



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba



Scotland's Futures Forum
Fòram Alba air Thoiseach



Goodison Group
in Scotland

INFLUENCING LEARNING

Let's Talk Scottish Education: A Contribution to the National Discussion

Background

From March 2017 to March 2020, the Goodison Group in Scotland and Scotland's Futures Forum explored what school, education and learning might look like in 2030 and beyond.

At the heart of the project was a scenario describing what school, education and learning might look like in the future. The scenario was not a prediction or manifesto; it was designed to provoke thought and debate.

The project report also considered the key aspects of change: the levers, acupuncture points and acceleration points.

The project was followed by a conference, which was held over two online sessions in November 2020 and February 2021. Participants were asked to step back from dealing with the day-to-day challenges to consider the question "Where next for education in Scotland?"

More information on the project and conference, including the scenario itself, is available online:

- [Scotland 2030: Education Overview | Scotland's Futures Forum \(scotlandfutureforum.org\)](https://scotlandfutureforum.org)
- [Future Schooling, Education and Learning - Where Next?](#)

Approach

Much of the work that we undertook remains relevant to the National Discussion on Scottish Education. However, we recognised that a lot has changed since we published the report, not least with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, on 8 November 2022 we held an event with a range of stakeholders at the Scottish Parliament and online to contribute to the National Discussion.

Reflecting on the 2030 programme and conference work as a starter, over 30 participants explored three questions from the [National Discussion guide for adults](#):

- What is one thing that needs to stay and why? [Q3]
- Overall, what is your vision for the future of education in Scotland? [Q5]
- How can we make that future vision for education a reality in Scotland? [Q6]

The discussion was held under the Chatham House rule.

We thank all the participants for their contribution.

This paper

This paper provides a combined output from the 2030 programme, the conference, and the November session as a contribution to the National Discussion. It features the following:

- A list of the things people would like to keep in any future Scottish education system. [Response to Q3]
- A revised scenario outlining what Scottish education might look like in the future. [Response to Q5]
- Thoughts and ideas on the potential levers, acupuncture and acceleration points for change, to make any vision a reality. [Response to Q6]

Please note that the paper outlines the key points that emerged from a number of rich discussions. It has been produced by Rob Littlejohn of the Futures Forum and Tina Livingston from the Goodison Group in Scotland. It aims to share a collection of views, thoughts and ideas gathered at the discussions, and it does not necessarily represent the views of all participants in those discussions

The Goodison Group in Scotland

The Goodison Group in Scotland (GGiS) is a charity, solely dedicated to issues of learning through life. We believe civic society should be active stakeholders, contributing ideas and influencing the thoughts of policymakers and decision makers.

We are an independent think tank that considers education and learning, whenever possible, far beyond the immediate horizon. We bring together a cross section of society, including influencers from education, government and business (including the third sector), to develop insights and model future scenarios.

Crucially, we seek to provide an informed context for longer term policy and ideas for innovative practice, some of which we hope also has resonance in the nearer term.

Our principal connection is with the Scottish Parliament's think-tank Scotland's Futures Forum.

Scotland's Futures Forum

Scotland's Futures Forum is the Scottish Parliament's futures think-tank. We work on a non-party basis to promote research and to stimulate debate on the long-term challenges and opportunities that Scotland faces. We aim to inform MSPs and others and enable them to consider the effects of decisions taken today on Scotland's long-term future.

Looking beyond the five-year electoral cycle and away from party politics, the Futures Forum seeks to bring fresh perspectives, ideas and creativity on how our society might prepare now for the future. We host discussions and seminars and present ideas to engage Scotland's parliamentarians and challenge their thinking.

Our work is guided by a board of directors composed of both Members of the Scottish Parliament and external directors, and it is chaired by the Parliament's Presiding Officer Rt Hon Alison Johnstone MSP.

For more information, visit www.scotlandfutureforum.org.

What is the one thing that needs to stay?

It was a difficult task to narrow thoughts down to one thing as many positive aspects of the current system were highlighted throughout the 2030 programme, the conference and November session.

In particular, the following aspects were highlighted: political support; children's rights and participation; dedicated, passionate and committed teachers; schools engaging in the real world; a flexible curriculum; and early years work. The full list is below.

