject 'choice columns' within Senior Phase course choice structures:
>
> • 193 schools offer 'traditional' S4-5-6 structures (with subject column patterns as follows: 8-5-5, 8-5-4; 7-5-5, 7-5-4, 7-5-3; 6-5-5, 6-5-4, 6-5-3) [with a total of 14 to 18 qualifications available to learners as a result of their S4-6 experience]
>
> • 9 schools offer traditional S4-6 6-5-5 structures with an option for some learners to pursue a 6-6-6 structure [with a total of 16 to 18 qualifications available to learners]
>
> • 22 schools offer a 6-6-6 structure in S4-6 [with a total of 18 qualifications available to learners]
>
> • 7 schools offer some other pattern (e.g. 6-6-4, 6-5-6, 6-5-3, 5-6-6, 5-5-5) [with a total of 14-17 qualifications available to learners]
>
> • 127 schools do not publish all of their S4-6 curricula and thus cannot be categorised.
>
> • There is now almost no evidence of schools opting for 2-year blocks within their S4-6 curriculum, where qualifications are not attempted until the second year of the block.[i]

28. When asked about the rationale for the use of different models in different local authorities, Professor Scott informed the Committee:

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> I researched every single document—I mean every document, right down to every committee paper from every committee since 2008—and managed to find only three curricular policies from the 32 authorities. I am sure that there are more, but they are not in a public place. Of the three policies, one predated curriculum for excellence. I did the same research with schools to look for curricular rationales that would explain why the reduction was happening, and only 15 to 20 per cent of Scotland's secondary schools could produce a rationale.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Jim Scott (University of Dundee), contrib. 9[7]

29. Dr Alan Britton also referred to Professor Scott's work in this regard:

> I have made the point previously that, other than Jim Scott's work and that of a few other people, we have very little research evidence about the impact of the different models. Schools have been left to try things out, almost certainly based on sound local judgment, but there is very little evidence. We need to have all those things in place to arrive at a solution.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Britton, contrib. 25[8]

30. Throughout the inquiry, some witnesses highlighted the flexibility of the structure of the Senior Phase as one of its strengths. Gayle Gorman, Chief Executive and Chief Inspector of Education, Education Scotland, said:

> It is a societal and systems change, so everyone has to shift their mindset. We have to talk more about having a fluid and flexible senior phase; we need to talk more about getting off the ladder of traditional qualifications and having to pass through one gate to get to the next. We have to look at the messages that higher education institutions and employers send to the system and to parents and young people about the value of the traditional model of five Highers in one sitting.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 47[9]

> ...wider qualifications are taking up more of the curriculum choice. That should be seen as positive. Young people are doing higher national certificates or modern apprenticeships and are taking different pathways. There is also wider learning, such as Duke of Edinburgh and saltire awards. There is a whole range of choices. The issue is about the definition of qualifications and subject choice. Looking at the outcomes of CfE, we see a much more fluid picture and a wider landscape of qualifications.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 59[10]

31. The SQA explained the philosophy of CfE compared to the previous curriculum:

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i The numbers that Professor Scott uses here refer to the number of choices in each of S4, S5 and S6. Therefore, "6-5-4" means that young people may choose six subjects in S4, five subjects in S5 and four subjects in S6

> The senior phase was originally envisaged as a three-year phase with young people doing a mixture of courses that would each take one or two years. It was never envisaged that everybody would do one set of qualifications in one year and another set in the next. A much more mixed economy was envisaged. I know of some schools that do subjects such as English and maths over two years because they feel that the depth of learning helps young people to consolidate, which is much better, because maths and English are fundamental to all the other learning that young people do.
>
> The ethos and philosophy are all about addressing weaknesses in the previous system, such as a lack of depth of learning. It was about giving schools the flexibility and empowerment to offer different approaches that they feel meet the needs of their young people, which might be different for different subjects or year groups.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Gill Stewart (Scottish Qualifications Authority), contrib. 97[11]

32. The SQA also said that the new curriculum was better suited to a wider cohort of pupils:

> Some children benefited a lot from the old system, in which they went through Standard Grades and then straight on to Highers and Advanced Highers. However, not all children benefited. It is important to understand that there is now a wider range of options. These days, schools have the opportunity to provide a range of options through partnerships with other schools. It is a question of thinking about the outcome of all education, not just about S4. It is about the outcome at the end of the senior phase and whether that is better for children than it was under the old system.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 84[12]

33. The EIS, however, stated that the structure of the Senior Phase is mostly unchanged from its pre-CfE design:

> While the qualifications themselves have changed, the ways in which young people undertake them much too closely resemble the experiences of senior students a decade and a half ago when the new ambitions of CfE, including those for the Senior Phase, were being articulated out of the desire to transform the curriculum for the better. [6]

34. Larry Flanagan of the EIS expanded on this point in oral evidence:

> Primarily because the change from Standard Grade to N4 and N5 happened over a summer, most schools simply replaced Standard Grade with N4 and N5 and maintained their curriculum timetables, because that was the only way in which schools and pupils could cope with it. We got off to a bad start in terms of looking at curricular structures, and it is only now that the SQA, Education Scotland and the Scottish Government are saying the same thing about exit qualifications and looking at a three-year experience. I think that that is the way forward, rather than reverting to a model that was designed for a different age.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 19[13]

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35. The EIS recommended a Senior Phase structure which it believes would address some of the challenges and better reflect the change in curriculum:

> To realise the vision, the EIS believes, learner pathways designed for two years of study from S4 towards an exit qualification, based on students' prior learning, achievement and attainment during the three years of Secondary BGE, are the way forward. Such pathways should be creatively constructed to engage students in academic, 'vocational', and personal and social skills-based learning in a balance that suits their prior learning, achievement and attainment, and which is appropriate for the next stages of their learner journey. S6 should enable students to deepen their learning in some areas, diversify in others, and in so doing, acquire additional qualifications as necessary and appropriate to their chosen post-school destinations. Within such a model, National Qualifications would be undertaken for the vast majority of students, for the first time, in S5; only the 10-11% of students who leave school at the end of S4 should sit National Qualifications after one year – or more realistically 9 months -of study within the Senior Phase.
>
> While qualifications and/ or exams in S4 may be necessary for those leaving school at the end of the year, this is not needed and indeed is an unhelpful barrier to depth and richness, and arguably greater enjoyment, of Senior Phase study, for the vast majority of young people -almost 90%- who remain at school until the end of S5, two thirds till the end of S6. [7]

36. In oral evidence, Larry Flanagan of the EIS again mooted this model, which he believed reflected the choice over number of subjects posed by the new structure:

> Frankly, there are only two choices. Either the school offers eight columns across S3 and S4 or it offers eight columns across S4 and S5. If we are going to have S4 presentations as the norm, we are not going to get beyond six subjects. Those that are doing seven or eight are either cheating S3 or they are cheating S4. That is all about the problems of the two-term dash and assessment.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 89[14]

37. Gerry Lyons of ADES said this suggestion was worthy of further exploration:

> It would be interesting to explore such flexibilities, including two-year Higher programmes for young people who are not doing eight National 5 qualifications but take eight subjects, some of which are at Higher level in fourth year if they have the ability. However, it is important that parents are engaged and that there is robust tracking and monitoring to make sure that the progress is right and that the pace of learning is at the highest possible level.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 82[15]

38. However, Tony McDaid of South Lanarkshire Council highlighted some of the challenges of this approach:

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> We have not really cracked the issue of a pupil bypassing the National 5 qualification, which has been part of the committee's conversations, but there can be merit in doing so. At the moment, parents are understandably reluctant about it and we have not convinced them that taking away that assessment burden would be in pupils' best interests. Therefore, we have to be quite robust in how we monitor and track the situation. For some young people, if we double the amount of time, we would halve their pace of learning, so there are pros and cons. For some pupils, we need to have the flexibility of the one-year activity, but for other young people it would be completely appropriate to take away the National 5 assessment, because we can see that they are Higher candidates. We need to be as flexible as possible, but we have probably not cracked that yet.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Tony McDaid, contrib. 81[16]

39. The Cabinet Secretary conceded an important point about the constraints of any structure on subject choice availability:

> I think that, because of the design of the deployment of resources and the choices that are made in schools, it is inevitable that some young people—I suggest that it is a small minority—will not be able to take all the choices that they would want to take. That is an inevitability of subject choice in any education system. I cannot sit here, as education secretary, and say to the committee that I can guarantee unfettered choice for every pupil in the country. No local authority leader or director of education could make such an offer, either.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 42[17]

40. The Committee supports the ethos and principles which underpin the Curriculum for Excellence and the work being undertaken to develop the Senior Phase. However, the Committee believes that the implementation of the Senior Phase has resulted in many schools attempting to implement a new curriculum within the structure of the previous curriculum which has resulted in unintended consequences.

41. The Committee recognises that there is an inherent tension between providing schools with the freedom to set their own structure and expecting our young people to have a consistent experience and opportunities. The Committee believes that Education Scotland should have a key role in helping to solve this dilemma by providing robust support to schools to understand the impact and outcomes of different curricular models.

42. The Committee therefore recognises that research to better understand the impact of different curricular models in different settings would be valuable to schools in deciding how best to shape their Senior Phase and recommends that the Scottish Government commissions independent research into different curricular models.

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43. The Committee noted with interest the evidence that some schools offer a two-year route in S4 and S5. Although the Committee retains concerns over how such a model could deliver for pupils who leave at the end of S4, the Committee recommends that this is a model which should be included in the proposed research.

44. This research should also consider how many subjects are offered in each year of the Senior Phase, what the core minimum offer is in each school, and the outcomes for pupils in order to provide schools and local authorities across Scotland with information on the challenges and opportunities created by different models to help inform their chosen approach.

45. Furthermore, the Committee believes this research should include qualitative analysis of the experiences of pupils, parents and carers, and teachers to supplement the quantitative aspects of the research.

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Accountability and data

46. The Committee was keen to understand where accountability lay for the performance of the Curriculum for Excellence. The Committee wrote to the Cabinet Secretary in January 2017, stating that:

> the lines of communication and delivery [in the Curriculum for Management Executive Board] seem blurred and the Committee remains concerned that this has had a negative impact on the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence. [8]

47. Education Scotland describes itself as a Scottish Government executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education and thereby securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages. [9]

48. As an awarding body, the SQA devises and develops qualifications, validates qualifications, and reviews qualifications to ensure they are up to date [10] .

49. Alan Britton highlighted a difficulty faced by local authorities in implementing the guidance from Education Scotland:

> There has been a.. loss of local authority capacity to provide policy translation, which was provided previously for things like Higher still, Standard Grades and the 5 to 14 curriculum. There was a middle cadre of people in the system who were able to interpret high-level guidance and provide ways to implement it consistently in schools. It was a cascade model, to some extent, but it operated in both directions. A policy could be cascaded from above, but information from the ground up was fed into the system.
>
> That middle layer has largely gone, as the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] highlighted in its report. A possible way forward is through the regional improvement collaboratives, which are at least an attempt to re-establish a layer that is sustainable in the current climate to provide regionalised support for policy implementation and to help headteachers to find their way around this.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Britton, contrib. 56[18]

50. The Cabinet Secretary outlined his view of accountability:

> I talked about the different shared responsibilities. I talked about the fact that individual schools must be well-led institutions that are engaged with pupil, parent and staff communities to ensure that a high-quality general education and an appropriate senior phase is delivered for all young people in secondary schools in Scotland. That is accountability number 1. Accountability number 2 is that local authorities have a statutory responsibility for the delivery of education. Local authorities should be constructively and creatively engaged in supporting schools to fulfil that objective. Accountability number 3 is that Education Scotland has a big role to play, along with local authorities, in regional improvement collaboratives, which are a platform for exemplary practice. Other collaborations will also take place.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 60[19]

51. During this inquiry the Committee has drawn on a number of sources of data. The SQA's submission [11] provides a useful overview of attainment and entries over time. The SQA's data is shared with the Scottish Government; however it covers only SQA courses. Both the SQA and the SCQF noted that the Scottish Government's Insight tool [12] will have information on a broader set of qualifications.

52. Dr Stewart from the SQA told the Committee that:

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> The insight tool provides a broader set of measures for schools to look at, such as the positive destination measure for school leavers; measures on literacy and numeracy, which have improved; and measures on the highest SCQF level achieved, which relate not just to SQA qualifications but to other qualifications, such as those from ASDAN, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and the Prince's Trust.
>
> The Scottish Government has all that data at the national level, and schools have it locally. Schools can try different approaches for different groups of young people to see what their impact is. Schools must look at what works for young people.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Stewart, contrib. 166[20]

53. In the context of whether the SQA's data could be used to support analysis of outcomes of different curricular models, Dr Brown told the Committee:

> We have data on the attainment based on an entry at a particular time. We know the age and stage of the individual but we do not know the curriculum model that they have undertaken. Our data can be used by local authorities and individual schools that know what their curriculum model is. They can see whether a change in their curriculum model has had a positive or negative impact on their students' attainment. We do not have that curriculum model information, so we cannot do that analysis
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 177[21]

54. The SQA publishes data at a local authority level. Each centre (school, college etc) has a unique code and the SQA data can also be used to track individuals over time. It would therefore appear possible that SQA or Insight data could be used alongside the data of schools' curriculum models to research the outcomes for young people under different curricular models.

55. Professor Scott was of the opinion that the transparent release of other data would assist with greater accountability on school performance:

> Personally, I would release the five subjects at SCQF level 3, five at 4 and five at 5 figures for every school in Scotland, and I would release information about the extent of planning, organisation and leadership by each of the 32 local authorities, because that is a mixed picture, as I suspect that you all understand. That would give us some basis, alongside the leaver statistics, which are very helpful, and the other statistics that we have. I would also try to ensure that information about all the qualifications that children get, whether through the SQA or not, is publicly available, so that we can see how schools are doing.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Scott, contrib. 48[22]

56. The Committee believes that the decision-making system in Scottish education confuses the implementation of policy. While ultimate accountability for the performance of Scottish education rests with the Cabinet Secretary, the Scottish Government should clarify the respective roles of Education Scotland, the SQA,

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Regional Improvement Collaboratives and local authorities in supporting schools in delivering the Curriculum for Excellence, and how the contributions of each of these levels of the system are assessed and improved. In particular, the Committee recommends that the purpose and role of Regional Improvement Collaboratives must be made clear.

