



Curriculum for All

Restoring world class Scottish education

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CONTENTS

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
Key Recommendations	5
Background to Curriculum for Excellence and the OECD Review.....	6
The Principles of Our Approach to Scottish Education.....	9
Developing a Curriculum for All.....	10
Empowering Our Schools and Teachers	12
Recognising and Rewarding Teaching Staff	14
Ending Geographic Inequality.....	15
Conclusion.....	17

FOREWORD



Nicola Sturgeon said in 2016 that education would be her government’s “number one priority”. She also stated that closing the attainment gap would be her “defining mission”.

Unfortunately, the reality has not matched the First Minister’s rhetorical commitment. Scottish education, once viewed among the best in the world, has plummeted in international surveys and is now considered worse than not only the UK average but also schooling in countries like Estonia and Poland. Meanwhile within Scotland, the attainment gap is now at its widest since 2016.

Scottish education has been declining for the last 15 years. A generation of Scottish school children have been let down by the SNP Government. This must be considered one of their greatest failings in office.

We cannot continue with an education system, which despite the best efforts of teachers and staff, is leading to declining standards in schooling. While we must work now to help pupils to catch up from the disruptive impact that Covid and two years of school closures have had, we cannot ignore these long-term trends.

The SNP’s response was to commission the OECD to conduct a review of Curriculum for Excellence. However, the government constrained the review’s remit and then suggested edits to the final report. As such, we do not consider this review to have been fully independent.

The subsequent Muir Review and the government’s response show that the SNP’s approach will be to consider mostly superficial

changes, such as rebranding government agencies. We do not believe that these changes will be enough to arrest the decline in Scottish education, we need to see a wholesale approach to restore Scottish school traditions for the modern day.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives have published *Curriculum for All* to begin a national conversation on the future of Scottish education. We believe that much of the decline in Scottish education can be traced back to the formation and implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and that it has proven to be a fundamentally flawed reform. We want to work with teaching professionals and education experts to build a shared vision for an alternate framework to deliver Scottish schooling.

We are also in this paper proposing a range of measures to ensure that our education system can successfully implement any new framework. This includes increasing school autonomy, better recognising and rewarding teaching staff and ending geographic inequality between urban and rural communities and among the most and least deprived pupils.

There are no immediate solutions to reversing 15 years of failing standards in our education system. However, if we remain committed to Curriculum for Excellence then this decline will only continue. We need to begin the work now on a bold and ambitious replacement for Curriculum for Excellence focused on restoring world class Scottish education.

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INTRODUCTION

Scottish education used to be regarded among the best in the world but is now considered by international observers to be just internationally average. This must be considered one of the greatest failings of the last 15 years of SNP government. A generation of Scottish school children have been let down at a time when increasing globalisation has meant that they face more competition for further education places, apprenticeships and jobs with peers not just in the rest of the UK but across the world.

However, opposition parties have picked around the edges of our education system, rather than addressing the root causes that have led to the fall in standards. Restoring teacher and teaching staff numbers, improving school infrastructure and equipment and closing the attainment gap will all help to improve education but they can only go so far if the principles that underpin schooling in Scotland are holding pupils back.

That is why the Scottish Conservatives have published *Curriculum for All* to kickstart a national conversation around the future of Scottish education post-Curriculum for Excellence. This marks the first time since the outlining of Curriculum for Excellence nearly two decades ago that a political party has supported the building of an alternate framework for the delivery of education in Scotland. We believe that this process should be driven by teaching professionals and independent education experts and would invite all those who want to see the restoration of a world class school system to be involved.

We are also proposing in this paper a series of changes to deliver a more autonomous school system, where teachers are more empowered and rewarded and we ensure that pupils have the same opportunities wherever they live in our country. These changes can both improve schooling in the short and medium term under the existing framework but would also help to make the shift to a new curriculum successful.

