

This briefing provides advice for practitioners and can also be used to inform partners, learners and their parents in taking forward Curriculum for Excellence.

CfE Briefing ⁷

Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase

Part 2: Learning in the Senior Phase

Introduction

Scottish education is going through a period of significant and important change to its curriculum, learning and teaching, to the assessment processes that underpin them and to the qualifications that they may lead to. Education Scotland is supporting this change by evaluating and sharing evolving practice as part of a national professional learning community. This is the seventh in a series of briefings which provide succinct advice on the progress being made in key areas of change, to help inform discussion and promote further, innovative development. This latest addition to the series explores the ways in which all young people, as appropriate to their needs, can expect to learn in the Senior Phase – the ‘how’ of learning – as staff build progressively on the 3-15

Broad General Education (BGE). It builds on the information and advice in ‘CfE Briefing 6: Part 1 The S3 Experience’. It can also be used alongside the Professional Focus Papers¹ which outline distinctive features of learning in National 4 and 5 qualifications. Part 3, to follow, will focus on curriculum planning in the Senior Phase – the ‘what’ of learning.

“Staff adopt approaches which ensure learners are leaders in their own learning. Learners have independent learning skills and can reflect on their own learning, capably drawing their own informed conclusions. They know what they are trying to achieve and seek help at appropriate times. They persevere with their learning and use a range of resources, including ICT, as they progress.”

The Journey to Excellence

¹ <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/nationalqualifications>

Learning in the Senior Phase will continue to be active, engaging and enterprising, building directly on the BGE.

1. How might young people expect to learn in the Senior Phase?

Learning in the Senior Phase will continue to be active, engaging and enterprising, building directly on the BGE. Challenging, relevant and rewarding learning experiences, which will continue to help learners make connections in their learning, will drive their motivation and sense of purpose and enable them to develop deeper understanding. The improved approach to learning embedded within Curriculum for Excellence helps learners develop attributes, capabilities, skills (including higher-order thinking skills), knowledge and understanding in greater depth. This depth can be applied across their learning experiences and to life beyond school. This fresh approach to learning needs new assessment methods and qualifications. The new and revised qualifications reflect the aims, values and principles of Curriculum for Excellence, and are intended to provide suitable progression from the BGE.

How well does the way young people learn in the Senior Phase build on their experiences in the BGE?

Learning in the Senior Phase will build directly from the BGE to ensure all learners are prepared well for lifelong learning, further study and employment. Young people will have become accustomed in the BGE to learning which promotes their sense of purpose and motivation to learn. This focus on **learning which drives motivation** will be furthered in the Senior Phase. Characteristics of this learning include:

- learning independently;
- taking responsibility for learning;
- active learning;
- collaborative learning; and
- applying learning and skills development.

How confident are you that learners are becoming suitably independent in their learning?

Young people will experience **increasing independence** in their learning. Learning which has a range of experiences, tasks and activities will continue to be important in order to meet individual learning needs. These experiences can be designed to ensure progress in individual ways which, in turn, can lead to a sense of enjoyment and achievement. Through the BGE, young people will have developed as independent learners who are used to making decisions, solving problems and initiating their own learning. Characteristics of **independent learning** which will be furthered in the Senior Phase include, for example:

- taking decisions;
- initiating and organising tasks;
- asking questions and finding information;
- demonstrating self-reliance;
- being clear about one's own learning needs;
- effective self-management; and

- having opportunities to reflect on and understand what has been learned.

How effectively and regularly do learners exercise responsibility?

The ability to **take responsibility** is critical to future lives and success and, because of the increasing independence learners will have developed by the Senior Phase, they will be well placed to take responsibility for their own learning. Characteristics of taking greater **responsibility** for learning that will be furthered in the Senior Phase include, for example:

- taking personal control of own learning;
- influencing and contributing to planning own learning;
- developing an increased awareness of oneself as a learner;
- seeking out learning opportunities linked to own interests and aspirations;
- a willingness to take on challenges;
- making informed choices and decisions; and
- monitoring own progress and, as appropriate, modifying strategies.

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The focus on learning which drives motivation will be furthered in the Senior Phase.

How regularly and effectively do learners benefit from active learning?

Young people in the Senior Phase will expect to continue to experience **active learning** which engages and challenges their thinking. This can drive their motivation and enthusiasm and unleash their natural curiosity to find out things for themselves. It helps learners to sustain their efforts until they are content that they have become highly skilled or have completed their tasks and activities. Such resilience, when self driven, is a powerful attribute which promotes success in the Senior Phase and beyond into future lives. Characteristics which illustrate when young people are **active** in their learning include, for example:

- constructing ideas about what they are encountering;
- developing skills such as problem solving by testing out their ideas;
- developing logical and creative thinking skills through doing, exploring and taking initiative; and
- exploring current developments and issues and how they impact on learners and society, for example, environmental, scientific and technological issues.