Leadership and values

- The political support for education and the value placed on education in general.
- The Scottish College for Educational Leadership (now Professional Learning and Leadership in Education Scotland) and the increased awareness of the importance of leadership across the system.
- Social justice as a value to be lived across all teachers' standards and extend across all education.
- The value placed on children's rights through UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the importance of the participation by children and young people in decision-making about education and learning.
- The commitment to and focus on early years – building from the bottom up and giving children for solid foundations to thrive. In particular, "Realising the Ambition: Being Me", the 2020 practice guidance for early years.
- A focus on raising attainment for all so that collective standards are raised in the process of addressing the gap.

Schools and communities

- Vibrant primary schools (and some secondary schools) that are geared up for Curriculum for Excellence and offering a positive environment
- Parental and community engagement, including collaboration between different sectors and partnerships with business.
- The dedication, passion and commitment of teachers: they are well trained and the vast majority are passionate about putting learners at the centre.
- Short communication lines.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

- The aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence for every child and young person in Scotland, with its broad purposes, principles and the notion of experiences as well as outcomes.
- The groundwork in the past 10 years for new approaches to teaching and learning, including flexibility in pedagogy.
- Schools that engage with the real world to give education purpose and link learning together in challenging projects.
- Opportunities to learn and be assessed by doing, especially in STEM areas of the curriculum.
- Multiple pathways of learning and the range of opportunities.

Tertiary Education

- Colleges as diverse environments that can offer learning to a wide range of age groups.
- Four-year degrees.

Overall, what is your vision for the future of education in Scotland?

The following scenario is an updated version of the scenario produced in 2020 in our [“Future School, Education and Learning: 2030 and beyond”](#) programme. It has been updated to take into account the thoughts and ideas of participants in 2022.

The scenario is not a prediction or manifesto; it is designed to provoke thought and debate.

A Scenario for the Future of Education in Scotland: A View from the Future

Context

Scottish education has been on its own learning journey since the early 2020s. Now Scotland has a clear, long-term vision for education which includes high achievement, pedagogical excellence, innovation, experimentation, change and compassion. The vision – which was drawn up by all those with a stake in education, including teachers, learners and their communities – has generated a strong, positive narrative around education, as well as a shared understanding of its purpose. Article 29 of the UNCRC is now the framework against which we measure what we do and how we do it. This has led to high levels of ownership and trust in the system.

These changes began in the early 2020s with a radical review of the whole system. This included state, fee-paying and denominational schools, and links to further and higher education. The aim was to put our children and young people at the centre and prepare them for the challenges they will face as adults.

A key part of the review was leadership, with both empirical research and existing approaches considered. This led to a model that differentiated between leadership and management and which was based on the values of compassion, care and co-operation. As a result, the whole system became more open to experimenting with different structures and career paths for the teaching profession, as well as developing a much better understanding of how to lead simple, complicated and complex change.

Professional Learning and Leadership (PLL) in Education Scotland, which had started its life as the Scottish College of Educational Leadership, evolved into a Leadership Academy. The academy not only supports all education sectors but brings together leaders from across the public sector, encouraging networks that promote real system change to engender a better and fairer society.

Many children and young people, teachers and people in society at large were still reeling from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic of the previous two years and worsening climate change, when the economic downturn came hard on their heels in 2022-23. This led to a challenging financial period.

At the time, there were concerns that talking about radical change would not engage people who were too tired for more change, or would create something that is only half done, ending up in a worse position than before. However, the implications of not having any change provided the impetus to move forward.

The understanding that education is an ecosystem with interrelated parts was crucial in assessing the impact of any suggested changes and in focusing on what matters. With inspirational and brave leadership at all levels – government, strategic and school – and by engaging the innovators, the thinking and work began.

It wasn't an easy journey, but Scotland has started to flourish as a country with a flexible education system that both reflects and engenders the wider social values of respect for rights, social justice, optimism, diversity, inclusion and equity at all levels.

All services and sectors – public, private and third – now collaborate and share responsibility, valuing education and the right to education. It is understood that children and young peoples' needs must be considered in the context of their community. It takes a village to raise a child.

The values and behaviours expressed in the education system

Scotland now holds a shared belief that the primary aim of education is to enhance a child's life and to ensure they have the necessary knowledge, skills, behaviours, attributes and values required to shape their future and thrive in a complex world. It aims to prepare them as life-wide and lifelong learners.

“Education has to be about the real world and about life, as soon as you are around, you are learning to play and work with life at its worst, at its best, we need to realise it is about that living system and connectedness”

The UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and Persons with Disabilities were incorporated into Scots law in the early 2020s, a move backed by educators who understood that children treated with human dignity have higher levels of confidence and learning. Article 29 of the UNCRC now provides the core narrative for education, acting as an anchor in the most recent refresh of the National Performance Framework launched by the Scottish Government in 2018.

