

CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE – PROGRESSION AND TRANSITIONS

Purpose

1. This paper aims to:
 - recap briefly on known existing strengths and opportunities for improvement related to progression and transitions ages 3 -15;
 - present a case for change; and
 - suggest possible ways forward.

Introduction

2. This paper sets the themes of progression and transitions within the overall broad context of the learner journey. The starting point for discussion of the learning journey has traditionally been from age 3. Early learning and childcare is now an entitlement for up to 27% of 2 year olds. As such, whilst the focus of this paper is on ages 3-15, we should consider this within the wider context of the 2- 24 Learner Journey, being mindful of the recently published 15-24 Learner Journey Review Report and of actions agreed at the last CAB meeting on senior phase.
3. **Progression and transitions** are distinct but interrelated concepts. Progression is a fundamental principle of curriculum design and closely linked to the principle of coherence. It assumes that the learner will experience a curriculum which builds on prior learning and achievements. Transitions are the times of change within the learner's journey. From a learner's perspective, for example, it would be a reasonable expectation for them to experience a journey in which they are clear about 'what's next?', that what is next matches their developmental stages and builds on what they have already learned, and that the transitions they undertake to remain on that journey are well supported. Progression is discussed in paragraphs 5 to 20. Transitions are discussed in paragraphs 21 to 30. Conclusions and suggestions for action are set out in paragraphs 31 to 35.
4. Many of the issues presented in this paper are long-standing. The paper draws on findings from a range of publications. Importantly, it is informed by recent and on-going professional dialogue with a wide range of practitioners across a range of settings working to implement national programmes. Three factors consistently emerged in discussions as priorities to improve progression and transitions:
 - progression should be revisited and supported as a curriculum design issue;
 - practitioners and leaders in schools and other settings need to be actively involved in curriculum design; and
 - learners' agency in relation to their own progress is important.

Progression – where are we now?

5. This discussion paper primarily addresses progression in learning as experienced by children and young people as they move through early learning and childcare settings and primary and secondary schools. However, any discussion of children's

and young people's progress needs to take account of the learning that takes place before and beyond that offered in these settings.

6. Progression in learning is informed by the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) **Experiences and Outcomes**. These are set out across five levels – Early to Fourth - against the 12 years of the 3 – 15 journey and known as the Broad General Education (BGE). Experiences and Outcomes illustrate the learning expected across the curriculum area and have been available for use since 2009. The Experiences and Outcomes for Technologies were updated in 2017. **Benchmarks** published in 2017 were developed to provide clarity on the national standards expected at each level. They set out clear lines of progression across levels in each curricular area.
7. In recent weeks **milestones to support learners with complex additional support needs** have been published for literacy and English and for numeracy and mathematics. This includes foundation milestones which outline key skills and competencies that underpin all curriculum areas and guidance to support practitioners. The milestones aim to support practitioners to assess the progress made by learners who may be achieving at a pre-early level.
8. Experiences and Outcomes have been used by practitioners in different ways to support their **planning for progression** in learning. This includes the use of 'progression pathways' in curriculum areas developed at school or local authority level. These are most often used in the early and primary stages. There is some limited evidence of their use in S1 to S3.
9. The **role of practitioners** in working with the leaders of their schools / settings to develop the curriculum and to see where their contribution sits within the overall curriculum offer in the school / setting is variable. In too many schools and early learning settings, practitioners have had limited opportunities to design and develop pathways and the overall curriculum is viewed as having been 'sorted' at some time in the past and by someone else. This contributes to a lack of practitioner confidence and ownership. For many practitioners, progression has come to mean coverage¹ of the Experiences and Outcomes. Too much focus on coverage can impact on the pace of learning for groups and individuals, repetition of prior learning between stages and a resultant lack of depth and challenge. Enabling practitioners to view their contribution to the overall learner journey across 3 to 15 (as set out in the curriculum offer at setting, school and cluster level) needs to be seen as a priority for sustained action for leaders.
10. This disconnect for practitioners can be true at whole school level, at cognate discipline areas (e.g. across the STEM subjects) and at cluster level. The disconnect is evident at the primary stages but more so at secondary where the underlying subject structure can contribute to a more fragmented approach. Inspection evidence shows that in schools many young people at S1 can be studying learning across as many as 15 subjects. This presents challenges in relation to coherence and in ensuring that connections are made across learning. Whilst it is open to schools to organise the Experiences and Outcomes differently,

¹ Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012- 2016

taking account of local circumstances, most continue to organise S1 and beyond into traditional subject areas for all young people.