Building a new curriculum is not an immediate response to the challenges that Scottish education faces today. However, there are no quick solutions to 15 years of declining standards in our schools. If we truly want to restore world class education in our schools for all of Scotland's pupils then we need to address the real reasons for why it declined in the first place. That must mean replacing Curriculum for Excellence with a Curriculum for All.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Begin a national conversation around the replacement of Curriculum for Excellence and the development of a Curriculum for All.** Curriculum for Excellence has led to declining standards in Scottish education due to the lack of importance it places on knowledge, its lack of alignment with Scotland’s traditional exams system and confusing guidance for teachers. We need to start a national conversation led by teaching professionals and independent education experts on its replacement. Any new curriculum should place a renewed emphasis on pupils being taught subject specific knowledge, better prepare pupils for Higher exams, further and adult education, apprenticeships and work and place the early development of digital skills at the core of its approach.

To ensure the successful implementation of any new curriculum we should also:

- **Increase school autonomy and teacher decision making over course content.** Teaching professionals know best how to educate their pupils. We need to give headteachers more autonomy over decisions regarding their schools, including staffing and budgets, and teachers’ flexibility over how to implement the curriculum in their classes. We also need to see parents given a greater involvement in the running of schools.
- **Link central grant funding to improvements in pupil performance.** National funding from the Scottish Government should be more closely linked to outcomes in pupil performance. This will encourage schools to innovate and implement best practice.
- **Introduce independence in school and education inspections.** It is right that the Scottish Government has recognised that Education Scotland should not both govern and inspect school performance. A separate independent school inspectorate should be set up and staffed by former or seconded teachers. We would also re-enter Scotland into international comparisons, such as the TIMSS and the PIRLS.

- **Invest in school IT equipment and digital connectivity.** We need to ensure that the development and use of digital skills are placed at the heart of any new curriculum. To achieve this our schools should receive a major upgrade in their available IT equipment. A full fibre connection should be part of any assessment as to whether a building is considered fit to be a school.’
- **Improve teacher pay and progression.** The Scottish Government should implement the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Career Pathways for Teachers, including creating ‘Lead Teacher’ posts before the start of the next school year. Schools should be able to make additional payments to teachers who hold classes outside of their normal hours.
- **Expand alternate pathways into the teaching profession.** The Scottish Government should invest in expanding the number of places available for alternate pathways into teaching. These should be targeted at where there are geographic or subject specific shortages.
- **Base one of the new education agencies outside the Central Belt.** To better understand and tackle the issues faced by schools outside of the Central Belt, the Scottish Government should base one of its planned new agencies outside of Scotland’s two largest cities, such as in Aberdeen.
- **Encourage schools to cluster both locally and remotely to widen subject choice.** Schools should be encouraged to share online resources and content to allow for the delivery of a wider range of subjects across the country. The Scottish Government should also support the formation of local clusters to offer more choice to pupils and allow schools to better specialise in subjects.
- **Replace SIMD for allocating attainment funding and other support for deprived pupils.** The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a flawed measure that labels whole communities and schools as deprived. The Scottish Government should replace this with a measure, like Low Income Households, which allows for the better targeting of support to those pupils and their families who need it most.

BACKGROUND TO CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE AND THE OECD REVIEW

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is the national curriculum setting out the purpose and priorities for educating children in Scotland between the ages of 3 and 18. It was the subject of the national debate on education in Scotland in 2002, first outlined in a document in 2004 and introduced in schools for the 2010-11 year, with the first exams under this new curriculum sat in 2014. As such, CfE has been the most important reform in Scottish education of the last two decades.ⁱ

CfE is structured so that children from early years until the end of S3 undertake what is referred to as the Broad General Education (BGE). This is broken down into an Early Phase covering pre-school and P1, a First Phase covering to the end of P4, a Second Phase to the end of P7, a Third and Fourth Phase to the end of S3 and a Senior Phase covering S4-S6. The BGE sets out eight broad subject areas, with courses built around four competency areas:

- **Successful learners**
- **Confident individuals**
- **Responsible citizens**
- **Effective contributors**

