

## THE REMAINDER OF THE 2020/21 ACADEMIC YEAR AND BEYOND

### Purpose

1. This paper draws on existing evidence including the ongoing National Overview of Remote Learning to provide detail of curriculum and assessment delivery during the pandemic in the latter part of the 2019/20 academic year and the first part of the 2020/21 academic year. It then goes on to identify and consider the likely challenges and opportunities relating to curriculum and assessment delivery in the remainder of the current academic year.

### Introduction

2. Scottish education has been disrupted since the emergence of Covid-19 in Scotland during the early part of 2020. The closure of schools and other education settings in March 2020 ushered in a period of remote learning for most young people in the final part of the 2019/20 academic year. Schools and other settings reopened in August 2020 (subject to enhanced Covid protocols) but have largely remained closed following the 2020 Christmas break. A new period of remote provision has been underway since 18 January 2021 however, those in early learning and childcare, P1-P3 and small groups of senior phase learners with critical practical work to complete in relation to qualifications have been allowed to return to face-to-face learning on 22 February 2021. While Ministers have made clear that a return to school for all children and young people is the priority, at this stage, the government intends to take a gradual phased approach. There will be no further extension of cohorts attending school before 15 March. Next steps include a general update on the Routemap on 2 March and, ahead of that, plans for the phased transition towards fulltime face-to-face learning for all pupils are being carefully considered in the context of emerging clinical and scientific advice.
3. A number of challenges associated with curriculum and assessment delivery have accompanied the disruption outlined above. However, a range of opportunities for improvement and recovery have also emerged. Those challenges and opportunities are discussed below.

### Learning and Teaching

4. The provision of learning and teaching continues to be impacted by the pandemic. Practitioners have had to adapt quickly to provide learning remotely. Furthermore, they also had to adapt approaches to reflect specific education recovery circumstances when young people returned to face-to-face learning during August to December 2020.
5. The Curriculum and Assessment Board has previously discussed the reopening of schools and other settings alongside the provision of appropriate curriculum offerings (see Paper CAB-12(01)) but there has been less focus on the delivery of remote learning. We know from Glow statistics that the platform continues to host high levels of traffic [Across the whole of 2020, average monthly Glow users increased by approximately 157,000 while average monthly log-ins increased by around 4.2 million when compared to

2019.]. We also know from the ongoing National Overview of Remote Learning Practice [<https://education.gov.scot/improvement/supporting-remote-learning/national-overview/s/national-overview-of-practice-reports/>] that schools have learned from the previous lockdown and are continuing to improve their remote learning offers. Similarly, the National e-Learning Offer (NeLO) has achieved a high level of traction and positive feedback. e-Sgoil offers live, interactive sessions across the broad general education and the senior phase along with a broad range of study webinars. In addition, there are around 1000 recorded lessons and 16,000 items of online learning and teaching resources available as part of the NeLO. All of the above indicates that remote learning is being delivered across Scotland to meet local circumstances with national level support resources being utilised to supplement those offerings.

6. Remote learning is however not intended to completely replicate face-to-face provision and challenges unique to remote delivery have emerged. Education Scotland's National Overview of Remote Learning has identified that *"more work needs to be done at the primary stages to ensure children are learning across the breadth of the curriculum"* [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 2 – Schools – p 3]. Similarly, schools and teachers have expressed a desire for *"guidance on effective approaches to assess children's and young people's progress during remote learning"* [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 2 – Schools – p 8]. The National Overview also found that *"overall, significant challenges remain in meeting the needs of some groups of children and learners"* [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 2 – Schools – p 10]. Furthermore, there is a continuing challenge for schools to find the correct balance of live and independent learning amidst considerations of teacher time and workload, digital access and families being able to support learning at home.
7. The challenges set out above can cumulatively result in a reduction in learner engagement and ultimately lost opportunities to deliver educational outcomes. With these challenges have come calls from education commentators and parents/carers to look at the prospect of learners either spending a greater number of hours in school (once face-to-face provision returns) or having the opportunity to repeat the full academic year [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 2 – Parents, Carers and Learners – p 5].
8. As such there is a need to consider how the education system addresses challenges relating to learning and teaching in the rest of the current academic year. Much of this improvement work will already be underway with educators, schools and other settings continually adapting provision to improve the remote learning offer. Further to this there may be opportunities to consider how young people can best build on their remote learning experience when face-to-face provision resumes. This may focus on utilising the flexibility inherent within Curriculum for Excellence to offer more personalised learning in line with
9. individual needs rather than reflecting some calls to extend learning time or the academic year.