57. Given we have a diverse system, it is important continually to collect data at a detailed level to understand performance and support improvement. This includes the impact of curricular models of attainment at different stages of the Senior Phase as well as at the point a young person leaves school. The Committee therefore seeks clarification from the Scottish Government on the reasons for not releasing data relating to attainment and achievement at S4 at individual school level.

58. The Committee's recommended independent research, to be commissioned by the Scottish Government, into curricular models should therefore be complemented by consideration of SQA data and SCQF attainment levels to help identify the outcomes for young people under different models.

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The purpose of S3

59. Regardless of the curricular structure chosen by a particular school, an issue which featured strongly in evidence was how S3 was used to prepare pupils for the Senior Phase. In the previous structure, S3 was the first year pupils would undertake preparation for qualifications, but the 3+3 model meant that S3 has now become the final year of pupils' broad general education before specialising in S4 and beyond.

60. The Committee heard from Larry Flanagan of the EIS that, in some schools, time is taken in S3 to undertake some preparation for National examinations in S4:

> A lot of schools are doing BGE in S3 while having an eye to what the senior phase is looking at. It should not be the case that, at the end of S3, pupils go into the senior phase—there should be a conscious transition from S3, so that pupils are prepared for the senior phase. That might mean making sure that there is informed choice.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 44[23]

61. Others, such as the SAGT, reported that S3 was seen as "wasting time" ahead of beginning qualifications in S4. In the view of the Royal Society of Edinburgh ("RSE"), the tension between S3's purpose in preparing pupils for the Senior Phase and its place as the final year of BGE is "the nub of the issue":

> However, its effectiveness in enabling a broader senior phase hinges on the extent to which schools use S3 to prepare learners for qualifications but in a way that does not compromise their entitlement to a broad general education in S3. This is the nub of the issue since the synergy between the BGE and the senior phase will have a significant bearing on the extent to which learners are prepared for qualification courses and the shape of the senior phase curriculum structures. [13]

62. The Royal Scottish Geographical Society ("RSGS") urged the Scottish Government to provide

> a strong indication… (perhaps through the forthcoming restatement of CfE) about the flexibility to teach more of the appropriate course content in S3 [which] would go a long way to addressing these time pressures and consequent knock on issues. [14]

63. Education Scotland accepted that S3 could be used in this way, with Strategic Director Alan Armstrong stating:

> we are not saying that schools cannot teach any element of National 5 courses until August of S4. That would not be appropriate.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 14[24]

64. Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland also stated that:

> The good news is that almost all headteachers and schools feel empowered to make decisions about their curriculum, and almost all are now revisiting the broad general education to plan better-aligned learning pathways, particularly between the BGE and the senior phase.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 6[25]

65. The SQA supported Education Scotland's view that progress had been made in ensuring a smooth pathway from BGE into the Senior Phase:

> Over the past few years, the SQA has done a couple of research programmes in which we have interviewed headteachers, senior management teams, teachers, pupils and parents, asking how they feel about the broad general education and the senior phase. The first study that we undertook indicated that there was not a smooth pathway from BGE into the senior phase, but the research in the second year found that a lot of progress had obviously been made. With any programme, we can learn lessons from going back and looking at how we could do it better. There is obviously much better understanding now of pupils' progress through the broad general education, in order to ensure that they are ready to enter courses in the senior phase.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 80[26]

66. This was echoed by Gerry Lyons, who said:

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> There is an iterative element to the issue. Such a disconnect might have been in place three, four or five years ago, but I suggest that it has lessened as we have come to understand the senior phase better and schools have engaged with the learner journey more effectively.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 25[27]

67. Tony McDaid from South Lanarkshire Council agreed with this, and pointed out that the previous system had also been subject to a disconnect:

> Previously, under the five-to-14 curriculum, young people would do their Standard Grades and then their Highers, but there was quite a disconnect with what preceded that. The learning that took place in the history class in first year did not necessarily connect with the Standard Grade experience or, indeed, the Higher experience, where different skills were involved. We now have a chance to line up what goes on in S1 with the skills that are required in S4 and S5. I think that an opportunity exists not only for greater progression, but for better coherence within the structures themselves.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Tony McDaid, contrib. 38[28]

68. The Committee notes that teachers and schools have worked hard to reduce the lack of coherence between the broad general education and the Senior Phase.

69. However, the Committee notes that this lack of coherence was the result of problems during the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence, and that issues still remain in some schools in ensuring a better transition from S3 to S4.

Review of the Senior Phase

70. The Scottish Government commissioned a policy review by the OECD to inform the development of education policy. The OECD reported its findings in 2015, and recommended a further evaluation of the implementation of CfE.

71. According to William Hardie of the RSE:

> The OECD's report focused on the broad general education phase because, back in 2014-15, the senior phase was still in its infancy.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, William Hardie, contrib. 79[29]

72. The RSE suggested that a new review which included the Senior Phase should now take place:

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> We have now had a number of years of running the senior phase, and quite a lot of the comments that have been made in discussion have been about how the broad general education knits with the senior phase. Given the fact that that was not covered by the OECD review in 2015, there could be a case for undertaking a review to look systematically at how the broad general education phase now fits with the senior phase. Curriculum for excellence is meant to be a 3-to-18 integrated curriculum but, if we have reviewed how it does only for those up to the age of 15, it might make sense to look at the system in total.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, William Hardie, contrib. 79[29]

73. On 1 May 2019, the Scottish Parliament held a chamber debate on subject choice[ii], and passed a motion referring to the OECD review and calling for the evaluation recommended by the OECD, which would include consideration of the Senior Phase, to take place.

74. The Committee believes that the time is right for an independent review of the Senior Phase which would be separate from the proposed research recommended by the Committee elsewhere in this report. The Committee seeks confirmation from the Cabinet Secretary that he has commissioned an independent review of the Senior Phase as well as providing an update on the timescale and scope of this work.

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National 4

75. The National 4 qualification is the equivalent of the previous Standard Grade General qualification, but does not have an external examination. It has been the subject of debate for some time and was considered by the Scottish Government's Curriculum and Assessment Board. Initially, pupils could 'fall back' to National 4 should they not pass their National 5 exam. However, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills wrote to the Committee on 31 October 2018 to inform the

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ii Text of the agreed motion: That the Parliament believes that Scottish education should be based on the principles of excellence and equity and that all young people, whatever their background, should be afforded the best possible educational experience at all levels of the curriculum; further believes that, while these principles are enshrined in the policy aims of the curriculum for excellence, the delivery of the new curriculum structure has exposed some fundamental failings with regard to subject choice, including the inequity that exists between schools in more affluent areas and those in more deprived communities; calls on the Scottish Government to recognise the serious concerns, which have been expressed by teachers, parents, young people and academics and take urgent action to address these failings in the delivery of the curriculum for excellence; believes that such action should include an evaluation of how the curriculum for excellence is actually being implemented in schools, as recommended by the OECD in its 2015 report, *Improving Schools in Scotland*, and considers that, although the senior phase was outwith the remit of this report, how the senior phase operates within the curriculum for excellence should be a priority for review.

Committee of the decision to withdraw the Recognising Positive Achievement fall-back option between National 5 and National 4 and said:

> With no clear consensus on redesigning the National 4 qualification, I am clear that attention should instead be focussed on improving the perceptions and currency of National 4 among learners, teachers, parents and employers, and within the context of a wider range of pathways available to learners. [15]

76. In the latter stages of the inquiry, the currency of the National 4 qualification was discussed. In its written submission, the SAGT suggested that the lack of an exam for National 4 adds to the feeling of being devalued by less able pupils [16] , while the EIS stated in its written submission that it had been of the view for some time that:

> National 4 courses require to be restructured to include an assignment, perhaps in replacement of the Added Value Unit, which is externally marked and graded by the SQA. Scottish Government has procrastinated on this issue for over two years. [17]

77. Larry Flanagan of the EIS expanded on this when giving evidence to the Committee:

> Around N4, there is a kind of dual-target group. There are people for whom N4 is a stepping stone to N5, and there are people for whom N4 is the plateau of their school achievement and who are looking to map into other qualifications. I am not seeking to diminish this debate, because I think that it is a very real one. I do not think that N4, as it currently stands and operates, is a good progression route to N5; however, if it is used as an exit qualification for young people going on to different pathways, it can be made to work. I just do not think that the absence of an external exam should be the default criticism; the issue should really be the young people's assessment needs.
>
> At the moment, we are trying to deal with quite a wide range of requirements with regard to what N4 is doing. Our current model does not straddle the two ambitions... For some young people, N4 is almost an incidental stepping stone that does not prepare them well; the reason why a lot of N4 candidates do not get their N5 is that they are borderline N4 passes rather than aspiring N5 passes. That is one of the wicked issues that we still have to resolve around how these qualifications work.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 11[30]

78. This was also mentioned during the Committee's focus group sessions with teachers in Dunfermline, where some participants said that the lack of an exam at National 4, along with the practice of "dropping" pupils from National 5 to National 4 following the results of their prelims, stigmatised those children taking National 4. [18]

79. The SQA acknowledged to the Committee the challenges faced by National 4:

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> We need to address the credibility of National 4 because it is a very valuable qualification. There is no external examination, but there are no external examinations for higher national certificates or diplomas. The issues are about perception and ensuring that the learners who achieve certification at National 4 have achieved the learning, knowledge and skills that are demonstrated at National 4.
>
> National 4 was designed specifically for the students who would go on to courses that do not have examinations and for whom examinations are not best suited to capture their abilities. There is a huge challenge with regard to the credibility of National 4, but we need to make sure that we address it.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 191[31]

80. The SQA said it had commissioned research into the credibility of the National 4 qualification. This found that 18 per cent of young people felt National 4 has low credibility, the figure for teachers was 37 per cent and for employers it was 15 per cent. [19]

81. However, the Committee heard during focus groups with teachers that some parents and carers did not recognise the value of qualifications below National 5, and that some employers were unaware of what a National 4 was worth. [20]

82. The Cabinet Secretary said that he considered National 4 to be a valuable qualification, but accepted that problems remain with its perception. He said:

> We are taking steps to build credibility. One of the factors in that regard was the existence of fall-back, whereby if a young person did not achieve a satisfactory level in National 5, they could get a National 4—not automatically, but as long as they had the unit history to demonstrate that learning. The approach made that qualification look a bit like compensation, and I have now removed fall-back, to ensure that we can explain to parents, young people and external stakeholders that National 4 represents significant learning, which is of value to young people. That is just one of the measures that we are taking to promote and strengthen National 4.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 141[32]

83. The Committee heard that the National 4 can be a key part of a learner's journey, either within school or as a route into college or modern apprenticeships. For those young people who choose to go to college having achieved at National 4 level, it is unclear how well the qualification prepares them to complete their courses in college.

84. The Committee recommends that as part of the review of the Senior Phase, the Scottish Government works with the Scottish Funding Council to identify the qualifications and destinations of young people who entered Further Education as part of their 16-18 learner journey having achieved at National 4 level while at school.

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85. The Committee notes the concerns expressed by some witnesses that pupils who leave school solely with National 4s will not experience the process of preparing for and taking an exam. The Committee is concerned that there has been no explanation of who made the decision to remove an external exam for National 4 and no apparent rationale explaining why this was the correct course of action to take. The Committee therefore seeks confirmation from the Scottish Government of who made this decision and the process and rationale which led to this decision.

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Senior Phase choices

Subject numbers in S4

86. The early part of the Committee's inquiry focused on the number of subjects studied in S4. The Committee heard evidence that the number of options has reduced from an average of eight across S3 and S4, as tended to be the case prior to the introduction of the new qualifications and curricular structure, to around six or seven in one year in S4, although the menu of choices for pupils had increased.

87. The broad general education from S1 - S3 is intended to ensure young people acquire a breadth of knowledge across eight curricular areas: expressive arts; health and wellbeing; languages, including English; mathematics; religious and moral education; sciences; social studies; and technologies. The Senior Phase is intended to provide opportunities to deepen that learning in particular areas and develop skills.