11. Many secondary schools need to review the **S1 to S3 curriculum** to make sure it meets the needs of young people. The pace of implementing the BGE from S1 to S3 has been limited due to the focus on the introduction of new National Qualifications in the senior phase. The curriculum at S3 is susceptible to being designed by the 'draw down' from the perceived needs of the senior phase and not built on the progression needs of learners to enable them to transition into the senior phase.
12. Young people are entitled to a broad general education from S1 to S3. As they make progress in their learning, many make choices for specialisation for Fourth Level in S3. It is not possible to learn across all curriculum areas at Fourth Level – it was designed on the assumption that young people would make informed choices during S3 about selecting courses. It is important therefore that learning in S3 at Fourth Level provides a clear progression route to courses which lead to qualifications in the senior phase. As practitioner confidence in CfE and the new qualifications has grown, this is creating space and time to focus on the design of BGE pathways which will lead smoothly into senior phase options.
13. The potential of **interdisciplinary learning** (IDL) in offering depth and challenge for children's and young people's learning is not yet fully realised. It would be useful to build on the body of good practice that currently exists, more notably in primary schools, and develop a shared understanding of IDL within and between schools and sectors. There is some evidence to suggest that the focus placed on skills by DYW developments has renewed interest in developing IDL. The recently published STEM strategy, for example, presents a timely opportunity to look again at IDL development across primary and into S1 to S3.
14. Requests to clarify what **progress between levels and within levels** looks like continue to surface in discussions. Evidence drawn together for this paper indicates that the written guidance currently available is sufficient and that confidence and clarification comes when practitioners work together in on-going professional learning. Early reports from national support work for the use of the Benchmarks in literacy and numeracy related to the National Improvement Framework (NIF) suggests that they have been well received by practitioners and that capacity in assessment and moderation is being strengthened.
15. At a structural level progression 3-15 sits naturally across a **cluster** – from early years through primary to secondary. The sustained impact and extent of cluster based development has varied over the years and currently varies from geographical area to area. Local authorities have invested in learning community structures to support development in professional learning. It is not always yet clear how well this translates into improvements in progression for children and young people. In some local authorities, strong examples of effective cluster working exist within and across some curriculum areas (e.g. as part of the National STEM project,

mathematics transition project²). Current development work to build capacity in assessment and moderation is cluster based.

16. Systems need to be in place to support practitioners' **monitoring and tracking** of the progress of learners and to plan next steps and appropriate interventions. These systems are now largely in place across early learning and childcare and primary with varying degrees of use and impact. Evidence from the Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) work suggests that their use is maturing with better use and analysis of data by senior teams to identify gaps and take appropriate actions. The same level of understanding and use with class-based practitioners is not yet evident. There are some very good examples of practice where children's progress is being tracked from the early years through to P7. In these examples evidence from tracking is used to shape learning and teaching and the overall curriculum offer at a strategic level. Good examples of practice in monitoring and tracking are less evident in S1 to S3.
17. The **role of learners** in making sense of their own progress across all of their learning is crucial. In recent years practice in enabling children and young people to take more responsibility for their own learning and achievements has improved.³ Increasingly they are supported to recognise and discuss their strengths and areas for improvement and to plan for their next steps in learning. Evidence from work to support Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), conversations related to Learner Journey work and the Year of Young People and recent publications⁴ highlight an appetite to support and develop children's and young people's ownership and agency. DYW has placed a renewed focus, for example, on the need for children and young people to own and articulate their skills⁵. This is being supported in schools by a renewed interest and focus on the development of **profiling practice**.
18. There is a need for better recognition and capturing of learning which, for example, takes place in community youth work settings or which children and young people undertake in their own time (for example, music lessons, sports activities) and can be linked or contribute to progress as set out in the Experiences and Outcomes. In best practice, schools do recognise, celebrate and track children's and young people's out-of-school achievements. Current development work on capturing achievement arising from the Year of Young People debate and identified in recommendation 1 of the 15-24 Learner Journey Review⁶ presents an opportunity to develop and strengthen existing practice in this area.
19. In the examples of **very best practice** practitioners have been enabled by leaders in schools / settings to be instrumental in designing and shaping the curriculum. Attention has been paid to developing agency in children and young people as learners and owners of their own progress. Their 'trusted adults' or mentors (parents, carers, families, youth workers, other) are enabled to be active and informed partners throughout the journey.

² [Inspection of local authorities: How well is West Dunbartonshire Council improving learning, raising attainment and closing the poverty-related attainment gap? May 2018](#)

³ [Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012-2016.](#)

⁴ [For example, Learner Participation in Educational Settings \(3-18\)](#)

⁵ [Career Education Standard 3-18](#)

⁶ [The 15-24 Learner Journey Review, page 25. May 2018](#)

Transitions – where are we now?

