

This briefing provides advice for practitioners and can also be used to inform partners, learners and their parents about the development of Curriculum for Excellence.

CfE Briefing ⁸

Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase

Part 3. Curriculum Planning at the Senior Phase

Scottish education is going through a period of transformation that will affect all learners. Approaches to the curriculum, learning, teaching, assessment, awards and qualifications are all changing. Education Scotland is supporting change by evaluating evolving practice and sharing it nationally to inform discussion and promote innovation. This briefing explores the ways in which schools are changing the curriculum at the Senior Phase and how they are building progressively on the 3-15 Broad General Education (BGE). It should be read alongside CfE Briefings 6 and 7.

Over the coming months and years, as young people enter and go through the Senior Phase, Education Scotland will publish descriptions of **actual** pathways they have followed to show their achievements. In the

meantime, **potential achievement pathways** that are now opening up are described here. In addition, a range of **case studies** illustrating approaches of emerging practice in planning the Senior Phase are being developed.

'The Senior Phase of the curriculum relates to the period S4 to S6 in schools or the equivalent in terms of college or other means of study. It is the stage of learning at which the relationship between the curriculum and qualifications becomes of key significance. At this stage of the curriculum we expect that most young people will engage with the qualifications framework and that more formal assessment and certification will take place.'

BtC 3, page 39

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An **achievement pathway** describes an individual's progress through successes, awards and qualifications.

1. How will changes to the curriculum increase achievement and raise attainment?

To increase achievement and raise attainment for all, schools and their partners are developing new curriculum approaches that provide flexible achievement pathways at the Senior Phase. An achievement pathway describes an individual's progress through successes, awards and qualifications. Because of the more challenging expectations and improved learning in the 3-15 BGE, all young people now have the opportunity to achieve awards and attain more highly in qualifications. They can do this through programmes that ensure progression in knowledge and understanding, skills (including higher-order thinking skills), attributes and capabilities. This has direct relevance to their preparedness for future learning, life and work.

Schools now have more flexibility to **meet better the needs of all learners** to increase achievement and raise attainment, including for those learners who in the past have typically been least engaged at the Senior Phase. Needs vary from learner to learner, establishment to establishment, and from geographical area to area. To meet better this range of needs, the Senior Phase needs **partnerships** that broaden the range of achievement pathways. To develop these, education authorities and schools are mapping existing partnerships and developing new ones with different providers including colleges, Community Learning and Development (CLD), and others in the wider community including local employers and businesses. At the end of S4, learners may be in school, college, with training providers, in the workplace, engaging in programmes

offered by community and youth groups or in programmes offered in collaboration, such as those offered through school-college, school-employer, or school-university partnerships. They may be in full- or part-time programmes. They may be studying through a combination of taught classes and distance learning. As they move through S5 and S6, they may experience an increasing range of delivery and partnership arrangements, and be taking more and more responsibility for their own learning. Some schools are now looking at how S3 profiling can provide a platform to inform planning for these varied achievement pathways through the Senior Phase. Schools are also changing the way they deliver qualifications in order to provide the flexibility to meet personalisation and choice, for example by:

- designing the Senior Phase as a three-year experience rather than planning each year separately, so that individuals can gain **more qualifications at higher levels**, opening up more routes into post-school destinations;
- delivering qualifications over a variable timeframe in response to young people's needs and prior achievement, for example through programmes which lead to qualifications over one or two years, thereby creating space for **more in-depth learning**;
- when they are clear that the learner is securely at the level of the intended qualification, developing pathways for able learners which by-pass qualifications at lower levels to allow more time to be spent on **more challenging learning at higher levels**, while covering necessary knowledge and skills from the lower levels;

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- providing appropriate, specific programmes which maximise achievement and attainment for young people planning to leave school after S4;
- ensuring all young people are aware of, and have the opportunity to meet entry requirements for post-school destinations, including college and university, and also have the qualifications and skills to enable them to progress to further training/and/or employment as appropriate;
- designing pathways which both ensure young people gain the qualifications they need, and **improve their achievement of a wide range of important personal skills** including those gained through the qualifications; and
- ensuring, through universal and targeted support and timely transition planning, the offer of an appropriate place in learning or training for every 16-19 year old in advance of them leaving school and before leaving subsequent episodes of post-16 learning or training¹.

1 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2012/11/3248>

Schools now have more flexibility to **meet better the needs of all learners** to increase achievement and raise attainment.

In time, these changes will provide the opportunity for learners to achieve their maximum potential through their learning experiences, awards and qualifications in the Senior Phase.

2. How are schools and their partners going about making these changes?

Schools recognise they need to **engage all partners** and stakeholders in planning changes to the Senior Phase, including particularly young people and their parents. This informs both the direction taken and brings about a better understanding of why change is needed. Practitioners have been joining-up planning approaches at whole-school and department/faculty levels, together with partner providers. Sometimes, department/faculty discussions have themselves informed important decisions about whole-school curriculum planning. These approaches need to be founded on effective self-evaluation. Reviewing information from ongoing moderation activities and from profiling also informs planning for appropriate achievement pathways.