88. Professor Scott provided the Committee with details of his research which showed that, in 2018-19, around 50 per cent of schools offered six choices (including Maths and English, which are normally compulsory) in S4, around 40 per cent offered seven choices and around 10 per cent offered eight. Professor Scott also made comment on those schools offering six choices:

> 187/358 schools (down from 195 at the last survey) describe themselves as offering only 6 qualifications in S4. Their 'standard offer' of courses to their students is to provide English, Mathematics and any other four subjects. These schools must attempt to accommodate experiences in Expressive Arts, Languages, Business, Health & Wellbeing, ICT, Science, Social Subjects and Technology within those four columns. Inevitably, for each child, significant aspects of their prior curricular experience cease after S3…This has the potential to engender a significant impairment of the academic, scientific and business-related capacity of Scotland through the decline in Modern Languages and STEM subjects and of the cultural life of Scotland through the declines in Expressive Arts. [21]

89. Professor Scott expanded on this in evidence to the Committee, and gave his personal experience as a head teacher in managing this process:

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> Roughly half of Scotland's secondary schools offer six courses in S4.
>
> Generally, the schools that offer seven have chosen to do so, as a more sensible position in which to stand in a tighter curricular space, because schools have only S4 to play with for the first course. It would be a challenge for them to offer eight courses. When I was the headteacher of Perth high school, I chose to move to seven courses, because that was a sensible compromise between the danger in offering six choices, which I will spell out in a second, and the danger in offering eight—which is that there would be pressure on children from squeezing eight subjects into the available time, which would be difficult.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Jim Scott (University of Dundee), contrib. 9[7]

90. Some local authorities challenged the criticism made of the narrowing of the number of subjects studied in S4. Aberdeenshire Council said:

> On a superficial level, some people have criticised CfE because in schools – and authorities – which have remained true to the principles of CfE, pupils in S4 mainly study for 6 instead of 8 qualifications. Schools have, however, been creative in planning the S4 curriculum to allow pupils, on occasion, to achieve 7 qualifications, and where it has been in the best interests of young people, they have also been helped to follow the most appropriate learning pathway, with study of Higher, for example, in S4, or AH in S5. Schools are building Senior Phase timetables around learner pathways so that if pupils have not been able to take a qualification in one year, it will be available to them in the next. In this way, pupils can consolidate and deepen or broaden their learning at one level by moving sideways to pick up other subjects within a curricular area, rather than having to move upwards, to the next level. Pupils are therefore able to progress at a level and a pace which best suits them. [22]

91. Fife Council stated:

> The focus on subjects can be misleading. It is generally accepted in our schools that 8 courses cannot be undertaken in S4, given the time required for each one, without taking time from the core curriculum. However most of our schools offer 7 opportunities but these may not all be traditional national qualifications or even at the same level. The focus on young people following pathways in learning has created a much wider and more flexible curriculum offer in our schools. [23]

92. Those local authorities that gave oral evidence outlined the background to their decision on the number of subjects to offer in S4. South Lanarkshire Council said:

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> We understand why parents ask why the limit is six subjects in their school while in another school it is seven. At community level, we talk to children and their families about why that is the case, and we say that it is not just about their fourth year, and that they can do other subjects when they move on to fifth year and can get to where they are trying to get. It is important to have conversations with young people about their careers and what they are trying to do, and to say that they can do their qualifications across the full senior phase. Explaining that in schools helps, but we can understand the natural anxiety if there is a conversation between two households from different communities.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Tony McDaid, contrib. 49[33]

93. Similarly, Aberdeenshire Council reported its reduction from eight subjects to six:

> In 2013, Aberdeenshire Council decided to consult schools and said that we would, in the main, reduce the column structure from eight to six subjects. In Aberdeenshire, most youngsters in fourth year have the option to do six subjects and then do additional subjects. It is important to remember that eight subjects at Standard Grade were delivered over two years, but National 5 subjects are delivered over one year. It has a lot to do with the timing as well as the make-up of courses.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Vincent Docherty, contrib. 66[34]

94. However, East Renfrewshire has retained eight subjects:

> Broadly, across East Renfrewshire, students select eight subjects, sometimes nine, in S3, as they blend the experiences and outcomes into the senior phase. In S5 they generally choose five subjects and in S6 they choose three or four.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Mark Ratter, contrib. 44[35]

95. Witnesses were also keen to stress the increase in the number of subjects which pupils could choose from to suit many more potential pathways:

> In our [East Renfrewshire] high schools, our fifth and sixth years have a choice of more than 130 courses that they can take. Some of those will take place in the school—traditional Highers, Advanced Highers and National 5s—but alongside that is a huge range of courses from level 1 to level 8 of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework, which they can access in partnership with the colleges. That provides the opportunity to make sure that we are meeting all the learners' needs.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Mark Ratter (East Renfrewshire Council), contrib. 12[36]

96. This was highlighted as a strength of the system by Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland:

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> wider qualifications are taking up more of the curriculum choice. That should be seen as positive. Young people are doing higher national certificates or modern apprenticeships and are taking different pathways. There is also wider learning, such as Duke of Edinburgh and saltire awards. There is a whole range of choices. The issue is about the definition of qualifications and subject choice. Looking at the outcomes of CfE, we see a much more fluid picture and a wider landscape of qualifications.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 59[10]

97. Scott Harrison, representing the City of Glasgow College, expanded on the benefits of this:

> We must remember that curriculum for excellence is about skills for learning, life and work and that not everyone will go to university. There is widening access and alternative awards and qualifications—you mentioned Duke of Edinburgh awards, short courses and national 3s, 4s and 5s. It is important that we recognise those and acknowledge that people might use them not to go to university but to go into further education, employment or training. When I look at a student's application, I value those things just as much as I would value a Higher or an Advanced Higher.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Scott Harrison, contrib. 290[37]

98. However, those who attended the Parliament's community workshops felt that while there may be options to pick up subjects at local colleges or elsewhere, this was not always communicated effectively or done in a way that made it easy for pupils to access. [24]

99. Universities Scotland warned in its written submission about the risk of "pigeon-holing" pupils:

> We need to retain learners' capacity to follow diverse journeys from their senior phase subject choices to their eventual Higher education qualification, with the opportunity to change subject specialism....young people currently choose subjects for National 4s and 5s in S2 (approximately aged 13/14 years and typically choose 7/8 subjects) and choose a narrower subject choice following exams in S4 for Highers in S5/S6 (approximately aged 15/16 years). Further narrowing of subjects at this level will potentially 'pigeon-hole' young people at a very young (arguably too young) into potential employment and onward education choices. [25]

100. Joan Mackay, Assistant Director of Education Scotland, informed the Committee that Education Scotland is:

> not in a position to specify a minimum number of subjects.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Joan Mackay, contrib. 70[38]

101. Yet the RSE's written submission highlighted Education Scotland's 2016 guidance, which included direction on subject numbers:

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> The guidance also stated that schools should offer between six and eight qualification courses from S4. This has helped to minimise the number of schools offering fewer than six courses at S4. Fewer course options at S4 also reduces the learner's room for manoeuvre in the event that s/he does not succeed in one or more of their chosen subjects. This is not only important for those learners who plan to leave at the end of their compulsory schooling, but also for those who intend to progress to further study in their chosen subjects at S5/6. [26]

102. When asked whether taking fewer qualifications in S4 was an objective of curricular change rather than an unintended consequence, Alan Armstrong of Education Scotland said it was part of the design. He told the Committee that the policy intention was that in S4, young people would have a reduced number of choices as part of a range of different educational experiences including "leadership, volunteering and other wider experience that will help them through their lives", adding:

> We are measuring young people's attainment and achievement on the point of their exit from the senior phase, when they are 18 years old, wherever that learning has taken place.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 150[39]

103. The pressure on timetables of allocating 160 notional hours of learning for each subject required to complete a National 4 or National 5 qualification has been the main factor identified in reducing the number of subjects an individual can take in S4.

104. James Morgan of the SQA outlined the background to this allocation of hours:

> The 160 hours allocation for National 4, National 5 and Higher is not new. It was part of the previous qualifications—Intermediate 1, Intermediate 2 and Higher. Those qualifications are the DNA of the current National 4, National 5 and Higher. The allocation of 160 hours was specified, although the real measure that the SQA uses as part of the Scottish credit and qualifications framework is SCQF credit points and levels. The qualifications are the same size—they require 240 hours of learning. The allocation of 160 hours is for directed learning in the classroom and similar environments, and there is 80 hours of self-directed learning. At Standard Grade, the subjects also attracted 24 SCQF credit points.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, James Morgan (Scottish Qualifications Authority), contrib. 92[40]

105. William Hardie from the RSE told the Committee—

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> It is clear from the research and other work that has been carried out that the reduction in course choices in secondary 4 is an unintended consequence of fitting in the 160 hours of learning for national qualifications in a single year. A key issue is the point at which students can begin to prepare for qualifications—that is about the extent to which the broad general education phase can be used to prepare for qualifications. No policy intention to reduce subject choice is stated anywhere: it is an unintended consequence.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, William Hardie (Royal Society of Edinburgh), contrib. 3[41]

106. Larry Flanagan of the EIS outlined why this impacted on the number of subjects which could be chosen in S4:

> People talk about a notional 160 hours of learning time per subject. For a timetabler in a school, 160 hours is not notional. If I timetabled 100 hours for a maths Higher class, there would be a delegation at my door saying, "We cannot deliver this in 100 hours."
>
> The number of hours needed to deliver a course is 160 hours. You cannot even fit six subjects of 160 hours each into one year. The only reason that some schools are able to do that is because they are starting some courses in the middle of May—kids are finishing their exams one day and they are starting their new course the next day. That is the only way that, technically, they can offer six courses of 160 hours each.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 49[42]

107. The SQA explained that 160 hours is the length of time an average child would need to be taught the course content for a National examination, and that learning could start earlier than S4:

> There is always a debate about when learning for a particular course starts. Our understanding and expectation is that, to cover the course content, the average child has to have around 160 hours of teaching time. How much of that learning can be undertaken during the course of the broad general education by a child who is very advanced is down to the discretion of the teacher. For instance, some people will start the learning—not necessarily the assessment—of a National 5 course earlier than S4.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 126[43]

108. Some other witnesses claimed that the 160 hours need not be taught in one year, which would provide some further flexibility. The Cabinet Secretary said:

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> One of the problems with the 160 hours allocation point is that it rather assumes that nothing that a pupil has learned in the broad general education is of any relevance to the qualification that they are now undertaking. A young person will not succeed in National 5 maths if they do not know what one plus one is. I venture to suggest that they learned that a lot earlier than the start of S4 in secondary school. An assumption is made that prior learning is not really relevant to the calculation of 160 hours, which has perhaps constrained thinking about how courses should be delivered.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 66[44]

109. Alan Armstrong of Education Scotland said:

> the notional period of 160 hours is the learning required to reach a qualification. That learning does not have to take place after the start of S4. You could, for example, have a very able young person in S2 who is totally inspired by a novel, and gets deep into that novel, and into understanding the craft of the author and so on. Those are the kinds of skills and experiences that mean that we might be looking at National 5, perhaps even Higher, once in a while.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 11[45]

110. However, Alan Armstrong of Education Scotland also said that

> Its [the SQA's] notional 160 hours for a Scottish credit and qualifications framework-related 24 points is based on notional learning, not all of which requires teacher contact.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong (Education Scotland), contrib. 9[46]

which contradicts the SQA's explanation of the hours allocation.

111. Some witnesses emphasised that, although there had been a reduction in subjects studied in S4 in some schools, the Senior Phase had to be considered holistically. The Cabinet Secretary highlighted the opportunity for pupils to return to subjects later in the Senior Phase:

> I know that young people might not take a subject at a particular stage and then return to it later on. I have not seen any data that suggests to me that young people who pursue a subject at a later stage in the senior phase are at an inherent disadvantage.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 44[47]

112. However, the Scottish Youth Parliament's submission said that those who took part in their workshops reported "having to take crash Highers to meet conditional university offers" [27] . Those who were not able to take all the subjects they wanted to in S4 were reported to have said that they had to crash subjects later on and had limited career and university options.

113. In oral evidence, Alan Armstrong of Education Scotland emphasised the changing pattern of when pupils left school:

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> We know that an increasing number of young people are staying on after S4; in fact, two thirds now leave from S6, and the numbers not leaving in S4 but moving into S5 have increased. Ten years ago, only about one in nine young people stayed on into S5, and now it is one in six.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong (Education Scotland), contrib. 9[46]

114. However, the Committee heard from CELCIS that 72% of care-experienced young people leave school in S4. CELCIS also said:

> The attainment gap begins to narrow for looked after children in S5 and S6 therefore it is imperative that, where appropriate, we support children to stay at school for as long as possible....
>
> Children who have experience of care will often have faced very disrupted schooling due to issues such as placement moves, exclusions, reduced timetables and lower average attendance. This will impact on children's ability to meet the expected curricular milestones at the expected stage of school. This could potentially narrow the subject options available to them in the senior phase. [28]

115. CELCIS also stated that support for looked-after children needed to be in place from an early stage:

> According to the achievement of CfE levels data, there is at P1, P4, P7 and S3 already quite a significant gap in reading, writing, literacy, numeracy and talking for our looked-after children. That not only goes some way to explaining their experience in education but helps us to think about the supports that need to be put in place before children even get to fourth year, to ensure that we are making plans right from that very early age, at which we are initially spotting these concerns.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Linda O'Neill, contrib. 61[48]

116. In its written submission, CELCIS highlighted research commissioned by the Scottish Funding Council designed to gain deeper understanding of the enablers and barriers that care experienced students encounter in going to, staying at and transitioning out of further and higher education in Scotland. This research[iii] was published in June 2019 and made 18 recommendations on how to better support care experienced students.

117. The Committee acknowledges that there is, depending on availability, a wider range of subjects and alternative pathways for pupils to choose from than existed before, but that inevitably there will continue to be instances where pupils are unable to choose every subject they wish to study.

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iii O'Neill, L., Harrison, N., Fowler, N. & Connelly, G. (2019). 'Being a student with care experience is very daunting': Findings from a survey of care experienced students in Scottish colleges and universities: Glasgow: CELCIS.

118. Although it is important to put the issue of subject choices in the wider context of curriculum design, the remit of the Committee's inquiry specifically sought to examine whether there was a narrowing of choices in S4. When considering this precise question, it is evident that there has been a reduction in the number of subjects available to pupils in S4 in most schools since the introduction of the Senior Phase.

119. It is clear that this reduction in subject choices is at least in part a result of the change to the curricular structure. This reduction in the number of subjects pupils can take, combined with an often increased number of subjects for pupils to select from, has had a detrimental effect on participation rates in some subjects in S4.

120. The Committee acknowledges that a Broad General Education with eight curricular areas now exists until S3, rather than S2, and that the intention is to provide pupils with the opportunity to return to subjects later in the Senior Phase.

121. However, where the curriculum narrows to five or six subjects in S4, there can be challenges for learners who wish to undertake a broad suite of qualifications in traditional subject areas, such as mathematics, English, sciences, social sciences, arts and languages. The Committee considers that the opportunity to retain a breadth of learning throughout secondary school and to gain a broad set of qualifications are cornerstones of Scottish education which are in danger of being lost.

122. Pupils who leave at the end of S4 will also be affected by the reduction of subjects taken in S4. Although the number of pupils leaving at the end of S4 has decreased notably in recent years, 72 per cent of care experienced pupils leave at the statutory leaving age, which means those pupils are disproportionately affected. The Committee notes the results of the Scottish Funding Council's research into care experienced students at Scottish colleges and universities published in June 2019, and recommends that the Scottish Government sets out how it will improve the current system and act to reduce barriers for care-experienced young people in going to, staying at and transitioning out of further and higher education in Scotland.

