

# **National Discussion on Education**

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

**May 2023**

## Equality Impact Assessment

### 1. Title of policy

National Discussion on Education

### 2. Summary of aims and desired outcomes of policy

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.

These outputs consider what our education system needs to look like twenty years from now. It will also help to identify the work that is needed in the short-term to help achieve that vision.

### 3. Directorate: Division: Team

Education Reform: Education Strategy and Recovery: National Discussion on Education

### 4. Executive Summary

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.

By setting a 20-year vision for Scotland's education system, the National Discussion contributes to the delivery of many of Scotland's National Outcomes, including:

- Education: We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society
- Children and Young People: We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential
- Human Rights: We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

- Communities: We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- Culture: We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely
- Economy: We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy
- Environment: We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment
- Health: We are healthy and active

The National Discussion is one part of the Scottish Government's wider suite of education reform, which includes:

- A review of qualifications and assessments to ensure all senior phase learners have an enhanced and equal opportunity to demonstrate the breadth, depth and relevance of their learning.
- The creation of three new national education bodies – a qualifications body, a national agency for Scottish education, and an independent inspectorate body – to replace the SQA and Education Scotland.
- A purpose and set of principles for post-school education, research and skills
- An independent review of the skills landscape in Scotland.

The National Discussion's Vision and Values and Call to Action plan is a provocation intended to influence the work of everyone connected to the education of 3–18-year-olds in Scotland, including children and young people, teachers and all members of the wider education workforce as well as parents and carers, families, and community members. It will shape the experience of all learners.

As a result, the National Discussion sought the engagement and participation of all sections of Scottish society with a particular focus on being learner centred. This ensured that the different needs of different learner groups could be comprehensively explored.

In terms of promoting equality and diversity, an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is grounded in this work.

Equality legislation, namely the Equality Act 2010, covers the protected characteristics of: age, disability, gender reassignment, sex including pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, marriage and civil partnership and sexual orientation.

The Vision and Values and Call to Action resulting from the National Discussion has the potential to affect people across the range of protected characteristics, so the scope of this EQIA is extended beyond the list of protected characteristics to include wider socio-economic considerations; including those with care experience, and people living in remote rural areas and island communities. Where possible intersectionality across varying characteristics is also taken into account.

## 5. Background

The National Discussion was co-convened by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). Two independent facilitators, Professor Carol Campbell and Professor Alma Harris, were appointed to help shape this work and act as assurance as international experts in education.

The need for a National Discussion to establish a compelling, consensual and renewed vision for the future of Scottish education was highlighted in a recent review by Prof Ken Muir in 2022, [\*Putting learners at the centre: towards a future vision for Scottish education\*](#).

A range of concomitant reviews also drove forward the thinking behind establishing a review of education, including proposals made in the following recent reports:

- OECD (2021), [\*Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future\*](#), Implementing Education Policies, OECD Publishing, Paris.
- Stobart, G (2021), [\*Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective\*](#), OECD Education Working Papers, No. 253, OECD Publishing, Paris.

- Morgan, A (2020) [Support for Learning: All our Children and All their Potential](#), Scottish Government, Edinburgh.

In developing a vision for the National Discussion, the Scottish Government is mindful of the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED):

- (i) to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- (ii) to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and;
- (iii) to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

We recognise that these measures may positively impact on one or more of the protected characteristics. We are also mindful that the equality duty is not just about negating or mitigating negative impacts, but that we also have a positive duty to promote equality. Across this piece of work, we have sought to do this by making sure that every person has an equal opportunity to express their views, feelings and wishes in all education matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

## 6. The Scope of the EQIA and Engagement

### 6.1 Stage One

In this EQIA we look at existing evidence, expert advice, and data from similar national discussions to identify implications for protected characteristics as listed within the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, sex including pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, marriage and civil partnership<sup>1</sup> and sexual orientation.

In addition, as the National Discussion has the potential to affect everyone, the scope of this EQIA is extended beyond the list of protected characteristics to include those with care experience and those living in remote rural areas and island communities.

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<sup>1</sup> The Equality Act says a person must not be discriminated against in employment because they are married or in a civil partnership.

Data and qualitative information has also been gathered from evidence arising from stakeholder workshops, one-to-one interviews/discussions and the findings of a scoping review of available evidence review.

It is important to note that the protected characteristics listed along with the other socio-economic considerations are not independent of each other and some people may have to deal with complex and interconnected issues related to disadvantage at any one time.

## 6.2 Stage two

A series of engagement exercises were carried out to inform the National Discussion. These took place in a variety of forms, including engaging with children's and young people's organisations, teachers' professional bodies and parents' representative groups.

As the independent facilitators for the National Discussion, Professor Carol Campbell and Professor Alma Harris, were appointed to oversee this work. Based on their respective vast experience of conducting research in the education field, they acted as sources of advice and guidance in the design of this work, including ensuring the inclusivity of diverse learners and communities. As facilitators they also helped oversee efforts to reach out and engage with young people and adults who are less frequently heard in official consultations. This was particularly helpful as they carried out their engagements with independent authority, assuring participants of their independence of the Scottish Government and CoSLA. This helped to emphasise the authenticity of the National Discussion to participants in the education system.

### 6.2.1 Engaging and consulting: communities and groups.

To ensure plans were attuned to the needs of all learners, we initiated regular correspondence with approximately 144 third sector organisations during the design phase of the National Discussion. We used their advice in the drafting of the EQIA and to develop an inclusive learner engagement plan.

We kept in touch with these organisations during the National Discussion and worked with many to support group discussions for different groups of learners across Scotland. The reach, capacity and advice of our partners helped us to maximise the chance of all learners participating - irrespective of their personal characteristics.

