

# **National Discussion on Scottish Education**

**Fairer Scotland Duty**

**May 2023**

# Fairer Scotland Duty

## **Title of Policy, Strategy, Programme etc:**

National Discussion on Scottish Education

## **Summary of aims and expected outcomes of strategy, proposal, programme or policy:**

The National Discussion is an unprecedented opportunity for children, young people and those who support them to have their voices heard in a debate designed to establish a compelling and consensual vision for Scottish education.

The National Discussion delivers a Vision and Values and a Call to Action with clear priorities for the future of Scottish education that engages learners and meets their wide ranging and diverse needs.

## **Summary of evidence**

Our engagement plans were designed to counter risks of the following factors being a barrier to participation:

**Age:** Evidence suggests that children and young people can encounter barriers to participation in national government consultations. For example, New Zealand's well regarded Education Conversation received 14,000 responses between 23 March 2018 and 3 July 2018. However, school-aged populations had amongst the lowest response rates. Indeed, responses from primary school aged children made up 2% of the 14,000 received responses, and secondary school aged children made-up 6% of the responses. (Government of New Zealand, 2019).

**Disability:** The National Discussion engaged representatives of disabled people to identify issues to be explored, and to develop methods, communications and outputs accessible to people with different types of impairments.

**Race:** Approximately 90% of the school population identify as being white according to the Teacher Census (2021) and Pupil Census (2021). Early consultations with those who represent teachers and learners of different races suggested that racism would be a barrier to participation in the National Discussion. Furthermore, related to race, aspects of language and literacy may be a barrier in households where English is not a first language.

Socio-Economic Status: Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland 2021 shows the gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas (based on the Scottish Index for Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)) who achieved their expected level in literacy has increased from 20.7 percentage points in 2018/19 to 24.7 percentage points in 2020/21. The gap between the proportion of primary pupils (P1, P4 and P7 combined) from the most and least deprived areas who achieved their expected level in numeracy increased from 16.8 percentage 6 points in 2018/19 to 21.4 percentage points in 2020/21. For both primary literacy and primary numeracy, the sizes of the gaps in 2020/21 were larger than at any previous point since 2016/17 (the first year for which comparable data is available).

### **Summary of assessment findings**

**Age:** Efforts to include children and young people were made with due regard for their age and maturity. There were certain groups, for example younger children, who will need additional support to take part in their national discussion. This support should include resources written in plain English and Easy Read; modified consultation questions that relate to things young learners experience; explanatory audio-visual resources; multiple ways to feedback views; the support of trusted adults; opportunities to discuss with their peers; and the inclusion of learners in the testing phase.

**Disability:** Our collaborators' initial advice included: The need to engage recent school leavers up to the age of 30. This is because young disabled people often reflect upon their educational experience when trying to enter the labour market; and the engagement of parents would likely be a particular consideration for engaging those living with disabilities. For example, we were advised to hear from parents of children living with disabilities; and, we were advised to ensure children living with disabilities their opportunity to participate without their parents. Furthermore, evidence including the HM Government Office for Disability Issues publication, *Involving disabled people in social research* (2011), informed the design of the National Discussion and the National Discussion's EQIA, for example:

To include people with hearing impairments: it was necessary for the National Discussion's description, research questions and explanatory video to be available in written English (incl. closed captions) and BSL. Furthermore, selected National Discussion's events featured BSL interpreters.

To include people with speech impairments: it was necessary for the National Discussion to provide opportunities for people to make written responses to the National Discussion through online surveys, emails, and social media posts

To include people with visual impairments: it was necessary for National Discussion to provide an opportunity for people to make verbal contributions through facilitated focus groups, online events, and group discussions led by third sector organisations and schools.

To include people with learning difficulties or disabilities. It was necessary for the National Discussion to ensure: information was clearly presented and straightforward to understand; information was made available in plain English, large print, audio or the Easy Read format; our website contained simple text and explanatory videos to help people to understand information. Furthermore, group discussion resources were made available to ensure trained adults in schools and across the third sector could support people who needed it to contribute to the consultation. Finally, focus groups were promoted to those advocating on behalf of demographics less likely to participate in the National Discussion.

Race: Collaborators advised that the National Discussion could not just take place in schools because learners from minority groups might encounter real and perceived barriers to their full participation. Instead, the National Discussion should also engage through community groups and local organisations who are likely to hold more trusting relationships with people who otherwise risk finding their views marginalised. Furthermore, advocates stressed the importance of the consultation analysis having a focus on equalities. A race blind approach to analysis would otherwise fail to identify important issues experienced by a minority, including potentially racist abuse. Finally, to remedy issues connected to English as a second language, every effort was made to ensure that the National Discussion carefully considered language when producing information, such as the complexity of the content and vocabulary used. For example, the National Discussion's consultation questions were available in Easy Read, Gaelic, Arabic, Mandarin, Polish, Punjabi, Ukrainian, Urdu and British Sign Language.

Socio-Economic status: The National Discussion is an opportunity for individuals and groups that are often marginalised or underrepresented in the education system to have their voices heard. By participating in a consultation, learners facing an attainment gap can bring to attention the issues that affect their communities and can advocate for a vision and call to action that better addresses their needs. Their participation can help ensure the vision is inclusive and equitable.

Care Experience: We ran six focus groups for adult advocates able to represent the views, interests and learning needs of those less likely to disclose their experiences to a public consultation.

Pregnancy and maternity: To mitigate childcare responsibilities being a barrier for some individuals being able to participate in the National Discussion, opportunities for face-to-face or online engagement events were set at variety of times and places.

Online feedback via the consultation was also available for individuals to participate in at a time that is convenient to them.

Religion or Belief: Published evidence suggested that being cognisant of religious holidays and providing facilities such as prayer rooms or quiet contemplation space when setting engagement events would be helpful when engaging with people from a range of religions. Early consultations with those who represent teachers and learners of different faiths suggested the consultation methodology might also utilise trusted relationships of institutions to access views of populations with religious beliefs (or none).



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