The shared vision and goal of CfE also sets out eight objectives for children (active, respected, responsible, included, safe, healthy, achieving and nurtured), all underpinned by a commitment to health and wellbeing.ⁱⁱ

Much of the current policy debate on CfE is around how the BGE aligns with the composition of teaching in the Senior Phase. The BGE teaches pupils in a holistic approach which then shifts dramatically in S4 to prepare for subject specific examinations (National Qualifications, Highers and Advanced Highers) in each of the remaining school years. Highers and Advanced Highers, as entrance examinations for university, have remained largely unchanged as the education

system transitioned to CfE. This has led to a debate around the continued relevance of these traditional exams over coursework and their place as the educational objective for pupils, particularly when we have seen a dramatic reduction in the number of pupils leaving in S4 over the last decade.ⁱⁱⁱ

Another related debate about CfE is how it has reduced the role of knowledge in the Scottish education system. Critics have argued that CfE has diluted the role of facts in schooling in favour of a shift towards a vaguer style of learning based on skills. This has seen an emphasis on cross-disciplinary learning placed before subject specialism, on which the traditional school curriculum was based.^{iv}



Finally, CfE has also been criticised for its flawed implementation, with teachers given excessive guidance and ineffective direction. This was even recognised by Education Scotland who stated in 2016 that there was “too much support material and guidance for practitioners. This is contributing to the growth of over-bureaucratic approaches to planning and assessment in many schools and classrooms across the country”.^v

Since the introduction of CfE, Scotland’s educational performance has declined against international competitors. According to the OECD’s PISA Survey, from 2006 to 2018 performance in mathematics has dropped from 506 to 489, its lowest ever level and below the UK average. Over the same period, its

performance in science has dropped from 513 to 490, again a record low and below the UK average. The performance in reading has seen a marginal improvement from 2006 from 499 to 504 which matches the UK average, but this must be considered in the context of a dramatic fall from 526 in 2000. Scotland's overall performance is now consistently below that of not just the UK average but also of countries like Estonia and Poland. Whereas once Scottish education was considered among the best in the world, now it is considered among the internationally average.^{vi}

While we can obviously attribute some of this shift to substantial improvements in the delivery of education in some other countries, it is clear that either the introduction of CfE has led to a stagnation in Scottish school performance or it has actually damaged performance.



Even attainment by Scottish pupils against CfE expectations is down to its lowest level since 2016/17. The proportion of primary school pupils achieving their expected CfE levels in 2020/21 fell to 74.7% in numeracy and 66.9% in literacy down from 79.1% and 72.3% respectively in 2018/19 (no data was collected in 2019/20). This fall in attainment was even more pronounced among the most deprived pupils with the gap between the least and most deprived primary pupils increasing from 20.7 percentage points in 2018/19 to 24.7 in 2020/21 in literacy and from 16.8 to 21.4 in numeracy. These were again the largest gaps since 2016/17, when this data was first collected, and show the impact of the pandemic on pupil performance and our education system.^{vii}

OECD REVIEW

The OECD review was commissioned by John Swinney in May 2019, with the stated intention of understanding the issue of the Senior Phase not aligning well with the BGE. In January 2020, the then opposition majority forced the Scottish Government to extend the scope of the review to encompass the entirety of CfE. In June 2021, the OECD published their initial report, with a further report on student assessment published in August 2021. The Scottish Government accepted the recommendations of the review and Professor Ken Muir has now reported on how some of these recommendations are due to be taken forward.