20. The term '**transitions**' is taken to mean moving from one setting to another in chronological order. Tied closely to this is the move between sectors and in particular the move from early learning and childcare to P1 and from P7 to S1 (and later transitions from age 16 onwards). However, transitions are many and complex. They are times of change within children's and young people's learning journey and can have a major impact on learners since they usually include new people, new learning environments and new circumstances. This is particularly true for very young children, and for those with additional support needs who may be attending multiple settings. Transition can be the sole experience of one young person with, for example, repeated moves due to family circumstances. There may be some lessening of this movement for most children throughout the primary years but it intensifies again for all young people at the secondary stages. These transitions can bring both benefits and risks to children's and young people's progress and achievement.
21. A significant amount of guidance exists on transitions. Research is on-going and more is planned (see para. 29). As part of the work being developed around the refreshed narrative agreed at the second CAB meeting on 8 March 2018 it may be useful to adopt one set of principles for transitions to support cross-sectoral work such as that set out by the Scottish Transitions Forum⁷.
22. Overall, inspection evidence indicates that **pastoral support** for transitions from early learning and childcare to primary and from primary to secondary is a strength and has been for some time. It will be important to build on this solid base as practitioners' knowledge and understanding about the links between learning and wellbeing issues such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the impact of poverty strengthen.
23. Support for **progression in learning** is a work in progress at the early learning and childcare to primary transition supported by the CfE early level crossover and by, for example, recent developments to share play based pedagogy. Transition in learning from P7 to S1 continues to be a key area for development (see para. 29).
24. Recent inspection evidence shows that most **early learning and childcare** settings demonstrate an understanding of the importance of effective transitions for young children. In the best examples practitioners work closely with parents, other partners and primary schools to provide supportive arrangements for transitions to ensure children's learning and progress are understood.
25. **The ELC expansion** presents some opportunities to strengthen transitions. Longer days in ELC offer greater opportunity for 4 year olds to spend some of their time learning and socialising alongside children in early primary school. We know this already happens in some schools that have an integrated nursery. Our focus on further embedding understanding of child-led, play based learning among ELC practitioners and school leadership teams who have responsibility for school

⁷ <https://scottishtransitions.org.uk/7-principles-of-good-transitions/>

nurseries could also strengthen quality and consistency across the early level (including P1). We also know of examples of schools using their PEF funding to employ an ELC practitioner in P1 to help ensure consistency in pedagogy. All of this should ensure a smoother transition from ELC to primary school but there may be more we could do to ensure that the early stage is as seamless as possible and to share good practice. The expansion and move toward more flexible ELC provision will also present some new and interesting challenges for the management of transitions. For example, it may mean that increasing numbers of children will attend more than one setting over a day or a week ('blended' provision) Including , for example, outdoor and child-minding provision. Recent evaluation⁸ of the 1140 delivery model trials provides evidence of settings paying close attention to the needs of children attending an extended hours or year placement. In one delivery model, for example, one practitioner stayed with the children as they moved between different sites. Sharing information about children's needs and interests and tracking their progress across the curriculum will have to be carefully managed. Building the Ambition, the national practice guidance for ELC, is already strong on the importance of well managed transitions. The ELC Quality Action (published in October) includes a commitment to develop a module in a new national programme of continuous professional learning on how to collaborate in tracking, monitoring and planning across the curriculum.

26. The **Additional Support for Learning legislation** in Scotland makes provision to ensure that children and young people with additional support needs receive help as needed when they experience transitions in school education. The legislation requires the local authority to seek relevant advice and information from appropriate agencies and others and to plan within specified timescales. **The 2017 Code of Practice** also states that school staff have responsibility for ensuring all children and young people develop the skills for personal planning which will prepare them for transitions within and beyond school education. The Code of Practice highlights effective practice for transitions of children and young people with additional support needs. Recent inspection evidence, based on a small sample, has identified effective transition practice in primary schools.
27. The move from **primary to secondary** has long been identified as a significant event in the learner journey. It has been associated with decreased motivation and engagement with school and a decline in attainment. The NIF Programme Board has recently approved plans for research into primary to secondary transitions. The overall aim of the research is to better understand why this move is associated with a decline in both attainment and engagement in school. For example, it is unclear to what extent this occurs because of the transition process itself, or discontinuities in education (for example, pedagogical differences, school environment changes, adolescent development). Progress in improving the S1 experience should be a developmental priority.
28. The journey from **S1 to S3** and onwards to the senior phase continues to present challenges for young people. They have asked for greater clarity about the options

⁸ [Evaluation of the Early Learning and Childcare Expansion Delivery Trials, May 2018](#)

open to them as they move from primary to secondary and on through the BGE to the senior phase.