Deprivation and rurality

123. Another area of debate was the effect of deprivation on the educational experience and subject choices of school pupils. Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland told the Committee that:

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> Our evidence shows that the deprivation factor has not been as significant as we initially hypothesised. It is about the range and quality of education. Schools in Scottish attainment challenge funded local authorities and schools have been able to continue to offer, in many cases in an innovative way, quite a wide curriculum because of the additional resource. There is a rounded and strong offer, with a variety of experiences in it.
>
> We are finding that, in areas that are not attainment challenge authorities or that are not receiving significant pupil equity funding, deprivation is a bigger factor in their curriculum offer and what they are able to do.
>
> However, geography and demographics still always play a part. Sometimes it is about the ability to recruit teachers
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 131[49]

124. However, other evidence received by the Committee suggested otherwise, such as the written submission from recently retired head teacher Jim Sutherland:

> While fewer subjects should lead to a greater depth of learning, many of the possible benefits were lost initially with over-complex and burdensome assessment procedures. Reducing courses from two-year (S3-S4, Standard Grade/Intermediate) to one-year (S4 only, Nationals) has also impacted negatively on the depth of young people's learning.
>
> I believe that the narrowing of the curriculum in S4 has contributed to widening – not closing – the attainment gap. Young people from more affluent backgrounds tend to choose subjects which are more inclined to lead-on to higher or further education while children from more deprived backgrounds tend to choose subjects which some would describe as "less academic". [29]

125. Alastair Sim of Universities Scotland developed this point in oral evidence:

> From conversations that I have had in the sector, I know that there is concern at the moment that some students in some schools, particularly in more deprived areas, do not have the range of opportunity that we would expect them to have at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher and that their opportunities for progression are being diminished by that.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alastair Sim (Universities Scotland), contrib. 251[50]

126. Larry Flanagan of the EIS referred to previous Committee questions on whether schools that serve areas of multiple deprivation have fewer choices and agreed, saying:

> That is absolutely true, but it was as true before the senior phase as it is now, because of the class sizes in those schools. The stay-on rate is lower in those schools, so there are fewer pupils, which dictates the subject choice that can be offered.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 44[23]

127. The Cabinet Secretary told the Committee he:

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> ...would have to look carefully at whether a pattern exists. The position also depends on the choices that are made about where we judge deprivation to exist—do we judge its existence on the location of the school or the pupils' home residences? That makes a difference. A school that is located in what is judged to be an area of multiple deprivation can have a pupil cohort that does not emerge exclusively from deprived backgrounds, and the converse applies....
>
> I am open to exploring questions about deprivation. As I said, I do not want the backgrounds of young people to inhibit their opportunities to progress.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 135[51]

128. Alan Armstrong of Education Scotland also told the Committee that the Scottish Government

> has commissioned and is scoping a piece of research on the senior phase that will look at issues such as the availability of subjects in each school.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 68[52]

129. Prior to the commencement of this inquiry, during an evidence session on 19 September 2018, the Committee took evidence from Dr Marina Shapira whose research with Prof Mark Priestley suggested that there is

> a link between the level of school area deprivation, the number of children in school on free meals and the average number of subject choices at a school.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 19 September 2018, Dr Shapira, contrib. 25[53]

The research suggested that this may be explained, in part, by there being fewer teachers at such schools.

130. Dr Shapira and Professor Priestley have since published further research on the role deprivation plays in subject choices, which was published following the conclusion of the Committee's evidence-taking. Their research demonstrates that:

> A larger reduction in the number of subject entries for National 5 level qualifications took place in schools in more deprived areas, as well as in schools with a larger number of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, schools where the proportion of pupils with additional learning support needs was higher, and schools with poorer staff-student ratios. We also found that the number of subject entries was smaller in schools where the overall number of subjects offered for National 5 level qualifications was smaller. Furthermore, we found that schools in areas of higher deprivation and schools with larger numbers of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds had smaller proportions of young people enrolled in Sciences and Modern Languages, and a larger proportion of pupils enrolled in Vocational subjects. [30]

131. As Education Scotland acknowledged, schools in rural parts of the country can struggle to recruit and retain teachers, which affects the subjects they can offer. Consortium arrangements would therefore, in an ideal world, be of assistance, but such arrangements with other local authority schools and/or colleges may not be feasible due to the distances involved. In such cases, the Committee heard about

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the use of digital tools such as "e-Sgoil" to provide additional capacity. Although e-Sgoil originated in the Western Isles, it has since been rolled out across a number of other local authorities.

132. Parent representatives were supportive of using digital tools such as e-Sgoil, although there was a disparity in experience of their use:

> I cannot see why, though, with the digital means that we have today, a pupil cannot sit in a classroom in their own school and link to a classroom in another school. I do not see why that is not an option. I know that e-Sgoil has been rolled out across the Highlands. I do not see why something similar is not an option for other classroom lessons. Certainly, young people coming together in one location for a subject is fine, if it is possible.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy, contrib. 34[54]

> In rural areas, travelling to other schools is not an option, so technology is the only answer. It is the only way to deliver equality in provision for children who are in small classes in small schools with limited curriculums. We need to develop the use of e-Sgoil and other hubs that can deliver to schools through technology.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Magaidh Wentworth, contrib. 46[55]

133. However, Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland did also caution that it would be concerned whether remote learning was suitable for all subjects:

> The approach is absolutely appropriate for some subjects and is appropriate for part of the learning in other subjects. It requires that teachers and educators construct a course in such a way as to ensure that young people get the best out of it.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 84[56]

134. The Cabinet Secretary recognised the need to ensure pupils in rural areas were not disadvantaged:

> I totally accept that choices can be more difficult because of rurality. I represent a rural area and I know exactly what the challenges are. Models can be deployed to try to ensure that the broadest possible choice is available to young people. I stress that, if there are concerns about availability of course choices, I am happy to explore them.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 123[57]

135. There is cross party support for closing the poverty-related attainment gap. It is therefore concerning that recent academic research has found that secondary schools in more deprived areas have a more restricted range of subjects available for study, and that the subjects that are available tend to be subjects perceived as being less academic and/or more vocational in nature.

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136. The Committee urges the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to investigate this educational disparity and to confirm where accountability at a national level for tackling this lies. The responsible body should then work with schools and local authorities to ensure that this inequity in choice is tackled effectively.

137. The Committee acknowledges that location/rurality and deprivation can be barriers to aligning school timetables and establishing consortium arrangements.

138. The Committee asks COSLA to confirm how the use by local authorities of e-Sgoil or other digital solutions is promoted, and how experience of these is shared through Regional Improvement Collaboratives. The Committee also asks Education Scotland to provide guidance to local authorities on which subjects could appropriately be taught using such means.

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The impact on particular subjects

139. As well as issues surrounding the number of subjects chosen at S4, the Committee received evidence from teachers in particular subjects, which suggested that their subject was particularly disadvantaged by the new curriculum.

140. Logically, it is to be expected that some subjects in S4 will see a reduced uptake if there are a wider range of options for young people to choose from and fewer qualifications studied in S4. However, the Committee wanted to understand whether this affected certain subjects disproportionately.

141. Larry Flanagan of the EIS reminded the Committee, by way of contrast with the new curriculum, that "we used to be quite prescriptive across Standard Grade about the limit of pupil choice". He continued:

> To be clear, pupils did not have free choice under Standard Grade. They had to do English, maths and a science; they had to do history, geography or modern studies; and they normally had to do art, drama or music, whether they liked those subjects or not. They then had a wee bit of choice around second sciences.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 44[23]

142. This approach was referred to by Marjorie Kerr, representing the SAGT, who suggested that there had been a reduction in the breadth of study:

> We would also like there to be a requirement to keep breadth in education up to S4 of at least seven or eight subjects, and we are very keen to see teaching of subjects from S1 onwards being led by subject specialists to ensure rigour, challenge and progression.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Marjorie Kerr (Scottish Association of Geography Teachers), contrib. 4[58]

143. Some Committee witnesses. such as Professor Jim Scott, identified particular subjects which were perceived to be affected by the reduction in subjects taken in S4:

> We probably have five problems. We have a modern languages problem, an ICT problem and a STEM problem because of a drop that was caused by structural changes in Scottish education. Despite Keir Bloomer's not having got a lot of answers, I know how many schools are doing six columns: roughly half of Scotland's schools are. We have a problem with STEM subjects because, whether we like it or not, they suffer in a six-column environment. Instead of the 16 to 17 per cent drop in those taking STEM subjects that we should have had, there was a drop of 25 to 27 per cent.
>
> There are also problems in the arts and the technologies, as several of us have said, because they are competing with one another for part of the last space: it is extremely difficult to give them all curricular bandwidth unless the columns are ramped up to seven or eight.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Scott, contrib. 96[59]

144. Referring to his suggested Senior Phase model discussed earlier in the report, Larry Flanagan of the EIS also acknowledged the position of particular subjects:

> Subjects such as geography, history, sciences and languages will be squeezed out if the school goes down to five or six choices early in the programme. That is why I favour the two-year S4 and S5 course, because the pupils are staying on. Using S4 and S5, we can retain subject choice in a much more meaningful way than we can with the hybrid system that we have at the moment, which was born of the practical need to make changes without damaging pupils' outcomes.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 89[14]

145. The Committee received particular representations from a number of subject areas. The Learned Societies' Group on Scottish STEM Education set out the decline in STEM qualifications:

> The number of candidates presenting for STEM qualifications has declined over the last five years. While demographic change is a factor, the changing structure of the senior phase, especially the reduction in subject choice at S4, would appear to be a key factor. Given that the total number of Higher entries increased between 2013 and 2018, we might reasonably have expected to see an increase in STEM entries. However, the data shows a decrease in the uptake of STEM subjects at Higher level relative to other subjects. [31]

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146. The Learned Societies' Group highlighted Computing as a particular cause for concern:

> In the case of Computing, an additional factor for the substantial decline in presentations could be the change in the substance of the courses, with computational thinking and programming featuring much more prominently in the new Computing Science courses compared with previous courses. Given the substantial skills gap in the tech sector in Scotland and the ongoing developments in automation, the drop-off in the uptake of Computing is particularly concerning. [32]

147. It was also pointed out by witnesses that part of the decline in participation rates was as a result of languages no longer being compulsory in S4.

148. Francisco Valdera-Gil spoke about the impact on languages:

> I think that it has come to that [reduction] since languages stopped being compulsory. Also, if someone is taking only five, six or seven subjects, the one that is most likely to be dropped in S4—statistics from SCILT, Scotland's national centre for languages, put the figure at 65 per cent—is modern languages.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Francisco Valdera-Gil, contrib. 24[60]

149. Alan Armstrong of Education Scotland suggested that languages could be picked up again later in the Senior Phase:

> The range of course options over S4 to S6 is mixed. A young person might not study a language in S4 but could pick it up in S5 or S6. Many short courses are also available to allow young people to learn a language or other subjects over S4 to S6.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 165[61]

150. However, Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland acknowledged the concerning decline in language uptake:

> That decline is a concern... We want our young people to be global citizens, and in order for that to happen they need to be able to communicate. Post the SQA examinations diet and the results that Education Scotland has been looking at, we have been working with our partners across the sector to develop language learning.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 188[62]

151. The Cabinet Secretary was asked about the importance of continuity of language learning:

> In relation to languages, I want to know whether, for example, a young person who learns French as part of their broad general education but who does not take French in S4 will be at any disadvantage if they take the opportunity to return to French in S5. I will need to take further advice on that question from educationalists who advise me on such matters.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 44[47]

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152. Particular concerns were raised about Gaelic qualifications, as well as what this may mean for the future of Gaelic Medium Education and the language itself. Catriona MacPhee of Clas-Comann Luchd-Teasgaisg Árd Sgoiltean ("CLAS" - the Gaelic Secondary Teachers' Association) told the Committee:

> I will summarise our position by saying that, despite the problems that we have, we are, almost without exception, in agreement that the narrowing of subject choices in many Scottish schools has had a profoundly negative effect on the uptake of Gaelic, especially—but not exclusively—among new Gaelic learners. The figures prove that: in the past five years, the number of Gaelic learners has reduced by 57 per cent.
>
> The situation needs urgent intervention to protect the Gaelic language itself, Gaelic education and—which is most relevant today—the right of Scotland's young people to learn Gaelic in their schools. Gaelic might be the smallest subject here today, but we are by no means small in terms of our importance to history, culture and identity. In that sense, we are so much more than a school subject or an option on a form. It is crucial to us that changes are made for the better, after this inquiry.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Catriona MacPhee (Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean), contrib. 2[63]

153. This warning was echoed by Marsaili NicLeòid of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, who said:

> If we are to meet our ambitions as a nation to deliver Gaelic-medium education and grow Gaelic-medium education in the secondary and senior phase, and if we are serious about maintaining what is still a fragile minority language community, we need to seriously consider how we might increase resources and prioritise Gaelic as a subject in the school curriculum.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Dr NicLeòid, contrib. 297[64]

154. In its written submission, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig stated:

> The structure of the Senior Phase of the Curriculum for Excellence and local decision-making are, therefore, undermining the national Gaelic policy as written in the National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-23 and National Advice on Gaelic Education for local authorities. They also run contrary to John Swinney's aim for a faster rate of progress in the expansion of Gaelic education across Scotland. [33]

155. These concerns were reflected by parents with children in Gaelic Medium Education. Magaidh Wentworth of Comann nam Pàrant told the Committee:

> In smaller, rural schools, if the pupils have the choice of six subjects, it makes column choices very difficult. Pupils often feel that there is no option to continue with their Gaelic studies. For children who have come through Gaelic-medium primary education, in which all their teaching is through Gaelic, and have gone on to have very limited access to Gaelic in secondary school, to leave school with no qualification in Gaelic is a huge loss—and they often lose their Gaelic language skills.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Magaidh Wentworth (Comann nam Pàrant), contrib. 26[65]

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156. Responding to other evidence about the numbers required to run classes in the Senior Phase, Catriona MacPhee of CLAS told the Committee about some recent experiences in attempting to retain Gaelic as a viable subject:

> I will return to something that Francisco Valdera-Gil mentioned about dropping down to five subjects and how the impact of that is very often to squeeze out languages. Another issue with that is the word "viability": across schools, subjects are being told that if they do not have a threshold number of pupils, the subject can no longer be selected and it is put to one side. The danger is that smaller subjects are marginalised and only bigger subjects with lots of uptake are taken on.
>
> I know that it happens for other languages, but Gaelic in particular is in a critical position and we really need every single child who wishes to take Gaelic to have that opportunity. Teachers from three schools have contacted me in the past week, concerned that their schools have said that the number of learners opting for Gaelic did not reach the threshold needed for that subject. Over those three schools, that is approximately 20 children. Last year, only 107 children did N5 Gaelic; even 20 children in three schools could make a huge difference...Intervention is needed and it would be very welcome if that happened.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Catriona MacPhee, contrib. 37[66]

157. Arthur Cormack called for a national plan which would supersede local decision making:

> As a minority concern in Scottish education, the future of Gaelic is far too important to be left in the hands of local decision-making. Support for Gaelic needs to be prioritised from the centre and supported nationally. There is an unwelcome situation currently where the Scottish Government says Gaelic is a national priority, and invests in it, while at the same time decisionmaking at local authority or school level has, in places, removed Gaelic as a subject available to young people. [34]

158. Joan Mackay of Education Scotland acknowledged these difficulties:

> An increasing number of youngsters come through Gaelic-medium education, and that is great, but equally there is the issue of getting enough subject teachers and having a wide enough variety of subjects in Gaelic medium at the other end.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Joan Mackay, contrib. 199[67]

159. The Committee notes that a combination of more subjects to choose from and a narrower time-frame for their study, which inevitably results in fewer subjects being studied by each pupil in S4, will lead to some subjects facing a reduced rate of participation. However, the Committee believes there has been an unprecedented negative impact on modern languages in particular, as well as Geography and STEM subjects.