Crucially the review was not allowed to question the merits of CfE or its “principles and aspirations”. This means that neither was CfE as an education reform being questioned nor were its objectives. As such, the scope of this review is much narrower than the Scottish Government’s rhetoric would have us believe. Indeed, on its publication Shirley Anne Somerville stated that “The OECD report is crystal clear - Curriculum for Excellence is the right approach for Scotland” but given the terms of its remit it could not do otherwise. We, therefore, must view the review as considering improvements to the delivery of CfE not to the delivery of education in Scotland generally. To believe that the review sets out the right approach for the future of Scottish education one must first agree that CfE is the right structure for the delivery of education in Scotland.^{viii ix}

What is more concerning is that the review cannot be considered to be wholly independent. As Professor Lindsay Paterson has written, the review largely consulted and received evidence directly from the Scottish Government or from aligned public agencies. Contributions from independent bodies were neither sought nor considered when proactively submitted. While it should be recognised that the review was being conducted under pandemic conditions, there can be no excuse as to why written submissions were not considered from independent bodies.^x

The view that the OECD review was rather less than independent is further confirmed by the editing role that the Scottish Government had with regards to the final report. Scottish Government officials were given the report well in advance of its publication and were able to suggest edits to the review team. The publication

of the report was also held back until after the Scottish Parliament Election. Again, this further undermines the claim that the OECD review can be considered truly independent.^{xi}

Taken together, it is our view that while the OECD review makes an important contribution to the future of Scottish education it cannot be considered a totemic, unscrutinised text. The review was constrained in its remit and institutionalised by receiving the totality of its evidence from and being edited by the public sector educational establishment. If we are to address the falling standards in Scottish education from the introduction of CfE, then we need to be able to consider whether its principles and objectives are the right ones, rather than unquestioningly accepting this as given.

Professor Ken Muir's report makes a number of recommendations to implement the changes suggested by the OECD. This includes a national discussion on the vision behind CfE, replacing the SQA and Education Scotland with new public bodies and the establishment of an independent school inspector. The Scottish Government has broadly accepted the recommendations of this report and has said that new agencies will become operational in 2024.^{xii xiii}

While we partially welcome some of these suggestions, the latter having first been proposed by the Scottish Conservatives in September 2020, they are again predicated upon CfE being the right approach for the future of Scottish schooling. We therefore see this report as a missed opportunity, that does not offer the transformative change we need in Scottish education.

THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR APPROACH TO SCOTTISH EDUCATION

In setting out our approach to the future of education in Scotland, it is important to start with a statement of our principles:

- **Firstly, we believe that our education system should support and encourage every pupil to achieve to the best of their ability.** That means having the right support in place in schools to develop every pupil and no one being held back because of the place they live or the school they go to. It also means looking to improve performance in absolute terms for every pupil, with everyone encouraged to do their best and no one being held back.
- **Secondly, we believe that the delivery of knowledge-based learning should form the foundation of our education system.** Ultimately, our schools exist to educate our children and equip them with the knowledge and skills that they will require for later life. The ability to learn and retain facts about a given subject is key to delivering this.
- **Thirdly, we believe in an education system that delivers great education but not the same education across Scotland.** We believe that schools should have greater flexibility in how they interpret and deliver the national curriculum to educate their pupils. That means headteachers having greater control over the resources available to their school and empowered to use them to deliver what they believe is the best and most effective educational experience. It also means trusting teachers as professionals to be able to teach their pupils in the best way to get the best outcomes for them.
- **Fourthly, we believe that teachers should not seek to replace parents.** The number one objective of our schools should be to educate our children, it is for parents to pass on their values to their children. That means ensuring that schools do not undermine the role of parents in deciding what is right or wrong for their child.

However, we also believe that no one has a monopoly on the direction that our education system should take and that it is essential that there is broad support for action. We therefore welcome all views as we look to restore world class Scottish schooling.



DEVELOPING A CURRICULUM FOR ALL

While there are changes that can be made to improve CfE and align it more with the principles set out previously that can only take us so far. We believe that CfE's decisive shift away from knowledge being a priority in education, its lack of alignment with the traditional exams-based system seen in the Senior Phase and the restrictions that it places upon teachers being able to teach make it incompatible with our principles and the restoration of world class education in Scotland.

However, more importantly, the record of CfE and its impact on Scottish educational performance speaks for itself. An educational reform can only be judged as a success if it leads to better schooling for pupils. By this metric, the PISA results show that CfE has been a failure, with Scottish education standards stagnating and getting worse while our international competitors move further ahead.