Whilst policy supports change, it is not necessarily the driver for change. Participation in consultation exercises from learners, parents and all sections of the community has become the norm and more meaningful since power and adequate funding was devolved to kindergartens, schools, or learning hubs – as many schools have become known.

Devolving power has also engendered greater trust and made for a nimbler system. The professionals in the learning hubs work within an agreed framework, driven by a shared purpose of education. They provide the flexibility to innovate and develop practice, with children's learning firmly at the centre.

The framework also includes decision-making parameters and processes, with leaders in the hubs now responsible and accountable for decisions appropriate for their local context. Drawing inspiration from the growing number of citizens' assemblies, children's views are routinely sought, alongside those of the community, and are acted upon.

As the whole community has a stake in the system, there is a greater understanding that accountability requires learning and openness, rather than blame. Visits from Government ministers and policymakers are often unannounced but are welcomed by learning hubs. These visits are seen by staff as a great opportunity for policymakers to understand what is happening at the coal face.

Learning hubs have been able to take advantage of research from the recently established Social Innovation Institute, which has given them a fuller understanding

of how to benefit from technological innovations. Funding for education, especially for early years, significantly increased as part of the preventative spend agenda during the 2020s and the focus on building from the bottom.

The drive to reverse growing inequality in Scotland also decreased the levels of deprivation and related stigma that had previously inhibited some children's ability to learn.

When education takes place

When to educate children and young people changed as a result of evidence-based research. The traditional stages of schooling were adjusted leading to the old divide between early years, primary, secondary, further and higher education being phased out.

3 to 8-year-olds attend **Kindergarten**, where children learn predominantly through play. A kindergarten system of 'hubs' supports the development of well-rounded individuals who can go on to positively contribute to and help shape society. While there is no testing other than teacher assessment, this stage links well to the rest of the education system and lays the foundation for a child's future learning. Children can leave kindergarten aged 7 or stay on for another year until it is agreed by the child, carers and educators that they are ready to move on.

8 to 15-year-olds undertake a broad general education during the '**GenEd**' phase. As research shows that adolescents' attention spans can be adversely affected while their brains are still developing, teenagers are offered a gap year at 15, with options to participate in community projects and/or gain work experience before transitioning to the senior phase.

When developing the gap year programme, the co-design team reviewed similar programmes, such as the Transitional Year programme offered in schools in the Republic of Ireland. Life skills development also starts in the gap year and continues in the Senior Phase

16 to 21-year-olds participate in the '**Senior Phase**' are offered a range of flexible academic, technical and cultural pathways, which have been developed with key stakeholders, including industry. This phase encompasses what was previously known as further and higher education. Based on robust research, morning start times for learning have been adapted to be age appropriate, with the best learning times adopted for each stage of education.

Where learning and education takes place

The terms 'nurseries', 'schools', 'colleges' and 'universities' have been discontinued in favour of learning 'hubs', 'hives' or 'communities'. Learning environments, which include virtual spaces, are more permeable, allowing children and young people to learn wherever suits them.

In the early 2020s, grants to local authorities encouraged collaboration with companies and local architects to transform empty commercial space into flexible, innovative learning spaces. These flexible learning spaces have become pastoral centres for the wider community, engendering a greater sense of shared responsibility for the education of children.

All learning environments also encourage peer-to-peer and intergenerational relationships, with many local authorities building retirement housing alongside learning hubs. Around the hubs there is plenty of outdoor, wooded space, where students spend a lot of time learning in nature. Outdoor overnight stays in forests are

also common to steep learners in the wonders of nature. Learners are regularly consulted about their learning environment and, as a result, spaces are simple to navigate and learners can easily find the right learning activity.

To meet Scotland's climate change targets, learning environments for children and young people are now virtually carbon neutral. Since 2025, only electric vehicles can be used in the vicinity of a learning environment and the final phase of changing roof tiles to solar tiles will be completed by within the next decade.

Every individual has access to what was known as broadband in 2020. Wearable Wi-Fi is now commonplace and free for all children as increased demand together with the equality and inclusion policies have driven down costs.