10. Furthermore, the pandemic has led to a transformational change in the use of digital technology. This has primarily been used to deliver learning remotely but it also provides opportunities to enrich learning and teaching beyond the current circumstances. The NeLO initiative, the development and delivery of e-Sgoil's live offers and the use innovative use of Glow with creativity and at significant pace, demonstrated what is possible. Further delivery of change has occurred in local approaches from many schools and local authorities. There is potentially a unique opportunity to build on this change, learn from the experiences of 2020/21 and allow Scotland to fully develop a world-class approach in the use of digital pedagogies. This approach can continue as face-to-face provision returns and as such, there is an opportunity to fully realise the aspirations of the 2016 Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy. [Scottish Government [2016] - Enhancing learning and teaching through the use of digital technology - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/enhancing-learning-teaching-through-use-digital-technology/>]. It is also notable that the National Overview of Remote Learning found some parents reporting that the remote offering has improved both wellbeing and ease of learning for their children. In some instances parents were concerned that their children would not want to return to school when it reopened. They asked that the positives of remote learning be incorporated into provision as Covid recovery continues. [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 4 – Schools: A focus on Meeting Learning Need, including those with additional support needs - p 3].

### **Additional Support for Learning**

10. Children and young people with Additional Support Needs and their families have experienced challenges in both learning and health and wellbeing during the pandemic. There have also been opportunities, with technology providing a new medium for learning, reducing anxiety, and increasing engagement in learning, for some learners with Additional Support Needs.
11. Having access to appropriately differentiated teaching resources has been inconsistent. However, there are examples of where individual teachers and schools have been creative by providing a mixture of live lessons, e-learning activities taking account of learner's needs, and learning packs for those not able to use digital forms of learning. We can learn from these examples and extend their use during the recovery phase. Indeed, many of the approaches will be helpful in ongoing delivery of the curriculum, providing personalisation and choice using meaningful activities, to ensure improved engagement in learning. The fact that all learners have required individualised approaches has enhanced opportunities for all, not just those identified with Additional Support Needs. *"There is not a one size fits all approach. Teachers are responsive to the needs of the children."* This will help to reinforce a more inclusive approach to the implementation of the Curriculum for Excellence.
12. The use of interdisciplinary learning and outdoor learning have provided contexts for learning that parents understand and which are meaningful for those learners with Additional Support Needs. The pandemic has enhanced and demonstrated

the value and effectiveness of such approaches which should be used more frequently, and further developed. The range of pedagogical methods available to practitioners in face-to-face interactions has proved difficult. This will have impacted more on those children and young people with Additional Support Needs because of the need to observe more closely how children are learning and problem solving to measure progress in learning and to identify precisely next steps for learning. All critical to informing individualised learning targets, and differentiation of the curriculum. *“Across all sectors, schools report that they would welcome further professional learning and guidance on how to assess progress of learners through remote delivery”* [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 4 – Schools: A focus on Meeting Learning Need, including those with additional support needs - p 6]. During recovery, it will be important to achieve a good balance of remote and face-to-face learning, with an appropriate focus on assessment. Face-to-face learning should capitalise on the opportunity for teachers to assess, scaffold and provide quality feedback to those children with Additional Support Needs.