Finally, CfE was the result of a process that began two decades ago. In that time, the skills required of the modern Scottish economy have changed substantially. The OECD paper acknowledged that CfE was not subject to regular policy review. We must therefore consider if CfE gives the appropriate weighting to the subjects and skills, such as IT literacy, that Scottish pupils will need for their transition to work and further education.^{xiv}

For these reasons we believe that this Scottish Parliamentary term is the right time for a national conversation on change in education and the structure of a new curriculum. Given that it was eight years from the initial consultation to the implementation of CfE, any changes would only come about in the long-term, but it is right for the sake of the future of Scottish education that this lengthy process and the direction that it sets is begun now. We believe that this process is best led by professionals and independent experts and our own views will evolve as we take part in that conversation over the next four years. However, for the rest of this section we will set out broad themes that will define our engagement towards building a new curriculum based upon

the principles mentioned above.

Firstly, we would wish to see a new curriculum shift the emphasis in Scottish education back towards knowledge. As mentioned earlier in the paper, there are four capacities within CfE of which only one 'successful learners' directly relates to the accumulation of subject specific knowledge as a goal of our education system. The remaining three capacities 'confident individuals', 'responsible citizens' and 'effective contributors' do not relate to the knowledge element of education but either refer to the teachings of values or of character building. The OECD state that this "creates the misleading impression that a strong knowledge base is no longer a priority".^{xv}



Setting learning as just one of four capacities devalues the importance of knowledge in our education. While we believe that the other three goals are worthy to an extent, we do not believe that they should hold the same weighting, as learning which is ultimately the reason children go to school. We also have reservations about the role of schools in teaching children to be 'responsible citizens' over their own parents. As such, it is our view that the successful teaching of knowledge should be placed at the heart of any new curriculum.

A new curriculum should also align well with the current Senior Phase and the examinations required for further education. The OECD review found that "There does not appear to yet be

successful alignment of qualifications and exams in the Senior Phase with the CfE visions” and suggested reforms to Higher qualifications to bring them into line with CfE. However, they also found that “Stakeholders agreed, that there remains one accepted and widely understood measure of success in the Senior Phase – the attainment of five Higher qualifications”.^{xvi}

We believe that their constrained review remit has meant that they have drawn the wrong conclusion from these findings. Ultimately, stakeholders, higher education institutes and, increasingly, employers need to have faith in the qualifications that pupils get from school, which they do from the current Higher qualifications. The problem therefore is not with the Senior Phase and the traditional system of examination but rather with how well the BGE prepares pupils for subject specific examination. It is our view that a new curriculum should encourage earlier subject specialisation to ensure that pupils are much more adapted to this model of teaching ahead of entering into the examination phase of their schooling.

A new curriculum should be used as an opportunity to put a renewed emphasis on the early development in pupils of digital skills and IT literacy. Computing Science entries at Higher level have declined from 4,476 in 2017 to 3,379 in 2021. At National 5 entries fell from 7,441 to 6,289 over the same period. At both Higher and National 5, entries to Computer Science were below English, Mathematics, the three traditional sciences and the three main humanities. A focus on digital skills will ensure that pupils are better equipped to meet the demands of the modern Scottish economy when they leave school and better facilitate the teaching of other science subjects, such as Mathematics.^{xvii}

Finally, we believe that a new curriculum should be designed to align with the government’s adult education and lifelong learning priorities. While we do not wholly agree with the approach taken by the Scottish Government in these areas, any government designing a future curriculum should ensure that it fits well within its broader objectives of securing youth employment and of encouraging Scots to develop their skills and education throughout their lives. This is especially important for ensuring that the curriculum offers a good experience and clear attainment for pupils who will leave in S4 and not sit Higher

examinations.