Finally, following the advice of stakeholders, further 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 were also carried out.

In total, there were 101 National Discussion events that the independent academic facilitators or the National Discussion project team participated in directly. An invitational, grassroots engagement approach was adopted to help ensure that the National Discussion was as inclusive as possible. We hosted public engagement events and participated in meetings hosted by organisations nationally, regionally, and locally. We met face to face with key groups to extend our reach and to gather as much first-hand evidence as we could. A highly successful social media campaign resulted in 10 million unique social media users seeing the hashtag #TalkScottishEducation. There were 6,000 Twitter posts about the National Discussion.

All schools in Scotland were invited to take part in the National Discussion, using the age-appropriate facilitation guides. Online National Discussion assemblies and classes were provided by e-Sgoil for primary and secondary age pupils. Over 26,000 pupils and students participated in these online events to provide their views to inform the National Discussion.

We made every effort to ensure that the voices of children and young people who are not usually forthcoming in discussions or debates like this were included and we actively engaged them through organisations and specialist support groups, such as the Children's Parliament, Young Carers and Young Ambassadors for Inclusion.

Discussions with seldom heard groups of children and young people were organised and we reached out in ways that reduced as many barriers to participation as possible. We facilitated focus groups for advocates who were able to represent the views,

interests, and learning needs of those less likely to disclose their experiences within a public engagement meeting. Some of these sessions were emotionally charged and we heard some moving accounts from children and young people that were both insightful and powerful. We strove to build trust and safe spaces for engaging, and we constantly reinforced to participants that we were independent facilitators who were keen to hear all viewpoints.

We also engaged children and young people in the places that they use, in ways that work for them, in areas of familiarity, including through social media. We also worked through trusted networks such as the safe spaces created by youth workers, and we connected extensively with parents and carers.

#### 6.2.2 Identifying expert third-sector collaborators

We used the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010 as the criteria for building our mailing list of third sector collaborators. For example, of the organisations:

- Age: 2 are specialist at working with and representing early years learners
- Disability: 24 are specialist at working with and representing people living with disabilities (including groups who work in support of neurodiverse learners)
- Pregnancy and maternity: 4 are specialist at working with and representing young carers
- Race: 19 are specialist at working with and representing Black and Minority Ethnic Communities
- Religion or belief: 8 are specialist at working with and representing people with different religions and beliefs
- Sex: 5 are specialist at working with and representing sex and gender
- Sexual orientation: 2 are specialist at working with and representing LGBTQ communities

Furthermore,

- 5 are specialist at working with and representing people with care experience
- 2 are specialist at working with and representing children missing from education
- 3 are specialists at working with and representing families engaged with the criminal justice system

- 1 is a specialist at experience working with and representing home schooled children
- 10 are child rights specialists

### 6.2.3 Engaging and consulting: education practitioners

To ensure plans were attuned to the needs of all learners, teachers and education practitioners we met with expert stakeholders in the design phase, including:

- All Parliamentary Spokespeople for Education
- COSLA's Children and Young People Spokespeople
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES),
- Association of Headteachers and Deputies in Scotland (AHDS),
- The Educational Institute of Scotland
- The Scottish Education Council
- The General Teaching Council for Scotland
- Education Scotland

We used their advice to develop and deliver inclusive engagement plans and their expertise aided the drafting of this EQIA.

We collaborated with professional organisations to engage with the education workforce at all stages, from early years through to university. For example, the GTCS, the EIS, and the University of Glasgow hosted National Discussion events that we attended. We also met with the NASUWT Scotland Black members' network, and we facilitated sessions during AHDS, and ADES conferences and many school leader events hosted by local authorities. We visited schools and met with staff and learners. Many education organisations also facilitated their own discussions and submitted responses to contribute to the National Discussion.

Local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) facilitated local events and/or invited us to join meetings to discuss the National Discussion. We had opportunities to engage with members of SOLACE, ADES, and COSLA and had invitations to participate in their conferences and meetings.

### 6.2.4 Engaging and consulting: parents

To ensure plans were attuned to the needs of all parents, we initiated regular correspondence with approximately 50 parent

organisations. This included a briefing event prior to the National Discussion's launch.

We used their advice to develop and deliver inclusive engagement plans and their expertise aided the drafting of this EQIA.

We wrote letters to parents in collaboration with Connect and the National Parent Forum of Scotland that were distributed through schools. National and local parent organisations led their own National Discussion engagement activities and invited us to participate in meetings and focus groups. Parents of vulnerable and marginalised groups were also invited to participate or be represented in discussions with relevant organisations.

## 7. Key Findings

It is important to recognise that the National Discussion provides a high-level, strategic focus for the education system in Scotland. As such, the final report intentionally does not set specific objectives for the delivery of education, including in relation to addressing equality issues, or the associated operational activities which will help to achieve these. Therefore, the data explores equality issues that are related to education, and some aspects of the outcomes of the work will inherently have more impact on certain equality groups, for example children and young people.

Overall, the evidence shows that people with different equality characteristics can experience education and learning differently. Different equality groups and communities can also have different needs and expectations from the education system. In order to be responsive and effective, the provision of education will need to engage and collaborate with our diverse communities through their own planning and activities. A focus on co-creating an education system that is proactive and flexible and on working together with partners and communities were key themes to emerge from the consultation.

## 8. Recommendations and Conclusions

Linked to the findings above, the National Discussion was not established to make recommendations to the Scottish

Government, but instead was to develop a compelling and consensual renewed vision for the future of Scottish education. In doing so a proposed Vision and Values statement was produced along with a Call to Action. Together these proposals act as platforms to inspire action rather than to be seen as a prescription or mandate to enabling change in the education system.



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