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160. The Committee notes that a sharp drop in young people taking Gaelic qualifications in secondary school will have a direct impact on the number of young people who go on to become teachers of Gaelic and in Gaelic Medium Education. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government considers as a matter of urgency how Gaelic uptake can be supported to prevent this situation becoming worse.

161. The Committee does not accept that language skills can be adequately retained without consistent progression throughout school, and therefore questions how feasible it is to rely on 'crash' examinations, whether at National level or at Higher, later in the Senior Phase.

162. The Committee welcomes the Cabinet Secretary's offer to consider this matter further and recommends that the Scottish Government engages with educationalists to determine the most effective method of supporting language skills and associated qualifications.

163. The Committee also recommends the Scottish Government and Education Scotland should interrogate the data on participation rates in all subjects since the introduction of the Senior Phase, and confirm whether subjects in any of the eight curricular areas studied during broad general education are particularly marginalised by the narrowing of the curriculum in S4 and thereafter.

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School responses to the curriculum

164. The Committee was keen to understand how schools and local authorities have responded to changing curricular structures, and how a balance is struck between consistency and flexibility both on a local and national level.

165. In particular, the Committee sought to investigate further evidence gathered from its surveys and focus groups about the prevalence of multi-level teaching in the Senior Phase and the challenges associated with teaching a mix of National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher candidates in the same class.

166. A number of witnesses and submissions also referred to consortium arrangements designed to provide pupils with the opportunity to study courses not on offer at their particular school.

School empowerment

167. The Committee's scrutiny of subject choices in schools focused not only on the number of subjects pupils can study, but on how teachers and schools are supported to deliver these subjects.

168. The change outlined earlier in this report from the previous curricular system to CfE was considered by many witnesses to empower a school to, in the words of Education Scotland, "design its curriculum to meet its learners' needs". COSLA acknowledged and welcomed this recognition in a letter to the Committee:

> A key theme from the submissions to the Committee has been the fact that the curriculum has an in-built flexibility which allows schools to deliver in a way that is focussed on meeting individual needs. In addition, it is clear that there is an increased emphasis on ensuring that a curriculum is delivered in the Broad General Education (BGE) and Senior Phase that is based on the needs of individual communities. It is our view that this flexibility and an approach based on local needs and circumstances is crucial. [35]

169. The Cabinet Secretary shared COSLA's sentiments:

> There is broad agreement across the education system that headteachers and schools should have the freedom to design a curriculum that meets the needs of the learners in their schools. It is inevitable that that process will lead to variety in our education system.
>
> I appreciate that that is challenging for many—for teachers, parents and those of us around the committee table who grew up with a different model. However, if we want an education system that is designed to equip our children and young people for the 21st century, it is inevitable that it will look different from what went before.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 32[1]

170. The SQA expressed the same view, with Dr Gill Stewart providing a personal example of this:

> It is the role of schools to work with young people, their parents and carers and their local community to agree on an appropriate curriculum model. My son followed six courses in S4. I must admit that I had some personal concerns about that, but I was confident that the school knew what it was doing. I placed my confidence in the school—as parents, many of us do that. We rely on the school to make good choices or to advise us, as parents, to make good choices.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Stewart, contrib. 138[68]

171. A note of caution was sounded by Dr Alan Britton, who said:

> there has always been a tension between autonomy and central control. The quite profound backdrop to everything that has been happening is that we are still unclear about who owns the curriculum and, therefore, about who owns responsibility for the outcomes. We talk about distributed leadership and autonomy at local level. That was part of the thrust of CfE and it is the context in which I have previously characterised the unintended consequences. The consequences have emerged from deep-rooted structures of governance in Scottish education, which we have never resolved.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Alan Britton (University of Glasgow), contrib. 16[3]

172. The NPFS welcomed the flexibility, which allowed schools to be more creative in how pupils could choose subjects:

> A particularly lauded concept was 'free choice', where students pick from a range of subjects without the limitations of having to select subjects according to column listings. These parents asked why this method is not used in all schools. We would urge for this to be shared as good practice through the NIF hub and the Regional Improvement Collaboratives. [36]

173. Connect provided an example in its written submission of how the new curriculum has been adapted in East Lothian, which also touches on another key component of the inquiry – namely, the debate surrounding multi-level teaching:

> The traditional 'column' approach to subject choices has always caused issues for young people. At Connect we have long argued for a more creative and flexible approach – one which matches the promise of Curriculum for Excellence. There are examples of different approaches which work, such as Preston Lodge High School in East Lothian which has moved away from the column structure and instead pupils are free to select their choices and rate them by preference. Subject teaching is then matched to demand and a flexible approach adopted to class and year structures so that different levels may be taught together, with young people from different year groups. [37]

174. Professor Scott mentioned the role of local authorities in the number of subjects studied in S4:

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> ...some local authorities have mandated their schools, almost without exception, to offer six courses in S4. That is the only mandating that has gone on.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Jim Scott (University of Dundee), contrib. 9[7]

175. South Ayrshire Council set out its standard model in written evidence to the Committee:

> Our schools all operate a unified Senior Phase approach that allows young people in S4, S5 and S6 to be taught together as one unified cohort instead of being taught as three separate year groups. It enables young people to take courses that are appropriate to their individual learning needs rather than their chronological age and / or the needs of their peer group. In this model, there is a balance of the number of option choices across each year of the Senior Phase. Young people can make six option choices each year, although there is flexibility within this framework depending on the needs of young people. [38]

176. In response to questions about South Ayrshire Council's model, the Cabinet Secretary confirmed that he did not believe local authorities should impose an authority-wide model without dialogue with schools:

> I believe that schools should be the determinants of more and more of their curricular choices. I would not find it acceptable for that model to be imposed on schools without their consent. However, if schools were to have a discussion with their parent and pupil communities, and with the local authority, and were to decide that that was the appropriate approach, I would leave them to make that judgment.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 111[69]

177. Other local authorities expected their schools to interpret the curriculum to fit their own context. Fife Council said:

> Significantly, we took the view that it was not appropriate to impose one curriculum model on all schools. [39]

178. In oral evidence, Vincent Docherty confirmed this flexibility was also applied by Aberdeenshire Council:

> ...the schools in the south of Aberdeenshire, in Banchory and Aboyne, perform very differently from those in places such as Fraserburgh and Peterhead. We encourage headteachers to use that flexibility and to tailor the curriculum to best meet the needs of the youngsters from the community that they serve.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Vincent Docherty, contrib. 41[70]

179. The Committee does not believe a one-size-fits-all model across a local authority area empowers schools to shape the curriculum to fit their pupils' needs, particularly if the schools in any given local authority serve a range of communities. The Committee asks COSLA to provide information on how local

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authorities who do use such models consult with schools and parents and carers to ensure this works for all.

180. As noted above, the Committee recognises that there is a dilemma between a desire for schools to be autonomous and ensuring equity for our young people as they progress through senior phase.

181. Special consideration should also be made for young people who move between schools with significantly different structures. Looked after children and children of armed forces personnel are likely to be over-represented in this group. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government commissions research on how those children's outcomes are affected.

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Multi-level teaching

182. A key issue that emerged during the inquiry was on the use of multi-level teaching; in other words, pupils in the Senior Phase placed within a single class studying towards different levels of qualification in the same subject.

183. As Alan Armstrong of Education Scotland and Larry Flanagan of the EIS reminded the Committee, multi-level classes have been used for a long time in smaller schools and in order to establish viable class sizes. Other witnesses highlighted that pupils could be moved up or down the qualifications ladder during the school year, which would create multi-level classes as the school year progresses. The Committee noted that Standard Grade classes would be streamed as Foundation/ General and General/Credit classes.

184. However, the Committee was keen to understand the prevalence of multi-level classes, and whether they helped or hindered pupils in their studies.

185. The evidence received by the Committee suggested that, as Vincent Docherty put it, multi-level teaching was

> the price of creating flexibility in the timetable

Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Vincent Docherty, contrib. 143[71]

186. When asked about multi-level classes, Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland said:

> We do not have a substantial body of evidence from our inspection of secondary schools that shows that learning in a bi-level or tri-level class is either a hindrance or a success. We inspect schools and we have a back catalogue of inspections. If such teaching came up repeatedly as a significant issue, we would of course report on that and raise it as an issue with a variety of partners and stakeholders including policy makers. Nothing is coming out of our inspections on a recurring basis that shows that such teaching is hugely successful, a model that should be developed in some subjects but not others or something that has a negative effect. If we found such evidence, we would take it forward.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 244[72]

187. However, other witnesses were highly critical of multi-level teaching, such as Larry Flanagan of the EIS:

> I do not think anyone on this panel would defend multilevel teaching in any subject area... Most timetablers will not put a subject on the timetable unless there will be a minimum of 10 pupils in that class, otherwise they will lose staffing elsewhere and that cuts the provision.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 44[23]

188. Alan Britton cited its use as a result of resources rather than pedagogical thinking:

> ...would any teacher actively choose to construct their teaching and learning in such a way? Although there are some—relatively weak—pedagogical arguments for multilevel teaching, which are to do with the notion of peer support in the classroom and so on, the reality for most teachers is that if they were given a choice, they would not choose multilevel teaching.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Britton, contrib. 29[73]

189. Larry Flanagan of the EIS was particularly concerned about multi-level teaching:

> There are very few pedagogical advantages to multilevel qualification teaching. That is separate from mixed-ability teaching in the BGE, and the single cheapest way of narrowing the attainment gap would be to have more effective mixed-ability teaching. The challenge in the qualification routes is that, particularly in content-heavy subjects, you do not have the skills crossover that you might have in languages, or even in English. You have content that has to be covered. You are effectively running two courses in the same classroom with two or three cohorts of teachers. That creates a workload agenda for teachers to deal with just to be able to cope.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 98[74]

190. Larry Flanagan later re-emphasised the strength of feeling among EIS members about multi-level teaching:

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> If I was to cite one of the biggest complaints that we have had from members about the senior phase, it would be the explosion in multilevel classes, with all the attendant problems that brings. A lot of the problems are to do with workload, and a lot of them are about the manageability of the class and the fact that, by and large, it is a poorer experience for all the students in the classroom.
>
> I do not think anyone would advocate multilevel classes. It is simply a pragmatic response to the limited resources that schools have to run the courses.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 98[74]

191. Teachers who gave evidence to the Committee were not in favour of multi-level teaching. Some teachers, such as Marjorie Kerr from the SAGT, believed that the lack of alignment between different qualifications was a barrier:

> SQA qualifications are definitely not aligned to be taught in that way. If National 5 and Higher are being taught in the same geography class, the kids who are doing the Higher get the teacher's attention, and the teacher will spend most time teaching them. The teacher will perhaps have to make up individual booklets for the National 5 pupils so that they can work on the parts of the course that are not aligned. We find that our National 5 pupils, in particular, are definitely disadvantaged if they end up in a class in which the Higher is also being taught, because the courses do not match up.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Marjorie Kerr, contrib. 94[75]

192. Teachers who criticised the use of multi-level teaching at the Committee's focus groups in Dunfermline highlighted that, in classes where some pupils are borderline between National 4 and National 5, teachers have to deliver content which suits both qualifications as well as giving Higher candidates necessary attention for their exams. [40]

193. Participants also said that, as a result of multi-level classes, some pupils repeat some parts of a course if they progress from National 5 to Higher and remain in a multi-level class.