Ultimately, we believe that the work to develop a revised curriculum should be led by teaching professionals and independent educational experts who understand the best approach to teach pupils. However, politicians will have a role in setting the broad direction for that conversation and it is these broad approaches that will be put forward by the Scottish Conservatives in a national conversation on the future of our education system.

EMPOWERING OUR SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS

Any curriculum change must also be accompanied by changes in how we deliver education and the role of our schools within that system. However, these changes do not have to wait for the best part of a decade – many could be achieved right now. Every Scottish child should be able to go to a good local school, but that does not mean that the delivery of teaching should be the same in every school.

The Scottish Conservatives were disappointed in the last parliament by the SNP's decision to drop their Education Bill. While not perfect, it would have enshrined in law increased autonomy for our schools. While some progress has been made through non-legislative changes, these were watered down from what was in the Bill, which was itself far short of the autonomy we need to see given to schools to create a dynamic education system.



A variation in teaching approaches and substance is essential if we are to deliver an education system that is innovative and able to learn best practice from itself. We believe that teaching professionals are better placed than anyone else to know how best to educate their pupils. That is why we believe that schools should be given flexibility about how they implement any curriculum and how courses are taught.

However, increased autonomy over course content and teaching methodology must also be backed with the resources to support this approach. That is why we support headteachers

being given more control over school budgets and staffing decisions, with the appropriate support being put in place to ensure that headteachers are empowered rather than bogged down by their new responsibilities. As part of this, we would like to see restrictions removed around how grant funding, such as the Attainment Fund, can be spent by schools.

A final point in increasing school autonomy is the role of parents. Parent representative organisations can make an effective contribution to the running of a school. It is therefore our view, as part of a more empowered school system, that greater parental involvement in the running and objective setting of schools should be encouraged.

Successful outcomes within a more autonomous school system should also be recognised by central government. This will encourage schools to innovate and focus on the delivery of good teaching and pupil performance. We should, therefore, more closely link additional grant funding to outcomes and best practice. This will reward those schools who deliver substantive improvements in pupil performance and encourage other schools to do likewise to receive funding.

As part of recognising the greater independence of schools, we welcomed the Scottish Government decision to create an independent school inspector. The current situation of Education Scotland both governing and inspecting school performance removed any claim to independence from the process. This suggestion was made by the Scottish Conservatives in our September 2020 paper *Restore our Schools* and also in our 2021 manifesto.^{xviii xix}

However, we were disappointed with the government's commitment to staff this new body with civil servants. We believe that any new inspection agency should be led by former or seconded teachers, to ensure independence and encourage professional oversight and

scrutiny. The government must also commit to this new body being accountable to the Scottish Parliament rather than to themselves.

This should be combined with a commitment to re-enter Scotland's schools into international comparisons. In 2010, the Scottish Government decided to withdraw from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). We need a frank assessment and more data on the performance of individual schools and the performance of the Scottish education system as a whole.

We should also look to make improving digital infrastructure in our schools a priority in advance of the introduction of any new curriculum. Given the opportunity that curriculum change presents to embed information technology and digital skills at the heart of a revised opportunity, ensuring that the proper equipment is in place to allow for this increased emphasis is essential. This should be used to greater effect in teaching subjects outside of those traditionally associated with IT and in the Senior Phase.

Taken together these changes will ensure that we have a school system with the flexibility to adapt any new curriculum to the best teaching methods for their pupils. However, they are also changes that the Scottish Government could deliver now to improve education outcomes under CfE. A more autonomous school system means putting our trust in teachers to teach, headteachers to run their school and parents to know what is best for their children. That must be the cornerstone of our approach to delivering Scotland's education future.

RECOGNISING AND REWARDING TEACHING STAFF

With increased responsibility must also come increased reward and recognition to drive forward positive change. We need to ensure that teachers and education staff feel valued within a structure that gives greater autonomy to schools and staff. To ensure this, we need to have a clear workforce strategy to accompany any changes in how our schools are managed, so that new structures are not undermined by shortages in staff.