How well have you involved all stakeholders, particularly learners and their parents, in exploring the benefits of CfE at the Senior Phase, and in exploring different achievement pathways for individual young people?

Schools and their partners are well aware of the complexities of changing the current curriculum and qualifications. They are now implementing **transition plans and interim arrangements** for the period of **dual running of existing and new qualifications**. They are scheduling carefully the changes needed in each of the next three years and identifying and addressing any resourcing implications.

A key part of developing the Senior Phase involves the use of **robust self-evaluation** to ensure up-to-date, high-quality information is used to guide change. This includes detailed analyses, including modelling, which gauge the likely impact on attainment of proposed changes. These analyses require accurate and comprehensive approaches which monitor and track

young people's achievements in the BGE, and from which the information can be used to underpin careful planning of Senior Phase achievement pathways. These analyses themselves are leading to even more detailed and considered discussions. For example, practitioners have found that they develop a greater insight into the appropriate length, number, range and levels of courses that lead to awards and qualifications appropriate for individual young people. They also inform how best to balance breadth and specialisation to meet young people's needs, and how to be responsive when any necessary changes are needed for individuals.

How well have you used flexibility to design pathways for all groups of learners that fully meet their entitlements, increase their achievement and raise their attainment?

Schools and their partners are exploring how to ensure they **deliver the aims, purposes and entitlements**² of CfE within the Senior Phase. They have recognised that this would be unlikely if all they did was replace old qualifications with new ones within existing curriculum structures. Entitlements at the Senior Phase include a continuous focus on developing skills for learning, life and work, namely – literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, employability, enterprise and citizenship, and thinking skills, and also on how young people will be advised as they plan their own achievement pathways. Education authorities, schools and their partners are discussing how best to ensure that young people achieve the highest possible qualifications in literacy and/or

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2 Building the Curriculum 3 specifies the entitlements of CfE

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English and numeracy and/or mathematics. For some young people, literacy and numeracy units will be the best choice. Some schools and partners are now exploring how these units can be delivered in the contexts of different courses and programmes. For others, these skills will be picked up in English and mathematics programmes. Schools are seeking to apply national guidance on religious and moral education,³ and physical education⁴. They are also looking to ensure they recognise and use learning opportunities beyond the classroom to increase achievement, and also to use interdisciplinary approaches which bring particular advantages to the way young people gain skills.

Schools are acutely aware that many young people's achievement pathways must be designed to meet **higher education entry requirements**. This has been the subject of much discussion because Curriculum for Excellence has given greater flexibility for learners to 'sit' examinations at the most appropriate point for them as individuals during the three years of the Senior Phase. Scottish universities are now in the process of considering their entry requirements to embrace this flexibility. In designing achievement pathways for learners, schools will want to be absolutely sure that all involved have a detailed understanding of such requirements.

3. What kinds of curriculum approaches are now emerging at the Senior Phase?

Some education authorities, through detailed consultation, have developed a curriculum rationale and Senior Phase approach that is being taken forward in all schools in their area; others have invited schools to devise their own to meet the needs of their particular communities. At present, most schools are implementing or maintaining approaches that enable young people to study between five and eight SQA qualifications in S4, usually alongside other important areas of learning. Some features of emerging models include:

- in S4 and S5, delivering typically two-year programmes for young people to learn across two levels, such as National 5 and Higher, with S6 being a single year programme which includes a range of Advanced Highers or a Scottish Baccalaureate and which perhaps involves colleges;
- developing a neighbourhood consortium or 'campus' approach where education authorities, schools and partners such as colleges have aligned provision and timetabling to maximise the range of achievement pathways with courses available to young people at all levels;
- delivering S4-S6 as a single cohort within which young people can opt for a mixture of subjects and levels and learn in mixed-age groups – this can help provide a wider range of classes;

- providing six qualifications for all in S4, followed by flexible planning over the next two years with study for Higher and Advanced Higher; and
- delivering a flexible combination of one- or two-year programmes.

4. What next?

A **Senior Phase Benchmarking Tool** is being prepared by the Scottish Government and partners to help local authorities and secondary schools to analyse, benchmark, compare and improve attainment and the curriculum at the Senior Phase. The tool will be available from August 2014 and will use a broader range of evidence than is used presently in STACs. It is being designed to take account of the full range of Senior Phase curriculum approaches described above.

All of the emerging approaches described in this briefing are designed to allow individual young people to progress in different ways and study for the number and levels of awards and qualifications appropriate to their prior achievements and aspirations. Education Scotland will continue to work with practitioners to identify emerging approaches and to evaluate the impact they are having on increasing achievement and raising attainment. You can access detailed descriptions of some of the approaches described in this briefing, and others as they emerge over the coming months and years, at **www.educationscotland.gov.uk/achievementpathways**

3 http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/resources/c/genericresource_tcm4650441.asp

4 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/HLivi/PE>