194. Although language teachers who spoke to the Committee said that the qualifications in their area did align, they emphasised that this required

> preparation time that teachers do not have.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Francisco Valdera-Gil, contrib. 95[76]

195. The Scottish Council of Deans of Education Modern Languages Sub-group also said:

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> In some cases, due to low uptake, schools are teaching N4/5/ Higher and Advanced Higher in the same class. Despite teachers' professionalism and efforts this can have a negative impact in learning experiences of students. Another unintended consequence of National qualifications at levels 3/4/5 can be the pedagogical approaches taken in Nat 3/4/5 combined level classes in which the focus from February onwards seems to be on students who will be sitting external exams. [41]

196. Others felt that it was unworkable without greater resources and higher levels of staffing:

> Having S4-S6 together could lead to greater flexibility but for the lack of resources including courses and teachers. This has therefore led to multi-level classes which are impossible to teach. This is not good for pupils. [42]

> Before 2013, you would never have put a Standard Grade and a Higher class in the same section and expect decent attainment, so what has changed with the creation of these new CfE courses? These are totally unrealistic demands being put on teachers, adding to workload, stress and pupil and parent dissatisfaction. Some schools actually have National 4, National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher in the same classroom. It's a disgrace. [43]

197. One area with particularly strong antipathy towards multi-level teaching was in the sciences. The Learned Societies' Group on Scottish STEM Education made this a central part of their written submission:

> A prominent issue for the teaching of the sciences is the practice of multi-course teaching of courses (i.e. where two or more distinct courses e.g. National 4 and 5 are taught simultaneously in one class). Science teachers have expressed concern that multi-course teaching does not allow them to fully support the needs and aspirations of pupils undertaking different levels of national qualifications. While the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and SQA recognise the challenges posed by multi-course teaching, it is not clear what action is being taken to address this issue. [44]

198. When giving evidence on behalf of the RSE, William Hardie said:

> ....we know that the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and the SQA are aware of the issue, but I do not know what action has been taken to address it since we raised it with those bodies in 2016.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, William Hardie, contrib. 41[77]

199. This is referenced in the minutes from a meeting held between Scottish Government officials, Education Scotland officials and representatives of the Learned Societies Group from April 2016, which discussed a survey of 259 teachers undertaken by the Royal Society of Chemistry. The survey asked how well Higher students' learning can be supported in the combined National 5/Higher grouping, and 99.5% of teachers responded "Not at all" or "Not very well". [45]

200. Local authority Directors of Education were asked for their views on multi-level teaching. Gerry Lyons felt it was "done through necessity, not choice":

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> Some courses lend themselves to it more than others. As we went into the senior phase course development, it was highlighted that some of the Higher and Intermediate 2 courses did not articulate well together. Therefore, we try to create courses that articulate well, so that, when necessary, bi-level teaching can take place without any disadvantage to the young people. That did not happen in all subjects, but it did happen in a lot of them. We should look to see which courses articulate, so that when we need to have bi-level classes, we can deliver them.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 124[78]

201. However, Vincent Docherty said that Aberdeenshire Council

> ...have not detected any explosion in bi-level or tri-level teaching.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Vincent Docherty, contrib. 143[71]

202. When challenged on multi-level teaching and Larry Flanagan's description of an 'explosion' in its prevalence, the Cabinet Secretary said he would be happy to explore the issue in greater detail. He also said:

> I am interested in looking further into that question. I have not seen any data that would allow me to make a judgment on whether there has been an "explosion", and I do not think that that data exists.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 85[79]

203. In its supplementary submission, Education Scotland confirmed that it does not hold data on teacher numbers and their location, or the numbers and location of bi- and tri-level classes [46] . It did, however, report during oral evidence that:

> ...teachers are concerned about the number and timing of changes to SQA courses over the past few years and their impact on planning for progression.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 6[25]

204. The Committee is concerned by the evidence it has received which suggests an increase in the use of multi-level teaching.

205. The Committee acknowledges that multi-level teaching can be used for positive reasons, such as ensuring that potential Advanced Higher candidates can be supported by their school, and has been used in schools for some years, particularly in smaller schools. The Committee believes, however, that the use of multi-level classes should not be driven by resource issues or be to the detriment of pupils' educational experience.

206. The Committee is concerned that the issue of the impact of multi-level teaching on pupils was raised in 2016 with the Scottish Government and Education Scotland specifically in relation to the impact of teaching National 5/Higher

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classes together. This could have generated work from the Scottish Government or Education Scotland in 2016. It is therefore frustrating that a lack of data on this issue is cited by Education Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary in 2019 and the Committee recommends that this is immediately rectified by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland.

207. The data gathered on multilevel teaching should also be examined to investigate whether this particularly affects certain subjects, as well as whether there is a disproportionate impact on smaller schools which tend to be in rural and/or deprived areas.

208. To assist schools and to provide some pedagogical rationale for their use, the Committee recommends that Education Scotland and the SQA work together to identify which subjects could be compatible with multi-level teaching, taking into account the content of the curriculum and progression between different qualification levels.

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Teacher numbers

209. The issue of staffing was frequently referred to by witnesses as one difficulty in providing a wide offer of subjects. Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland accepted that teacher numbers could affect subject choices:

> We recognise that, where there are teacher shortages, there has been a reduction in the curriculum—that is what our evidence-based inspection shows. That is happening sporadically throughout the country, but predominantly around the edges.
>
> As I said in response to the first question, we recognise that there has been a reduction in some schools' curriculum offer, and we would like to support schools to innovate and to widen that out a bit more.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 51[80]

210. One of the reasons for this is that, where schools do not have adequate staffing levels, teachers will be directed to Senior Phase classes, which affects those in BGE. This appears to be a particular issue in the sciences, as was explained by Tess Watson of the Association of Science Education (ASE):

> My experience in the past couple of years in a school where a science teacher was off long-term sick was that there were no temporary science teachers to come in and cover. Obviously, the accredited classes must be taken by the chemists, but the BGE timetable had all the third year cohort on it and the uptake for the third year cohort in chemistry going into fourth year was low—I think that the school did not even have enough to run a class of 20. That was because of the experience that the youngsters had. It was through no fault of their own and it was not the department's fault. It was just because of the circumstances and the fact that there are not enough science teachers.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Tess Watson, contrib. 64[81]

211. The EIS set out how a lack of teachers in particular subjects can affect the availability and viability of courses:

> Teacher availability, of course, is critical to subject options being available. For example, the EIS is aware of the critical shortage in Home Economic teachers which has resulted in this subject being removed from the curriculum in many schools. [47]

212. Catriona MacPhee of CLAS agreed with this, and set out how this was playing out in her own field:

> At the moment, staffing is one of the biggest issues that concerns all our members, but in different ways. Some schools have not replaced teachers for countless lengths of time. There are children sitting Gaelic not being taught by specialist Gaelic teachers.
>
> Staffing is a huge issue that needs to be looked at. Staff need to be trained in Gaelic-medium education or we must have Gaelic learners teaching. As the years go by, fewer people will leave school with Gaelic, so we will have a smaller skill set. We need to make sure that any gaps in staffing or lack of teacher training is looked at. We have to have staff, and schools and authorities must employ teachers the minute that there is a gap.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Catriona MacPhee, contrib. 45[82]

213. The move from individual subjects to faculties of subjects was also touched on by witnesses as having an effect on teachers. Marjorie Kerr of the SAGT opposed this move:

> As a cost-cutting exercise, many local authorities have gone over to faculties. Some are social subjects faculties that have history, geography, modern studies, and religious, moral and philosophical education all in one faculty. The head of faculty may not be from your subject. If their subject is not geography, let us say—that is my subject—instinctively the head of faculty is not going to give the time to geography that they are to history or modern studies, or whatever their subject is.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Marjorie Kerr, contrib. 77[83]

214. When asked about teacher numbers in different subject areas, Education Scotland said that it was not its responsibility to know about teacher numbers in each school.

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When given the opportunity to elaborate on this in supplementary evidence, Education Scotland said:

> The provision of education and therefore the responsibility of employing teachers rests with local authorities. The Scottish Government and COSLA are committed to maintaining teacher numbers as set out in the local government settlement. Local authorities submit data on teacher numbers to the Scottish Government through the annual teacher and pupil census and Education Scotland accesses this data when needed as part of its ongoing work. [48]

215. Education Scotland also addressed the challenges of recruiting teachers in rural areas, which according to others "struggle to fill any post, let alone those in pinch-point areas like STEM, ICT or languages":

> schools, particularly in rural areas outside the central belt, continue to find it difficult to recruit teachers. Whilst we do see schools taking creative solutions to their position, very successfully, this situation does sometimes limit opportunities to lead extensive curriculum improvements, and in some instances provide a local curriculum which fully meets the needs of children and young people. [49]

216. This was also raised by Aberdeenshire Council in their written submission to the Committee:

> Staffing, to a large extent, influences what can or cannot be offered. Aberdeenshire has experienced difficulties recruiting staff, probably because schools are in largely rural areas, and so not always attractive to younger staff. There are obvious dangers in having only one teacher qualified to teach a subject in school, because if this member of staff leaves, the provision is lost, a particular problem for smaller schools. Where there is staff shortage, senior phase classes are most likely to be allocated the necessary subject staff, opening up gaps in the experience of classes in S1-3. [50]

217. A further example given by Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland was using local businesses and employers to fill gaps in provision in Computing Science:

> A school needs to be able to shape the curriculum with the resources that it has.
>
> It is encouraging that we see real innovation coming out of some of that hardship. An example is schools partnering with businesses and employers to offer, for example, computing science when lots of areas are struggling for computing science teachers. Schools are setting up partnerships with employers to bring real-life employment opportunities and modern techniques into the classroom to support that learning and offer different qualifications.
>
> There is an issue with teacher shortages; we have found that ourselves. We as a system need to provide support and share examples of innovative ways of overcoming that, as some schools are doing. They are still in the minority, but we want to share that message so that they become the majority.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 33[84]

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218. While it is clear that staffing is a matter for local authorities, the Committee was concerned by Education Scotland's limited awareness of data on teacher numbers given its inspection role. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland works with the Scottish Government and COSLA to devise an appropriate method of using the data gathered by the Scottish Government and local authorities. This will better inform Education Scotland's understanding of where issues lie with recruitment and retention of teachers in particular parts of the country or within certain subjects.

219. The Committee was concerned by the evidence given by Education Scotland that some schools were resorting to support from businesses and employers to cover gaps in teaching provision. While it is useful to build links, this should never be used as a stopgap measure to mask teacher shortages.

220. Colleges play an important role in supporting provision of subjects where teacher shortages or low demand restricts pupil choices. The Committee notes the value of partnership working and recommends that the Scottish Government works with relevant stakeholders to identify ways in which this partnership working can share best practice and can take into account subject areas with teacher shortages.

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Consortium arrangements

221. One way in which some schools and local authorities are building further flexibility into their curriculum is through the use of consortium arrangements. These arrangements allow young people to travel to other schools to undertake particularqualifications while remaining registered at their "home" school. Education Scotland pointed to these as a way of expanding the offer:

> Young people can take a subject through a shared curriculum offer across three or five schools or under a city campus model. That widens rather than narrows the choice for young people. There might be less choice in individual schools in some areas, but the collective offer to young people is wider, because subjects are offered across three, five or six schools, for instance.

Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 63[85]

222. Local authority representatives set out how they use such arrangements to provide greater choice to their pupils. East Renfrewshire Council said:

> The flexibility that the schools have operates within a broad framework of agreed principles. Colleagues have mentioned the need to ensure that there is strong cluster planning from ages three to 18. That has been a key element for us. Another key element for us is that, in the senior phase—S5 and S6—timetables are aligned so that if, for example, a subject is not available at Advanced Higher in a school because of its size, pupils are able to access it in another school.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Mark Ratter, contrib. 44[35]

223. Glasgow City Council confirmed it also uses aligned timetables:

> ...Glasgow has worked to bring timetables together—in particular, on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, when timetables are aligned so that young people can travel as necessary. There is an understanding that, when schools work together, young people can be offered a wider range of opportunity. Schools are open to taking people from other schools on courses that they run that other schools do not run. That tends not to be a fourth-year scenario; it tends to happen further on in the senior phase—in particular, in S6.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 47[86]

224. 97% of schools which responded to the SPICe headteacher survey reported collaborating with colleges to offer courses. Angus Council provided further details of its work with colleges:

> In Angus, we are striking a balance between individual schools developing their curricula and our eight secondary schools getting the benefit of working together. As colleagues' authorities' schools have, we have a common timetable across all eight secondary schools. Through a strategic partnership arrangement, we have developed that with Dundee and Angus College. That means that our youngsters from across Angus go to college courses on the same day. There are staffing and practical benefits, as well as benefits from young people getting to meet one another.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Pauline Stephen, contrib. 48[87]

225. However, CELCIS pointed out that these flexible arrangements which suit schools do not always suit pupils, including those who are care-experienced:

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> Over the past few years, we have definitely seen a big increase in the flexibility of pathways and collaborations between schools, further and higher education institutions and workplaces, but for looked-after children—especially those at the upper end of the spectrum—it is important to think about the additional needs that they might have if part of their timetable will involve their studying somewhere else. We know that those young people have faced significant adversity in their lives, which might have an impact on their developmental stage relative to their chronological age. Although they might be 15 or 16 and capable of independent travel, they might struggle socially and emotionally with their timetable being split between different institutions. They might need to feel very safe in the school that they are in, and they might not cope well with going to a college or a placement somewhere else for half the time.
>
> If we are to have such flexibility, it is crucial to the success of that approach that we think about the planning and support that we provide for children. A young person's additional support requirements do not cease just because they are at the upper end of their education.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Linda O'Neill, contrib. 41[88]

226. This was supported by evidence from focus groups in Dunfermline with parents. One parent mentioned their child was taken by bus to college to take an apprenticeship but had to miss 50% of his maths lessons as a result and is expected to catch up on that missed learning himself by getting notes of lessons from a friend. Two other parents cited their children missing parts of certain subjects to accommodate taking other subjects they had to travel to, such as at another high school. [51]

227. Committee members explored the impact of consortium arrangements on pupils' educational experience. When asked about whether Equality Impact Assessments[iv] were carried out in relation to consortium arrangements, Gayle Gorman of Education Scotland confirmed to the Committee that

> ...common practice is that that local authority would take that through its education committee, or its equivalent, and it would do an equality impact assessment. That is a duty of the local authority.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 117[89]

228. The Committee recognises the efforts made by schools and local authorities to align timetables, which can allow pupils to undertake courses at colleges or other local schools. The Committee would welcome confirmation from COSLA whether

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iv An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) involves assessing the impact of new or revised policies, practices or services against the requirements of the public sector equality duty. The duty requires all Scottish public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. It covers people in respect of all aspects of equality (age, disability, sex, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity). It helps to ensure the needs of people are taken into account during the development and implementation of a new policy or service or when a change is made to a current policy or service.