The current teacher pay scale starts at £27,498 for a probation teacher, rising to £32,994 in their first year as a permanent teacher and £41,412 after six years in post. This is the end of the teachers' pay scale unless a teacher decides to go for promotion. These pay scales are in place for 2020/21 as they have yet to be agreed for 2021/22.

COSLA has offered a 1.22% increase dated from 1 April 2021, a further 1% increase from 1 January 2022 and a one-off payment of £100 for teachers in post on 31 March 2022. After the difficult year that teachers have gone through, we believe that this pay offer is inadequate and should be revised with additional resource from the Scottish Government.^{xx xxi}

Many teachers go above and beyond for their pupils and hold after school or morning revision classes outside of their contracted hours or take on additional school responsibilities. These should be recognised by allowing for schools to make additional payments on top of regular teacher salaries where appropriate. This will not only properly recognise the good that many teachers do but also encourage the delivery of additional classes and revision sessions.

Teacher retention also continues to be an increasing problem in the profession. The number of teachers leaving the profession in 2019/20 was 4,367 against 3,570 in 2015/16.^{xxii}

The Independent Panel on Career Pathways for Teachers made several recommendations in 2019 on ways to develop teaching careers with a view to retaining good staff. It is disappointing that some of these recommendations, such as

the creation of 'Lead Teacher' posts, have still not been delivered by the Scottish Government. We believe that the necessary resources should be put in place to deliver on the Panel's recommendations ahead of the new school year.

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We also believe that the role of the General Teaching Council should be strengthened in order to ensure that Scotland's schools are staffed by the best teachers and that they are supported to do their jobs.

In order to attract new teaching talent, the Scottish Government should look to develop new pathways for entry into the teaching profession. The Scottish Government's STEM bursary scheme is an attractive offer, delivering a £20,000 bursary for those with three years' experience in STEM fields to study a post-graduate qualification in education. However, this scheme is capped at just 150 places. The Scottish Government is also supporting a number of university-led schemes to provide alternate routes into education, however some of these are only targeted at existing council workforces or not widely publicised.^{xxv xxvi}

The Scottish Government should look to dramatically expand the number of places and funding available for alternative pathways into teaching. This is especially the case for schemes that allow for remote learning so that teacher training can happen in rural communities where shortages occur. Alternate pathways should also be aligned with subject specific shortages to ensure that we are incentivising professionals to take up teaching in those roles and using resources effectively.

Delivering a clear workforce strategy to end teaching shortages across the country and in every subject is essential to ensure that teachers are not overworked and under supported. This will allow for a new framework to be implemented successfully, as it is being driven by a motivated workforce. Ultimately teachers must be incentivised and encouraged to take ownership of this process.

ENDING GEOGRAPHIC INEQUALITY

As stated, the Scottish Conservatives believe that every school should be a good school with the same opportunities delivered to every pupil in every part of our country. However too many pupils in remote, rural or in deprived areas are left with less subject choice, teacher shortages and a poorer quality of education than their peers in other parts of the country.

The Scottish Government's own statistics shows that there is a rural attainment gap in Scotland. For example, the difference between attainment in literacy at P7 in large urban areas and remote small towns was 16 percentage points and 17 for numeracy.^{xxvii}

If we are to properly address these problems, then we need to build an education system that understands the issues faced in teaching across the whole of Scotland. However, SPICe research found that less than one in ten staff in Education Scotland were based outside of Glasgow, Dundee or Livingston. To achieve an education system that can properly address these problems, we need to move part our education establishment away from the Central Belt. This will encourage a culture change that would place more weight on using education resources to resolve issues faced by our school system in remote and rural areas, such as attracting good teachers.^{xxviii}

That is why the Scottish Government should base one of its new education agencies in Aberdeen. This would be a clear sign of intent that the refreshed governance of the school system in Scotland is working for the whole country and that it will address the long-standing issues in many parts of our country. It will also help to reduce the centralisation of the Scottish public sector and deliver well-paid jobs and opportunities outside of our capital and largest city.