Following the Climate Change strikes that started in in 2019, all children and young people take part in the annual Global Sustainability Summit. Through developments in digital democracy, they can also vote on the programmes of reforms they believe should be taken forward in this area and others. As the first country to decarbonise its curriculum, Scotland has just been shortlisted for the Greta Thunberg "Planet Wellbeing Prize", awarded annually to the country that demonstrates a holistic approach to sustainability.

Kindergartens have a 'buzzy' feel and emanate a sense of fun. They place particular emphasis on outdoor space where children spend most of their day, building dens to imitate homes or to play hide and seek. They are also encouraged to build temporary structures with the help of adults. These types of outdoor learning foster resilience and risk taking and help build peer-to-peer relationships.

Kindergartens operate a flexible timetable and are open every day including at weekends. Younger children do not have to spend all day at kindergarten as support is available for parents who do not want their children to spend long periods outside the home.

GenEd takes place in a network of connected learning hubs. As some learning is delivered remotely, learners attend learning hubs mainly for discussions, assessing learning and socialising. Local businesses and charities also offer learners placements and other projects that encourage teamwork and allow for the application of learning, which gives education more meaning.

In the **Senior Phase** there is a much stronger connection with employers as students develop their own pathways. Young people at this phase also access virtual workplaces to learn about different sectors, and to tailor their pathways.

What children and young people learn and develop

The hallmarks of Scottish education are the extent to which children and young people can thrive in an ever-changing environment, engage with complexity and shape their future. The broad aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence are realised for every child and young person, particularly the most marginalised and vulnerable, and can flourish and feel included.

The four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence (successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, effective contributors) have been retained and re-energised. The flexible and adaptable curriculum is underpinned by these capacities, with emotional literacy, resilience, creativity, curiosity, empathy, leadership, enterprise and critical thinking seen as key. There is more choice for all learners.

Numeracy, literacy (including digital literacy), STEM subjects, health and wellbeing,

and developing a range of deep knowledge remain important but the curriculum now facilitates learning in broad areas. Inter-disciplinary learning has been particularly successful in addressing the biggest challenges facing Scotland: climate change, automation and changing demographics.

A renewed emphasis on the arts, humanities and social sciences has led to many opportunities to learn about different global cultures through other languages. The term “extra-curricular activities” is seen as arcane as the curriculum encompasses all types of learning and learning environments.

It is recognised that learners should build up their knowledge of concepts and skills in a coherent and not piecemeal manner. With better designed curriculum frameworks, it is much easier to develop and provide high quality professional learning for educators.

Children are now seen as leaders and co-creators of their learning, and hub staff as facilitators of that learning. Curriculum making is ongoing and organic, responding in a timely way to the changing world that children and young people inhabit. It involves all stakeholders, including learners, parents and employers, and draws on national and international research. It is published by the Curriculum Community of Practice (CCP), which was established in 2025 and has evolved to ensure a balance of views on education reform.

Children and staff are also regularly consulted on inclusiveness, in recognition of the fact that learning takes place best when children feel safe and respected. The devolved nature of learning hubs means support for children can be changed quickly to address any concerns.

Greater flexibility in the system also allows staff in learning hubs to take advantage of any appropriate new technology and to take account of the latest research or new trends, in order to innovate and make recommendations for changes to the curriculum via the CCP.

In the Senior Phase, young people are encouraged to build on their knowledge and skills set and develop their own learning pathways. In the first year, learners explore different options – academic, vocational, or a combination of both – by speaking to employers, entrepreneurs and hubs that offer degree courses.

Individual pathways last between one to five years with transition and exit points into employment, self-employment or further learning. During this stage, young people also learn about the practicalities of life post-education, including running your own business, the tax system, relationships, health, and the justice system.

With a shift in attitudes towards risk, the education system supports learners to learn and unlearn. Pupils visit the National Museum of Failure to encourage them to experiment and learn from their mistakes and failures, and to understand that having a go at something new is an important part of learning.

The most up to date research into and guidance for children and young peoples’ behaviour is shared with all those who support them. Children and young people, and the professionals working to support their learning, receive tailored and where required specialist support to maintain positive relationships and enable early intervention and prevention.

Who provides the children and young people's learning and education

A radical overhaul of the teaching profession in the 2020s saw a change in mindset around the qualities required to be a good teacher – ensuring educators feel equipped to prepare children and young people for a world they could only imagine.

Teaching is now a highly valued and desirable profession with professionals trained in a wide number of techniques in relation to child development. Educators have a passion for what they do, with many entering the profession after time in industry or other occupations. All sectors of education have well-qualified and educated professionals.