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every local authority has undertaken or is undertaking this work, as well as further information on how Regional Improvement Collaboratives are supporting the sharing of innovative practices. The Committee also seeks confirmation from Education Scotland on how staff involved in timetabling are supported in this task.

229. The Committee also seeks confirmation from Education Scotland on how staff involved in timetabling are supported in developing the knowledges and skills required for this important role.

230. The Committee notes with concern some evidence that barriers are in place which prevent pupils from accessing courses at their closest college if that college is in a different local authority area from the pupil's school. The Committee invites a response from COSLA and Colleges Scotland on this issue and what work is being undertaken to remove any such barriers.

231. The Committee believes that consortium arrangements tend to be more prevalent in disadvantaged areas, which tend to have smaller school rolls in senior years. This includes the impact on the learning of young people who have to miss lesson time for one of their subjects in their school to travel to another setting to study another of their subjects. The Committee invites a response from COSLA which sets out how local authorities consider the impact of consortium arrangements on pupils.

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Working with parents and carers

232. Another area considered extensively by the Committee was the provision of information to parents and carers about subject choices. As discussed earlier in this report, the NPFS felt it was "not really consulted on the design [of CfE], although we were party to some of the discussions about how it would work."

233. The Committee's sessions with parent representatives and local authorities included substantial exchanges about how parents and carers are kept informed about subject choices and the structure of the Senior Phase in their child's school.

234. The written submission from the NPFS made a case for better information from schools:

> There has been very little improvement on helping parents support their children to make appropriate subject choices. Parents are often unequipped to help due to a lack of knowledge on CfE and the pathway choices on offer. Schools frequently leave it very late to try and involve parents and spend very little time on this: the process can feel rushed and many parents feel their involvement is a “token sign off”. The NPFS is aware that the new guidance suggests that a parent/ child/ teacher meeting should take place, but this does not seem to be widespread...
>
> Another factor is that parents are often unaware of what is on offer in their school or, more crucially, what options could be on offer if investigated. Many of the flexible pathways are new to parents and it can be detrimental to choices if schools do not communicate these well. [52]

235. The NPFS repeated this call when giving evidence to the Committee, arguing:

> Parents want information that is relevant to their child and the stage that their child is at. If a child is in primary 3, the parents will want to know about what happens in primary 3. If a child is in S4, the parents will want to know what happens in S4...
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy, contrib. 10[90]

> ...It is not being shared adequately or successfully enough. Some pockets of schools share information, but that is not widespread enough.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy, contrib. 12[91]

236. In its written submission, Connect called for "Clear, timeous information about subject choices, courses and career guidance" [53] . Eileen Prior of Connect pointed out that provision of this information must be done on a rolling basis:

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> There is a fresh cohort of parents and children every year, so a refresh has to be done; that is the very nature of schools. However, schools will manage the message. What they present to parents as being the best choice and option is rarely challenged by the parents, because they trust their school. The information that comes from the school and the decisions that senior management makes about how it will design the school's curriculum will rarely be challenged. Most parents will take it as being the best choice for their school.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Eileen Prior, contrib. 15[92]

237. Professor Scott's written submission referred to his research, which found that:

> 222 of 358 state secondary schools fail to explain part, or – in a much smaller number of schools – all, of their S1-6 curriculum to parents and prospective parents through their handbook, website or other means. [54]

238. Witnesses from local authorities accepted that there was ongoing work to do to communicate more effectively with parents and carers. Pauline Stephen, representing Angus Council, said:

> One of our biggest challenges is communicating with parents about all the options that are available to our young people and enabling our young people to explain to their parents what their choices are, what the implications of those choices might be and where they might lead next. We could perhaps work together nationally to look at how to make that clearer and more accessible, so that families understand the range of choices for youngsters. That would benefit from a closer look.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Pauline Stephen (Angus Council), contrib. 13[93]

239. Gerry Lyons concurred, telling the Committee:

> One thing that we must continue to do is get better at telling that story to people who came through a five-column structure, for example, and give them that understanding of what we are trying to do for their children and of the fact that we have a chance to do much more for them than we ever did before and explain how we can do that.
>
> Parental engagement is critical. I was interested to hear about your engagement with parents and your feeling that some of them did not quite understand the senior phase. We have to take cognisance of that and do everything that we can to change that.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 11[94]

240. One particular area which was brought up by local authority witnesses was the description of other pathways within the Senior Phase. Gerry Lyons gave a few examples of where the use of terminology could be improved to assist with understanding:

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> In addition, I would love to take the phrase "alternative pathways" out of the debate. Let us just talk about learner journeys for young people rather than "alternative pathways", which suggests that the young people who are on those pathways were not able to go on the proper pathway. We should also remove the term "extracurricular", because nothing is extracurricular. Let us celebrate learning, but not just the learning that is done in classrooms.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 150[95]

> One thing that I did not think about—in the way that you sometimes do not think about things—is that parents would hear the term "foundation" in foundation apprenticeships and think that they were like foundation Standard Grade courses. There is a communication issue that needs to be addressed.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 153[96]

241. Pauline Stephen, representing Angus Council, provided another instance in which a better explanation of courses could assist young people in taking the most appropriate pathway:

> I often speak to young people about where they are going and what they are leaving school to do; one young man had decided that he was going to join an accountancy firm to get his qualifications, and the hardest people to convince that that was the right thing to do were his parents. In that case, the school supported him by setting out the pros and cons of different routes so that he could have that conversation at home. However, there is still work that needs to be done in that respect.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Pauline Stephen, contrib. 154[97]

242. Another reason given for improved communication was the different school experience of parents and carers from that of their children. Eileen Prior of Connect acknowledged this:

> We, as parents, are from a previous generation and our experience of school is entirely different. We take that experience when looking at our child's school and we think that is not what we did or how it worked for us. A lot of work has to be done to help parents to understand the opportunities and to agree—not impose—a route forward for the school and the community.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Eileen Prior, contrib. 107[98]

243. Joanna Murphy of the NPFS supported this point of view, stating:

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> During the roll-out of the new qualifications, for example, schools consulted parents, but unfortunately communications have dwindled considerably since then. Generally, parents who have come in during the subsequent years have not had the information. They missed the big mailshot.
>
> Schools need to concentrate on sharing information every year. It is a big ask for schools, but, until the general population has a better idea of curriculum for excellence and all the ins and outs that make it different from our previous system, or even the system when I was at school, it will be difficult for parents to understand the differences and see the benefits.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy, contrib. 12[91]

244. Larry Flanagan of the EIS set out how this worked in practice at his former school, which used an unusual curricular model:

> At my old school, nobody sits exams in S4. Pupils do eight subjects across S4 and S5, and every year there has to be a meeting with parents to explain why that is happening. Teachers talk about depth and breadth of learning and the fact that kids can get six Highers rather than five, without needing to drop art or music or languages and without focusing only on five subjects, and they have managed to persuade the parents. The majority of parents, however, still think in terms of their own experience, which was about qualifications. It is really tempting to say, "Aye, let's just go back and pretend it didnae happen," but it has happened and, if we went back to that previous system, we would end up in a poorer place.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 35[99]

245. Marjorie Kerr of the SAGT advised that this flow of information should also cover parents' and carers' expectations:

> There is still a fair bit of education to be done—not of teachers, who know what they are doing, but of parents. For instance, in my school, we have pupils who get maybe 20 per cent in the prelim exam, and we see that they will not manage to pass an N5 examination, yet the parents want them to sit for that qualification.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Marjorie Kerr, contrib. 25[100]

246. The EIS also highlighted the unintended consequences of this on subject choices more generally:

> Parental preference for their children to study STEM, and arguably the drive from government, in addition to more 'academic' subjects, has reportedly led to some marginalisation of Creative and Aesthetic subjects, Social Sciences, Home Economics, etc. in some schools. The EIS is of the view that system-wide efforts are needed to enhance parents' and employers' understanding in this regard. Again, we see it that the rush to implement the new qualifications in 2014 missed the crucially important step of educating and gaining 'buy-in' from stakeholders who are highly influential in the decisions that young people make about their Senior Phase options, and thereby in the decisionmaking that occurs at school level around curriculum architecture. [55]

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247. Linda O'Neill of CELCIS reminded the Committee that a parent or carer's own experience of education could affect their willingness or ability to engage with their own child's school on these issues:

> It is important to think about how we communicate information and involve parents. In our work on parental engagement programmes in North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire, parents tell us that they do not understand curricular structures or content, particularly in the transition from primary school to secondary school, and they feel anxious about engaging with schools. Schools need the skills and the time to work alongside parents and build relationships. They also need to think about how to have meaningful two-way conversations instead of just imparting information and how to bring parents into schools and work alongside them to construct what is best for children.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Linda O'Neill (Centre for Excellence for Children's Care and Protection), contrib. 16[101]

248. Joanna Murphy supported this call:

> The system is completely new for parents in Scotland: there was nothing like it for them, so why would they be able to imagine it? Parents do not know about the system and they do not support it, because they do not know about it. It is human nature that they default back to what they know, which was alright and appeared to work. However, it was not working, so we decided to change it. We need to put a lot more into helping parents to understand the system, let alone to understand the fact that it does not matter when students sit their National 5s or their Highers.
>
> Source: Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy, contrib. 53[102]

249. The volume of evidence received by the Committee from parents and carers is indicative of the strength of feeling on this issue, and highlights the significance of their concerns. The Committee acknowledges that Curriculum for Excellence remains a relatively new curriculum which was not experienced personally by parents and carers. This presents challenges to schools in communicating pathways and structures to parents and carers.

250. The Committee recognises that many schools and local authorities strive to provide detailed information to parents and carers. The Committee encourages all schools and local authorities to consider whether the information they provide is up-to-date, clearly written, and is provided in a timely manner to allow parents and carers to digest and discuss with their children before they make their subject choices.

251. The Committee believes that the eventual output from its earlier recommendation regarding research of curricular models should be provided to parents and carers to better understand the context of the curricular model chosen by their child's school.

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252. The Committee recommends that Education Scotland investigates how the terminology used in communication with parents and carers can be clarified, and works with other relevant bodies such as the SQA and COSLA to ensure clear, consistent information is provided.

253. The Committee recommends that the Scottish Government supports COSLA and local authorities in a national campaign, aimed at parents and carers and employers, to explain the new system.

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Overall conclusions

The Committee has scrutinised subject choice in the senior phase in a range of work on school education. This includes work in 2017 specifically on subject choice in the senior phase and entry at higher education establishments. It has also highlighted the issue of subject choice during a number of its inquiries including Teacher Workforce Planning for Scotland's Schools and its inquiry into Young People's Pathways that focused on Developing the Young Workforce. Based on this evidence and representations made by constituents and stakeholders to individual Committee members, the Committee decided it should prioritise subject choices as a focus for further in-depth scrutiny.

The crux of the Committee's inquiry centred on whether or not the number of subject choices available to pupils had narrowed in S4; if so, what the reasons and context were for this, and whether the principle of a broad education or any particular subjects were adversely affected by the change in curriculum.

The Committee believes that substantial work must be undertaken by the Scottish Government to develop a better understanding of how subject choices operate in practice and to address the unintended consequences emanating from the change in curriculum. The Committee has therefore recommended that fresh research be commissioned in a number of particular areas, including:

- an independent review of the Senior Phase
- the impact of different curricular models
- the number subjects offered by schools in each year of the Senior Phase (S4-S6)

This research will provide those involved in Scottish education with a evidential basis on which to build a system which, as far as practicable, irons out the issues which emerged as the inquiry progressed. Indeed, several other important issues emerged from the evidence received, including factors such as multi-level teaching, the role played by deprivation and rurality, the status of National 4 qualifications and how to provide better support to care-experienced young people in education. In this report, the Committee has therefore also made a series of recommendations in response to each of these significant issues.

Considered as a whole, the Committee has serious concerns that there is a lack of clarity within the Scottish education system about who has overall responsibility for curricular structure and subject availability in Scottish secondary schools under the Curriculum for Excellence. Empowerment of school leaders and decision-making at the individual school level has many positive attributes, but there can also be negative consequences, such as a lack of consistency and equity in provision between schools.

It should be acknowledged that 'empowerment' during a period of teacher shortage in some areas and subjects can in practice mean that schools are required to take decisions to manage shortages, and this can impact on a school's ability to provide the range of subjects and curricular models best suited to their communities. Strategic oversight and support from the Government, its agencies and local authorities is paramount during such periods.

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It is the unanimous view of the Committee that there is continuing confusion about the responsibilities of Education Scotland, the executive agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education, and that it is failing to provide adequate support for the continuing implementation of Curriculum for Excellence. The evidence provided to this inquiry by senior leaders from Education Scotland revealed a serious gap in knowledge about the current state of curriculum implementation and the associated challenges facing schools which was alarming to the Committee and must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The Committee was also deeply concerned about an evident disconnect between Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which is responsible for the structure and design of the new National Qualifications in Scotland. This has exacerbated the unintended consequences which have emerged as the Curriculum for Excellence has been implemented in the Senior Phase. If the Curriculum for Excellence is to deliver a coherent educational pathway for young people, issues regarding hours of learning required for each qualification and credibility of qualifications without a final examination, such as National 4, must be solved.

Although the number of pupils leaving at the end of S4 has decreased notably in recent years, 72 per cent of care experienced pupils leave at the statutory leaving age, which means those pupils are disproportionately affected by the reduction of subjects taken in S4. The Committee therefore recommends that the Scottish Government sets out how it will improve the current system and act to reduce barriers for care-experienced young people in going to, staying at and transitioning out of further and higher education in Scotland.

Of the related issues to emerge during the inquiry, the perceived extensive increase in the use of multi-level teaching as a response to resources and curricular change was the most concerning. The clear message sent to the Committee by teachers of various subjects was that teaching a mix of National 4, National 5, Higher and/or Advanced Higher candidates within the same class was challenging and would inevitably result in some pupils not receiving adequate preparation for examinations. The Committee was frustrated that a lack of data on this issue was cited by Education Scotland and the Cabinet Secretary and recommends that this is immediately rectified by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to enable this situation to be better understood and addressed.