How effectively do learners work collaboratively?

Collaborative learning enables young people to learn how to contribute effectively to learning with others and to see the benefits for themselves. It is a potentially very effective context in which learners reinforce their own understanding of what they have been learning. This is partly because it involves discussing and explaining their own ideas and hypotheses. Characteristics of **collaborative learning**, which will be furthered in the Senior Phase, include for example:

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- working in partnership and in teams;
- taking initiative and leading;
- acting as learning resources for one another;
- working on team challenges and research tasks;
- taking on roles and responsibilities;
- demonstrating awareness and respect for others;
- debating to develop informed views; and
- discussing learning and providing explanations to others.

Are the range and frequency of opportunities for learners to apply their learning and skills sufficiently demanding?

In the Senior Phase, young people will increasingly **apply their learning and skills development**. They will do this by drawing together aspects of their learning and applying what they have learned to different

contexts. Varied and imaginative opportunities to apply skills, including higher-order thinking skills, are more likely to ensure the kind of motivation and self-confidence that is essential for sustained learning. Characteristics of this important 'how' of learning which will be promoted in the Senior Phase include, for example:

- using a range of skills, including literacy and numeracy skills, when engaging in learning activities;
- engaging in challenging topics to study open-ended investigations and topics in depth;
- exploring current developments and issues and how they impact on themselves and society;
- being open to new ideas and developing the ability to think creatively and critically; and
- seeing the relevance of learning to society and future employment, including through learning outdoors, field trips, working in the community and with employers.

Staff will want to use approaches to self-evaluation that are focused directly on the quality of learning itself, founded on a real understanding of the 'how' of learning.

2. What are the features of the new qualifications that promote Curriculum for Excellence learning in the Senior Phase?

The new National Courses, Units and Awards are designed to promote the enriched approach to learning of Curriculum for Excellence, and the wider range of qualifications is intended to suit the needs of all learners. They provide the scope for a greater emphasis on:

- depth and application of learning;
- developing skills, including higher-order thinking skills;
- real-life contexts; and
- personalisation and choice.

The new qualifications are designed to validate the knowledge, understanding and skills young people have learned and which they will need for further study, employment or training. They also provide opportunities for young people to continue to acquire and develop the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities as well as skills for learning, life and work. They include a new type of Unit which is less prescriptive and more flexible, with fewer and broader outcomes, in order to encourage a more flexible approach to assessment. Assessment approaches are designed to support learning and encourage breadth and depth of understanding, motivate and challenge learners and ensure transition from the BGE into qualifications is smooth.

Staff have the flexibility to design programmes of learning which meet the needs of all learners in progressing from their prior levels of achievement

in the BGE on to qualifications. Where appropriate, qualifications are designed as hierarchical Courses and Units which have a common structure. They are intended to allow flexibility in the delivery of programmes of learning so that, where appropriate, young people can move through SCQF levels to gain recognition for their best achievement. This approach has the potential to encourage young people to aim for the highest possible level of achievement. Unit assessments are less prescribed than previously. This is intended to give more scope for staff to decide which assessment methods are best matched to the way in which young people have been learning, and to suit their individual needs. It gives better scope to increase the relevance of assessment tasks so that they link more closely to local contexts and young people's interests and aspirations. The methods used for course assessment are designed to suit the particular requirements of each course.

3. How can we ensure that young people, as they go through the Senior Phase, continue to benefit from the way they have learned through the BGE?

Curriculum for Excellence is a unique opportunity to raise achievement and to ensure that all learners are better prepared than they have been in the past for learning, life and work. This is because the new curriculum gives real scope to build the 'how' of learning from 3-18 in a joined-up, seamless way. As a result, progression in the way

children and young people learn can be much stronger, with a clear focus on attributes and capabilities, skills (including higher-order thinking skills), and knowledge and understanding. To ensure that this is the case, staff will want to use approaches to self-evaluation that are focused directly on the quality of learning itself. This requires an unambiguous reflection and professional dialogue based on objective evaluation of the quality of learning, founded on a real understanding of the 'how' of learning. This might be achieved through direct observation of learning in action, perhaps by peer staff working with one another, or through finding out the views of all involved, or indeed through a range of other kinds of learning visits to share practice. To further this professional dialogue, staff may find the following questions helpful, alongside those embedded throughout this briefing.

- How do you know what the learning experience is like for all learners?
- How well do all staff and partner agencies, learners and their parents, understand the 'how' of learning?
- How effectively do you gauge the effectiveness of learning in action and use objective evaluation to inform professional dialogue?
- How have you ensured that approaches to learning in the Senior Phase build directly on the way children and young people have learned through the BGE?