13. The learning from the pandemic has reinforced the robustness of existing systems such as Getting it Right for All Children, in ensuring that vulnerable learners have their needs met. Effective multi-agency systems and planning to meet needs has been essential in protecting the most vulnerable: *“The team around the child meetings have been prioritised and maintained throughout lockdown.”* [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 2 – Parents, Carers and Learners – p 5].

### Health and wellbeing

14. The recent periods of remote learning alongside the pandemic in general has negatively impacted on the health and wellbeing education staff, learners and parents and carers. Parent and carers sampled as part of Education Scotland's National Overview of Remote Learning highlighted that *“wellbeing needs to be the key focus of....remote learning and [that it needs] to be the highest priority when all children and young people return to school”*<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, in almost every school contacted as part of the National Overview, *“workload pressures and wellbeing of staff [were] identified as a concern”*<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, concerns about student mental health have been consistently raised by NUS Scotland, Emily Test and colleges and universities themselves. An NUS survey highlighted over half of students said their mental health had declined in the pandemic (Nov 2020). [Education Scotland [2021] – National Overview of Practice in Remote Learning 2 – Schools – p 11].
  15. However, evidence collected as part of the National Overview also shows that schools and educators are generally working well to prioritise the health and wellbeing of learners. Use of daily check-in activity, targeted support and partnership working across community organisations were all listed as ways in
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which learner wellbeing was being monitored and supported. Parents and carers also reported positive activity with online assemblies and opportunities for learners to have online contact with peers being cited and keeping young people engaged and content.

16. Notwithstanding the above, it will be necessary to consider how support for health and wellbeing is maintained especially as many education staff and learners continue to experience learning and teaching remotely. In addition to support provided by their employers, Scottish Government has funded an additional package of health and wellbeing support for education staff in schools. This support, announced in September 2020, was designed to aid school staff as they managed the recovery from Covid-19. The package includes mental health support focussed on reflective supervision, a new coaching and mentoring offer, webinars and a wide range of new learning opportunities for teachers in their first four years of post-probation allowing them to discuss pressures they are facing as a result of delivering remote learning. We will need to maintain and build on this package of support as the pressures on education staff as a result of the pandemic are likely to continue for some time.
17. The Scottish Government has also taken steps to support children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. This work is set within a context of much wider focus and support for children and young people's mental health within communities and in relation to specific concerns. In providing support to children and young people through schools there has been an effort to retain a relational approach, recognising their already established relationships with school staff. Therefore, there has been a focus on ensuring that those working in schools have the advice, information and support that they need in order to signpost and link into sources of advice and support for children, young people and their families.
18. The Scottish Government has also invested £3.645 million in this academic year to support its existing commitment to introduce more than 80 additional counsellors in colleges and universities. In November 2020, £1.32 million of additional funding was announced to support students in dealing with the mental health impacts of the pandemic. The Scottish Government has also committed £750,000 to NUS Scotland and student associations for vital welfare support in colleges and universities. Additional financial support has been provided to extend the work of Think Positive, NUS Scotland's student mental health project, to March 2021. In February 2021, a further £4.4 million of support for college students and staff in responding to the pandemic was announced.
19. The Scottish Government and Education Scotland have also worked jointly to ensure that advice and guidance including sources of quality support from external organisations is available. This has been delivered through the [Health and Wellbeing Wakelet](#) which includes materials specific to [mental health and wellbeing](#). The Wakelet includes guidance prepared jointly and published to

support the return to school in August on positive mental wellbeing - [resources to support children and young people](#).

20. Local authorities have ensured that there is significant support in place through universal, targeted and community approaches, including support for school staff. This includes tailored supports and opportunities for the engagement of children and young people. Authorities are using a wide range of their own staff to make provision including strategic support from educational psychologists, links to children's and health services, and third sector provisions, in addition to community-based approaches and support to families.
21. In light of the above, there may be opportunities for leaders, practitioners, learners and wider communities to build on the refreshed CfE narrative and the breadth of Curriculum for Excellence. There may be opportunities to look again at curriculum offerings and the potential to design motivating learning experiences across the life and ethos of a school. Effective use of outdoor learning will also be being considered as a way to improve health and wellbeing, deliver progress in curriculum areas and reduce the risk of infection transmission.