Progression and transitions: opportunities for innovation and improvement

29. In summary, opportunities for improvement and innovation lie in the following.

- Responding to an appetite for curriculum design that has developed over recent years.
- Enabling practitioners and their communities to consolidate a shared understanding of what they are trying to achieve for learners through their curriculum offer.
- Enabling practitioners to work with leaders and each other across settings and schools to co-design the curriculum offer. This is a particular priority at P6/P7 to S1/S2/ S3.
- Developing a strong practice-based understanding of IDL through, for example, STEM led work.
- Exploring how leadership across clusters might work.
- Building on the strengths identified⁹ in the growing uptake for professional learning.
- Building on current capacity building activity in the BGE arising from the SAC, DYW and NIF programmes. For example, increasing confidence in using data to support decisions about what works.
- Strengthening the growing role of partners in supporting children's and young people's progress.
- Building on current work to find ways to capture the achievements of all young people by the time they move on from school and the links with a renewed interest in the practice of profiling.
- Building on what we now know about the impact of poverty and adverse childhood experiences on children's and young people's progress.
- Learning from, and building on, improvements in pedagogy emerging from early learning and childcare to ensure good practice is also reflected in early primary school, and from working with children and young people with additional support needs.
- The increasing use of digital technology to support practitioner learning and collaboration, learner participation and choice and learner experience.
- Enabling our experience with 'pupil voice' to mature into learner agency.
- Understanding more about what works for children's learning and progress at the middle stage of primary school.
- Addressing long standing and known issues with the P7 to S1 transfer.

Progression and transitions: conclusions

30. Progress in BGE curriculum development at the primary stages has slowed and has been more limited at the secondary stages. The national conversation has been largely focused on the senior phase – the implementation of national qualifications

⁹ [Quality and improvement in Scottish education 2012-2016.](#)

and, currently, with the expectations arising from DYW. The current investment in BGE from SAC, NIF and DYW is building the capacity and skills of practitioners and their partners and should lead to improved outcomes for children and young people. There is an opportunity to build on this capacity and respond to the growing appetite from practitioners to look again at the curriculum offer they have in their own schools and settings and to re-position progression as a key design feature of a strong and shared offer.

31. There is a need to be clearer as to how practitioners are supported and enabled to make changes and where their agency lies in relation to reform and change. Responses to requests for support have largely been **technical** (for example, written advice, exemplars of best practice,) in nature with not enough attention paid to the **relational** (attention to self, learning and doing in collaboration with others) aspects that are needed to initiate and sustain change. The findings of the OECD review and the subsequent aspirations set out in the Governance: Next Steps proposals need to be tangibly realised. *“We will support schools and establishments to work together in a learning journey cluster to develop a 3-18 curriculum offer, support transitions and clearly focus on outcomes. We will also support schools and partners in working to support transitions to a positive destination as part of their wider learner journey.”*
32. Children and young people have articulated what does and does not work for them through a wide range of fora¹⁰. They want to know more about the options and pathways open to them and to know this earlier than they currently do. They often report a secondary school experience which values traditional routes to higher education more than other options. They want attention paid to their health and wellbeing and their interests and aspirations. Above all, they want to know at an individual level that someone is ‘looking out for them’.

33. CAB is invited to:

- agree with the three factors identified as priorities to improve progression and transitions:
 - progression should be revisited and supported as a curriculum design issue;
 - practitioners and leaders in schools and other settings need to be actively involved in curriculum design; and
 - learners’ agency in relation to their own progress is important
- note that Education Scotland should actively promote and support practitioner leadership and collaboration at school and cluster level with the purpose of improving progression and transition by:
 - working with, and sharing good practice from, cluster -based pioneers who already - or are ready to - make curriculum design and planning across the early years to senior phase journey a reality

¹⁰ For example: DYW conversations; YOYP debates, Education Governance: Next Steps; Children’s Parliament; 15-24 Learner Journey Review

- commissioning and supporting sector-led innovative curriculum design at the S1 to S3 stage. This will include a new understanding of factors such as timetabling structures
- ensure that plans for a communications campaign around the senior phase offer help parents and the wider public to connect and understand the whole learner journey from the early years onwards
- ensure that a refreshed narrative gives focus to the entitlements of children and young people in relation to progression and coherence.