Whilst the role of a teacher and what they do is now better understood by wider society, a good number of learning environments have decided not to use the title of “teacher” in favour of “hub leader” “hub facilitator” or “educator”.

Educators are adept at nurturing and building on the learning that takes place within the family and through community and online settings. With so much learning taking place outside hubs, a lot of emphasis is placed on equipping adults with the skills and confidence to support their children.

Investment in initial educator education and institutions and continuous professional development has led to much greater flexibility within the profession, and it has allowed educators greater autonomy to tailor learning to the needs of individual children. Educators also have a sound understanding of children with additional support needs, such as autism, dyslexia and ADHD, and a better understanding of what inclusion means in practice through implementation of the recommendations in the 2020 review of Additional Support Learning.

Other recommendations in the early 2020s education review led to a more respectful relationship between educators and pupils. The use of educators' first names is commonplace and practices such as children being shouted at or having to raise their hand before speaking have long since been ditched. This rebalancing of power became much easier once educators and pupils gained a higher degree of autonomy.

Different pathways into the profession allow educators to play to their strengths and specialisms. For example, some are involved in designing specialist content and learning via artificial intelligence or virtual reality. Others have become online stars, delivering specialist knowledge in certain areas of the curriculum through streaming platforms, videos, online seminars and ‘ask the expert’ sessions. An educator's role is also achievable within contracted hours.

After a successful pilot, ‘para’ educator roles, akin to paralegals in the legal profession, were introduced. Whilst supporting work in the hubs, para educators have the opportunity to become a qualified educator through a pathway similar to what was known as a Graduate Apprenticeship in 2019.

Educators who have spent more than 10 years in the profession are obliged to take a sabbatical to widen their life experience and retain passion for their area of expertise and knowledge. The media recently reported that a scheme for retired hub leaders to coach and mentor student educators has been oversubscribed this year.

Technology has helped reduce the basic administrative tasks within learning hubs. For example, a report of hub attendees is sent to a tablet through facial/retina recognition systems, with each learning hub retaining control over the data they collect.

Overall, any perceived challenges relating to educator agency within the profession have been removed and educators feel empowered to support children with their learning and encouraged by parents, who trust them to do their job.

How children and young people are educated

In **Kindergarten**, learning is via play-based pedagogy, delivered by high-quality staff who understand what children need to thrive. Much of their professional development has been practice-based, with recognition of the importance of research on learning and child development.

With no divide between education and care, there is much closer working with health and social work. The kindergarten teams are encouraged to develop individual responses to each child. This careful profiling in the early years has been pivotal in closing the attainment gap.

Children undertake their own independent and enquiry-based learning, facilitated by expert pedagogy. Staff are viewed as kind and encourage children to do better rather than labelling them as naughty. There is a gender balance in kindergarten staff, while one member nominated as the 'safety officer', with a remit to encourage children to assess and take appropriate risks.

Intergenerational learning is encouraged by policies that give parents, grandparents and carers the flexibility to spend time at kindergarten. They work alongside staff to read stories, sing songs and talk about the games they used to play.

The focus at the GenEd stage is on encouraging young people to develop their skills, knowledge and interests. The school day is not rigidly structured, and children are supported to build a personalised learning programme to meet their needs. Learning is encouraged through critical reflection.

While learning is largely seen as enjoyable, pupils and students also develop a desire to succeed at 'the hard stuff'. There is an understanding of the importance of knowledge, curiosity is encouraged, and developing the skills to research information, solve problems and fact check is built into all stages of learning. All skills, knowledge and attributes are studied in a real-life context to provide depth to the learning.

Young people are supported to try different approaches to learning with the assistance of educators, coaches, guides and mentors, all of whom encourage creative thought and give children time to think. There are many opportunities to learn in multi-age and multi-ability teams which offer mutual support and encouragement.

Project work is very popular as learners can choose a topic of interest, then work with a facilitator to identify the knowledge and skills required to complete the project and to experiment with how to deliver the project's objectives. Technology has been harnessed to further the common good and to enhance learning, rather than drive it. Knowledge is accessed via different mediums, such as virtual libraries, online seminars, 'ask the expert' sessions and tablets linked to a facilitator, who helps structure learning and support an individual's needs. Learners can now interact more directly with the topics they are exploring through, for example, stepping into an historical event.

In 2030, the Global Virtual Hub launched its second phase of cross-cultural projects, which allows Scottish learners to work virtually with students across the world.