### **System level challenges**

22. A number of system level challenges have emerged as pandemic related disruption and remote learning have continued.

#### Number of teacher and other educators

23. Throughout the pandemic there have been calls from the teacher unions and from within the Scottish Parliament that additional teachers will be required to support education recovery. Whilst the recruitment and employment of teachers in local authority schools are matters for individual councils, the Scottish Government is firmly of the view that there is a need for all possible teaching resources to be available to compensate for any loss of learning opportunities suffered since the start of the pandemic, as well as to bring much needed resilience to the education system at this challenging time.
24. The Scottish Government has provided £80 million of additional investment in education staff, which has secured the recruitment of around 1,400 additional teachers and 200 support staff for this school year, and a further £45 million of new funding to support the delivery of remote learning. This funding is sufficient to employ an additional 2,000 teachers during this financial year, and a further £25 million has been made available to local authorities to support this to the end of the school year. The new funding can be used to recruit further staff, which might include teachers, classroom assistants, administrative staff, home school link workers or other support workers.

### Senior phase delivery and assessment

25. The impact of disruption this year will be particularly felt by senior phase learners studying towards qualifications. In recognition of the significant disruption to learning this session, SQA has already reduced the evidence requirements for each National Course to the minimum needed to preserve the validity and credibility of the qualifications. In many subjects, assessment components have been removed and content and contexts have been reduced to enable a narrower focus for this session. Particular challenges arise for those undertaking practical based subjects which is why a limited return to schools and college for these learners has been prioritised.
26. On 16 February, SQA published revised arrangements for the Alternative Certification Model and the timeline for delivering National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher results. These arrangements have been developed through the National Qualifications 2021 Group, and take into account the current remote learning position. The revised arrangements include a further extension to the final date for submitting provisional results to Friday 25 June 2021 to allow greater time for learning and teaching and assessment.
27. SQA is also in the process of finalising alternative assessment arrangements for HNVQs, which have been developed through the HNVQ 2021 Group. This is of particular importance to school pupils studying at college, including a wide array of vocational qualifications.
28. The priority at this time, and on immediate return to school or college, should be on completing and consolidating learning to ensure that learners have a secure foundation and appropriate course coverage prior to assessment later in the academic session.

### Transitions

29. Young people transitioning between ELC into P1; primary school to secondary school; and school into FE or HE at the end of this academic year are likely to have been disadvantaged by the impact of the pandemic. They may continue to have their learning disrupted until the end of the current session. Partners will have to work together at a system level to find solutions in relation to all three of these transitions. There is a need to ensure that levels of attainment and achievement in the remainder of this year are properly noted and discussed with learners, parents and practitioners in learners' new establishments in order to support continuation of learning as each young person moves onto the next stage of their learner journey. As noted above, assessing progress remotely is a known challenge but further to this, education establishments may find it challenging to undertake normal activities to support transition. For example, travel to and from different places of learning may continue to be constrained in line with Covid protocols.