As we have previously argued, teachers should be given additional incentives to work in remote and rural areas. That is why we have and continue to call for the creation of a Rural Teachers Fund, which schools could use to fund incentives, like salary top-ups or relocation payments, to encourage teachers to move to areas where it has been harder to recruit. The Scottish Government should also look, as a longer-term

solution, at more ways to train teachers locally, such as through expanding the available locations at which teacher training can be undertaken.

Another way in which we would improve the delivery of education in many parts of our country is to invest in online tools to provide content and lessons remotely. This will help smaller schools to expand their subject offering by ensuring that they have access to support online for the delivery of those subjects. As stated in our manifesto of last year we believe that all pupils should be able to take at least seven subjects in S4.

As part of ensuring that schools can share expertise and capacity remotely, the Scottish Government should ensure that any new inspection body makes digital connectivity a part of its assessment of whether a school building is fit to be used for teaching. If we are to design a curriculum with digital skills at its heart then we need to have the infrastructure in place to ensure that its implementation is not hampered by inadequate buildings and school equipment.



However, a greater emphasis on schools being able to support each other online is no substitute for schools sharing and pooling resources locally where they are able. Clustering allows schools to build local specialisation in subject delivery, ensuring that each school can better target their resources, while allowing pupils to access a larger range of subjects that may not be available at their local school. The Scottish Government should support clustering between schools and where appropriate ensure that these clusters are

able to be created between schools in different local authority areas.

Finally, in reducing geographic discrimination in our education system we must also look to improve opportunity for pupils from deprived backgrounds. As stated previously, the attainment gap is now wider than it has been since records began.

The Scottish Conservatives were proud at the last Scottish Parliament Election to commit to every primary school pupil being able to have a free school lunch and breakfast and it is welcome that the Scottish Government has taken this forward. This will ensure that no pupil is distracted at school from not having had a proper meal and will remove the stigma associated with free school meals.

However, the need for this action just confirms that the Scottish Government's flagship measure of poverty in Scotland, the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) is flawed. It labels whole streets, schools and communities as deprived rather than looking at the individual circumstances of families. This can mean that pupils from deprived backgrounds or where they are not supported in their learning are not receiving the additional support that they should be entitled to because they do not qualify under the SIMD. The Scottish Government should look to using a more nuanced measurement, such as Low Income Households, that will allow for the better targeting of additional support measures to those pupils and families who need them most.

We believe that geographic inequality is one of the greatest barriers holding back pupil attainment across Scotland. It is our belief that every effort should be made to ensure that pupils are able to have access to the same opportunities in learning as their peers across Scotland. That is how we will tackle deprivation and regional inequality, but it is also how we will build a more cohesive Scottish society.

CONCLUSION

We recognise that replacing CfE is not a short-term fix for falling standards in our schools. However, that does not mean that we should ignore the glaring problems that CfE has caused and avoid beginning the work now to develop a replacement. We can only improve standards in our school system so far without addressing the underlying issues, such as the devaluing of knowledge, that CfE has caused.

We have set out in this paper a very early outline for what we believe the priorities of a new education framework should. Yet, ultimately, as was the case with the development of CfE, this must be a process that is driven by teaching professionals and independent education experts. We intend for this paper to be just the start of a national conversation around the future of education in Scotland and we would invite all those who want to see the restoration of a world class school system to be involved in that conversation.

However, we have also focused in this paper on a range of improvements that could be made to the education system to improve our schools right now and to ensure that they are better prepared to implement any new curriculum. Empowering our teachers and schools will deliver an education system that puts more faith in individual professional judgement over system-wide priorities. Recognising and rewarding teaching staff will ensure that teachers are encouraged to remain in the profession and in classrooms. Ending geographic discrimination will ensure that our school system has the ability to deliver the same great education to every pupil in every part of our country.

The future prosperity of Scotland will be decided by the knowledge and skills that our schools deliver to the next generation. We must deliver a Curriculum for All so that every pupil can achieve as far as their ability will take them.

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