There is cross-party support for closing the poverty-related attainment gap. The Committee's inquiry has demonstrated that there are significant leaps still to be made to ensure that the structure of the Senior Phase supports closing this gap.

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Annex: Inquiry evidence

Official reports

The Committee took formal evidence during seven meetings in April and May 2019. Links to the Official Reports of those meeting are listed below:

3 April 2019

24 April 2019

1 May 2019

8 May 2019

15 May 2019

22 May 2019

29 May 2019

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Engagement work

As well as its call for views, the Committee created short surveys for head teachers, teachers, parents and pupils regarding subject choice, which we invited relevant individuals to complete by Monday 4 March 2019. The analysis of the parents and pupils surveys are below and were included in the papers for the meeting on Wednesday 1 May. The analysis of the teachers' survey returns are included in the papers for the meeting on Wednesday 8 May. The analysis of the Secondary schools head teacher surevey were included in the papers for the 24 April.

- Read the analysis of the Parents' Survey
- Read the analysis of the Pupils' Survey
- Read the analysis of the Teachers' Survey
- Read the analysis of the Head Teachers' Survey

The raw survey returns are also available below. Please note that some responses have been anonymised by the removal of personal data (e.g. names, schools, localities) in order to preserve the anonymity of those who have taken part.

- Read the raw returns of the parents' survey
- Read the raw returns of the pupils' survey
- Read the raw returns of the teachers' survey

The Scottish Parliament's Community Outreach Team conducted 3 community workshops with young people to look at the topic of Subject Choice and the notes from these sessions are attached below.

- Read the Community workshop notes

Members of the Committee held focus groups with parents and teachers in Dunfermline on Monday 29 April 2019.

- Read the Teacher focus group notes from Dunfermline
- Read the parent focus group notes from Dunfermline

The Committee received an additional submission from 13 parents who are members of a parent council and who were unable to attend the focus group in Dunfermline.

- Read the additional submission from a parent council

The Scottish Youth Parliament ("SYP") wrote to the Convener in respect of evidence they had gathered.

- Read the letter from the SYP to the Convener. 26 March 2019 (268KB pdf)

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Written submissions

You can read all of the submissions to the Committee on this inquiry here:

https://parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/110962.aspx

The Committee received the following responses to its call for views:

Teaching Staff

- Iain Aitken
- Jim Sutherland
- Richard Booles

Teaching Unions

- NASUWT
- EIS

Schools

- Glasgow Gaelic School

Parents and carers

- Arthur Cormack
- Alys Rodwell

- Mark and Sally Gunn
- Owen Morris
- Simon Wain
- Tormod Macleòd
- Dr Natasha Usher

Parent Councils

- Parent Council Glasgow Gaelic School
- Bun- Sgoil Shlèite Parent Council

Professional Associations

- CLAS (Comann Luchd- Teasgaisg Àrd Sgoiltean)
- Scottish Association of Geography Teachers
- Additional Submission from CLAS

Organisations

- Education Scotland
- Education Scotland- additional information
- Scottish Qualifications Authority
- Highland and Islands Enterprise
- Comann nam Pàrant
- National Parent Forum of Scotland
- Royal Scottish Geographical Society
- Connect
- Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) in Scotland
- Sabhal Mòr Ostaig
- Universities Scotland
- Bòrd na Gàidhlig
- Scottish Youth Parliament

Academics

- Royal Society of Edinburgh
- Royal Society of Edinburgh- supplementary information

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- Anne Gasteen
- Francisco Valdera-Gil on behalf of the Scottish Council of Deans of Education Modern Languages Subgroup
- Professor Jim Scott
- The Learned Societies' Group on Scottish STEM Education
- Professors Catriona Paisey & Georgios Panos
- Centre for excellence for looked after children in Scotland (CELCIS)

Universities

The Convener wrote to the Principals of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Scotland regarding subject choices impact on admissions to particular courses.

- Read the letter from the Convener to the Principals, 5 February 2019

The following responses were received from HEIs:

- University of Aberdeen
- Abertay University
- University of Dundee
- University of Edinburgh
- University of Glasgow
- University of Glasgow response 2
- Glasgow Caledonian University
- Glasgow Caledonian University response 2
- Heriot Watt University
- University of the Highlands and Islands
- Napier University
- Open University
- University of St Andrews
- University of Stirling
- University of Strathclyde
- University of the West of Scotland

The analysis of the University Submissions for 2017- 2019 is noted below.

- Read the analysis of the University Submissions

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Local Authorities

The Convener wrote to local authority Directors of Education regarding subject choices.

- Read the letter to the Directors of Education, 5 February 2019

Individual responses can be read below:

- Aberdeenshire Council
- Angus Council
- City of Edinburgh Council
- Clackmannanshire Council
- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- East Renfrewshire Council
- Fife Council
- Highland Council
- Moray Council
- South Ayrshire Council
- South Lanarkshire Council

A further response was received from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.

- Read the additional reponse from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

A letter and supplementary information was received from Universities Scotland.

- Letter to the Convener from Universities Scotland

The following links to further documents which are referred to in the letter from Universities Scotland.

- Commissioner for Fair Access discussion paper: retention, outcomes and destinations
- Scottish Government Fair Access: Analysis of school leaver attainment by SIMD quintile

The Committee received a briefing paper from the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework Partnership (SCQF) in response to questions sent to them regarding qualifications which don't appear in the SQA statistics and the trends of the uptake of these courses.

- Read the briefing paper from the SCQF, 2 May 2019

COSLA wrote to the Convener to express their views on subject choices instead of putting in a submission.

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- Read the letter from COSLA to the Convener 14 May 2019 (88KB pdf)

Extracts of minutes

30 January 2019

3. Work programme (in private): The Committee considered its work programme and agreed its approach to its inquiry into subject choices.

13 March 2019

1. Subject choices (in private): The Committee considered its approach to the inquiry.

3 April 2019

1. Decisions on taking business in private: The Committee agreed to take items 3, 4 and 5 in private. The Committee also agreed to take the reviews of evidence for its Subject Choices inquiry in private at future meetings.

2. Subject Choices inquiry: The Committee heard evidence from—

Gayle Gorman, Chief Inspector of Education and Chief Executive, Alan Armstrong, Strategic Director, Joan Mackay, Assistant Director, Jenny Watson, Senior Education Officer, National Lead on Curriculum Innovation 3 – 24, Education Scotland

And then from—

Alastair Sim, Director, Universities Scotland; Scott Harrison, Associate Director, Learning Journey, City of Glasgow College; Morven Cameron, Head of Universities, Education and Skills, Highlands and Islands Enterprise; and Dr Marsaili NicLeòid, Vice Principal and Director of Studies, Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

3. Review of evidence (in private): The Committee considered the evidence it heard earlier.

24 April 2019

1. Subject Choices inquiry: The Committee heard evidence from—

Dr Alan Britton, Senior Lecturer in Education, University of Glasgow; William Hardie, Policy Advice Manager, Royal Society of Edinburgh; and Professor Jim Scott, School of Education and Social Work, University of Dundee.

4. Review of evidence (in private): The Committee considered the evidence it heard earlier.

1 May 2019

1. Subject Choices inquiry: The Committee heard evidence from—

Eileen Prior, Executive Director, Connect; Joanna Murphy, Chair, National Parent Forum of Scotland; Linda O'Neill, Education Lead, Centre for Excellence for Looked After Children in Scotland (CELCIS); and Magaidh Wentworth, Oifigear Phàrant, Comann nam Pàrant.

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2. Review of evidence (in private): The Committee considered the evidence it heard earlier.

8 May 2019

1. Subject Choices inquiry: The Committee heard evidence from—

Francisco Valdera-Gil, Lecturer in Modern Languages representing the Modern Languages Sub-Group, Scottish Council of Deans of Education; Larry Flanagan, General Secretary, EIS; Tess Watson, Field Officer for Scotland, Association for Science Education; Marjorie Kerr, President, Scottish Association of Geography Teachers; Catriona MacPhee, Chair, Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean.

2. Review of evidence (in private): The Committee considered the evidence it heard earlier.

15 May 2019

1. Subject Choices inquiry: The Committee heard evidence from—

Gerry Lyons, representative Association of Directors of Education in Scotland; Dr Pauline Stephen, Director of Schools and Learning, Angus Council; Tony McDaid, Executive Director of Education Resources, South Lanarkshire Council; Dr Mark Ratter, Head of Education Services Quality Improvement and Performance, East Renfrewshire Council; Vincent Docherty, Head of Education, Aberdeenshire Council.

2. Review of evidence (in private): The Committee considered the evidence it heard earlier.

22 May 2019

6. Subject choices: The Committee heard evidence from—

Dr Janet Brown, Chief Executive, Dr Gill Stewart, Director of Qualifications, and James Morgan, Head of Research, Policy Standards and Statistics, Scottish Qualifications Authority.

7. Review of Evidence (in private): The Committee considered the evidence it heard under agenda item 6.

29 May 2019

3. Subject Choices: The Committee heard evidence from—

John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Murray McVicar, Head of Senior Phase Unit, and Andrew Bruce, Deputy Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government.

6. Review of evidence: The Committee considered the evidence it heard earlier.

12 June 2019

1. Decision on taking business in private: The Committee agreed to take its consideration of a draft report on the Subject Choices inquiry in private at future meetings.

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19 June 2019

1. Subject choices inquiry (in private): The Committee considered a draft report and agreed to consider a revised draft report at its next meeting.

26 June 2019

6. Subject choices (in private): The Committee considered a revised draft report and agreed to consider a revised draft report at its next meeting.

4 September 2019

8. Subject Choices Inquiry (in private): The Committee agreed the final wording of its report

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[1] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 32, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2190770

[2] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Janet Brown (Scottish Qualifications Authority), contrib. 77, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178181

[3] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Alan Britton (University of Glasgow), contrib. 16, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169831

[4] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan (Educational Institute of Scotland), contrib. 6, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174100

[5] Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy (National Parent Forum of Scotland), contrib. 8, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12075&c=2171984

[6] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 34, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180076

[7] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Jim Scott (University of Dundee), contrib. 9, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169824

[8] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Britton, contrib. 25, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169840

[9] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 47, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167479

[10] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 59, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167491

[11] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Gill Stewart (Scottish Qualifications Authority), contrib. 97, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178201

[12] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 84, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178188

[13] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 19, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174113

[14] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 89, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174183

[15] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 82, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176391

[16] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Tony McDaid, contrib. 81, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176390

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[17] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 42, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180084

[18] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Britton, contrib. 56, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169871

[19] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 60, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180102

[20] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Stewart, contrib. 166, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178270

[21] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 177, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178281

[22] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Scott, contrib. 48, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169863

[23] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 44, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174138

[24] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 14, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167446

[25] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 6, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167438

[26] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 80, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178184

[27] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 25, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176334

[28] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Tony McDaid, contrib. 38, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176347

[29] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, William Hardie, contrib. 79, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169894

[30] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 11, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174105

[31] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 191, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178312

[32] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 141, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180183

[33] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Tony McDaid, contrib. 49, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176358

[34] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Vincent Docherty, contrib. 66, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176375

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[35] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Mark Ratter, contrib. 44, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176353

[36] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Mark Ratter (East Renfrewshire Council), contrib. 12, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176321

[37] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Scott Harrison, contrib. 290, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167722

[38] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Joan Mackay, contrib. 70, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167502

[39] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 150, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167582

[40] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, James Morgan (Scottish Qualifications Authority), contrib. 92, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178196

[41] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, William Hardie (Royal Society of Edinburgh), contrib. 3, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169818

[42] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 49, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174143

[43] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Brown, contrib. 126, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178230

[44] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 66, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180108

[45] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 11, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167443

[46] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong (Education Scotland), contrib. 9, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167441

[47] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 44, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2190772

[48] Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Linda O'Neill, contrib. 61, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12075&c=2172037

[49] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 131, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167563

[50] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alastair Sim (Universities Scotland), contrib. 251, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167683

[51] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 135, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180177

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[52] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 68, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167500

[53] Education and Skills Committee 19 September 2018, Dr Shapira, contrib. 25, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11680&c=2113003

[54] Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Joanna Murphy, contrib. 34, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12075&c=2172010

[55] Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Magaidh Wentworth, contrib. 46, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12075&c=2172022

[56] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 84, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167516

[57] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 123, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180165

[58] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Marjorie Kerr (Scottish Association of Geography Teachers), contrib. 4, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174098

[59] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Professor Scott, contrib. 96, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169911

[60] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Francisco Valdera-Gil, contrib. 24, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174118

[61] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Alan Armstrong, contrib. 165, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167597

[62] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 188, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167620

[63] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Catriona MacPhee (Comann Luchd-Teagaisg Àrd Sgoiltean), contrib. 2, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174096

[64] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Dr NicLeòid, contrib. 297, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167729

[65] Education and Skills Committee 01 May 2019, Magaidh Wentworth (Comann nam Pàrant), contrib. 26, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12075&c=2172002

[66] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Catriona MacPhee, contrib. 37, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174131

[67] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Joan Mackay, contrib. 199, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167631

[68] Education and Skills Committee 22 May 2019, Dr Stewart, contrib. 138, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12118&c=2178242

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[69] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 111, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180153

[70] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Vincent Docherty, contrib. 41, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176350

[71] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Vincent Docherty, contrib. 143, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176452

[72] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 244, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167676

[73] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, Dr Britton, contrib. 29, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169844

[74] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Larry Flanagan, contrib. 98, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174192

[75] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Marjorie Kerr, contrib. 94, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174188

[76] Education and Skills Committee 08 May 2019, Francisco Valdera-Gil, contrib. 95, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12088&c=2174189

[77] Education and Skills Committee 24 April 2019, William Hardie, contrib. 41, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12058&c=2169856

[78] Education and Skills Committee 15 May 2019, Gerry Lyons, contrib. 124, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12105&c=2176433

[79] Education and Skills Committee 29 May 2019, John Swinney, contrib. 85, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12127&c=2180127

[80] Education and Skills Committee 03 April 2019, Gayle Gorman, contrib. 51, http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=12044&c=2167483

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