### School College Partnerships

30. We mustn't lose sight of the large volume of senior phase learners undertaking college led awards in their local college, as part of school college partnership arrangements. Some of these learners will be studying their awards as a requirement for progression. SCQF level 5 is often a progression route to college, particularly vocational awards like National Certificates.
31. Under the current restrictions, senior phase school pupils have not been able to attend college while schools are only providing face-to-face for a very limited number of senior phase pupils. Many senior phase pupils undertaking college led vocational awards are still yet to return and for some of these courses it is difficult to find an alternative to 'hands on' practical work. However, the First Minister announced on 23 February that a very small number of senior phase school pupils (c.425) will be able to return to college for essential practical coursework for Level 6 Foundation Apprenticeship engineering and scientific technologies courses only.
32. The return of further senior phase students to college is being kept under regular review, with decisions informed by the data on virus prevalence. SQA is also in the process of finalising alternative assessment arrangements for HNVQs, which have been developed through the HNVQ 2021 Group. In addition, the Minister for Further and Higher Education has established a Learner Journey Task Force to address the immediate challenges in this academic year and consider the longer term consequences for students completing their qualifications. The short term action focused group includes membership from the Scottish Government and its agencies and across the FE and HE sectors. The Group allows wider agencies and organisations to work collectively in a more joined up way. The group has now met twice with a third meeting scheduled on 9 March 2021.
33. The education sector as a whole has worked hard, under the banner of DYW, and taken great strides in providing a breadth of diverse opportunities and pathways for learners in their senior phase. These awards and qualifications, out-with traditional qualification routes, are equally valuable, sometimes more so, to the individual learner. However, we are now at a critical stage in terms of these learners having the opportunity to complete their courses. The likelihood for withdrawal is increasingly high, potentially risking progression opportunities for a key cohort of learners.

### Reopening of FE and HE institutions

34. The staggered return for universities was intended to reduce student movement after the winter break and to specifically reduce the number of students returning to student accommodation. Phase 1 of the return for university undergraduates commenced from 5 January 2021. The approach for colleges differed given they don't have high numbers in accommodation or large numbers of students travelling within the UK and abroad. In practice, while face-to-face teaching was very limited, we saw more university undergraduates returning to accommodation



than we might have expected. In contrast many colleges took an operational decision to provide no face-to-face teaching for much or all of January.

35. The First Minister announced on 23 February as part of the Strategic Framework refresh that universities and colleges can continue to bring back a small number of students where in-person learning and teaching is critical. For both sectors the vast majority of learning will continue to be online, with the number of students on campus to be kept as low as possible. No more than 5% of students should be on campus at any one time for in-person learning and teaching.
36. Students should only be on campus for the duration of the practical work and should continue to learn remotely for those course elements where this is possible. This limit does not include safe study spaces. Within these limits, students who can return are:
  - University students whose learning is critical under Phase 1 of the staggered plans agreed in January, phased up to the end of March;
  - College students whose return is time-sensitive and critical to the successful conclusion of their studies and it is absolutely not possible to deliver remotely or postpone; and
  - A very small number of senior phase school pupils (c.425) to college for essential practical coursework for Level 6 Foundation Apprenticeship engineering and scientific technologies courses only.
37. Students are also able to return to their workplace placement in order to maintain workforce pipelines in critical sectors, such as health and social care, and early learning and childcare. However, if they are on campus for in-person teaching they should be considered within the 5% limit.
38. It is expected that institutions to adopt a fair approach to assessments, which supports students in attaining the qualifications they deserve despite the challenges faced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.
39. The Scottish Government appreciates NUS's statement on the implementation of no detriment policies, there are however, some qualifications where such a policy would not be appropriate, such as where courses require evidence of a certain level of proficiency to be achieved in order for transitions into the workplace/specific work disciplines. Therefore it is difficult to adopt a blanket approach to this.
40. Universities do not all follow the same pattern for exams although we know there is considerable engagement across the sector as institutions agree a way to support students in progressing with their studies.
41. Universities are mindful of the continuing impact of Covid-19 on students and their studies and are looking to ensure that their policies for assessment recognise that. This is being done in different ways in different institutions.

**Points for discussion**

42. The Curriculum and Assessment Board is invited to consider the contents of the paper and discuss:

- The range of issues and opportunities highlighted and discuss any further aspects of experiences from the current academic session that need to be taken into account.
- Whether any identified opportunities or challenges relate specifically to different stages of the learner journey – ELC, primary, lower secondary, senior phase (including opportunities to address known challenges around college assessment).
- What action(s) should be taken to ensure that challenges and opportunities relating to:
  - learning and teaching;
  - additional support for learning;
  - the health and wellbeing of educators and young people; and
  - system challenges and the efficient operation of the education system

are addressed in the remainder of the 2020/21 academic year and beyond.