During this phase children and young people actively sign up for the Education Incubator where new technology and learning techniques are tested and piloted.

Through these approaches, learners are now expected to be motivated problem solvers able to survive in an ever-changing world. There is much less focus on employability during the GenEd stage, the premise being that if children and young people develop core knowledge, skills, strong physical and mental health, and a love of learning, they will have a solid foundation for entering the senior phase.

In the first year of the Senior Phase, career support is available in different media – virtual, online and face to face – to help young people develop their pathways. Career and skills coaches from different occupations, industries and academia help learners design their pathway by exploring their interests and passions, and then supporting the development of their employability and life-skills.

As individual pathways develop, they are shared with parents and carers and the educators within the hub. Some coaches are employed by the hub while others volunteer, providing a flexible and cost-effective model. This approach to careers has been embedded since 2025, leaving teachers to focus on their areas of expertise and experience. Intergenerational activities are now firmly embedded into the curriculum.

With the increased participation of the community in supporting children and young people with their learning. Children's rights and safeguarding processes for the sector have been overhauled and are robust and easy to navigate. With transparent and independent pathways to report any concerns, the priority is to keep children and young people safe and uphold their rights.

How success is measured and assessed

Great strides have been made to close the attainment gap and achieve equity in education with improvements year on year since 2020. The target of 100% numeracy and literacy, including digital literacy, now feels in reach. Standards have been raised to such an extent that it is rare for a family to move house just to get into a particular catchment area.

The former HMIE now has a remit to support hubs as learning organisations and has been renamed His Majesty's Inspectorate of Learning. Resourcing of the Inspectorate has changed, with a small core staff and associate inspectors who continue working in schools. All teachers and leaders can train to do this, and interaction is regular, supportive and welcomed.

There continues to be a commitment to addressing gender imbalance within the system. By 2030, girls were as likely to embark on engineering apprenticeships as boys, and there has been a significant increase in the number of males working in kindergartens.

Success in education is no longer evaluated through monolithic national assessments. There is ongoing and lively debate to ensure we assess what matters in education. Learners are now asked to select the way they wish to be assessed. There is greater flexibility around assessment and certification to reflect 'complexity' and 'real life', with alternative approaches to demonstrate knowledge and understanding and skills.

Students are fully able to identify and articulate the skills and knowledge they have acquired from their learning and what they believe has made their learning successful. Changes in assessment practices have impacted positively on young people's motivation, creativity and wellbeing.

A common language is used in all areas of education, including further and higher education, and with employers to articulate what young people have gained from formal education and other forms of learning.

Since higher education institutions agreed to change their entry requirements, there is now less reliance on grades for students who wish to take an academic pathway. This has helped resolve the issue of the narrowing of subjects that students could study in the Senior Phase, which impacted the curriculum in the early 2020s

E-portfolios record a student's achievements and experience. These reduce the need to submit job applications or CVs as students can choose to share their portfolios with potential employers and the entry teams for the further and higher education pathways. As with all online systems now in use, clear safeguards are built in and individuals control their own data.

While employers report that the workforce has the necessary skills and qualities to meet the demands of a fast-changing environment, education's contribution to the wellbeing, prosperity and sustainability of local communities is seen as just as important as its contribution to economic performance.

How can we make that future vision for education a reality in Scotland?

The following points emerged during the project, conference and November session as ones where there is potential to accelerate change or lever further change. There are also “acupuncture points” in the education system: areas where change, although potentially painful, may make the biggest difference. Whatever the future vision for Scottish education, these are key points to consider for helping change happen.

“We need to remember education is an ecosystem. It’s complex, but let’s not be afraid of that complexity.”

Let’s have a clear purpose of education and school in Scotland

To be clear about what everyone is working towards, we could:

- agree and define clearly the purpose of education and school in Scotland, identifying the key components and values that never change
- incorporate the UNCRC and establish Article 29 as a guiding principle for the purpose of education and school and the anchor for a new education system, narrative and policy.
- as part of this, develop a programme to engage people with the UNCRC and Article 29
- agree what success looks like for the children and young people who go through the system, for the teachers, education leaders and politicians, and for society as a whole.
- make a Scottish education promise so that children, parents and society as a whole have a contract that outlines what the education system will deliver for and with them as a child, for and with them as a parent, and for and with society.
- strive for political consensus on the approach and create excitement about the future of education in Scotland and a sense of shared endeavour for turning any vision into reality, in the same way as in the development of Curriculum for Excellence.

Let’s ensure the participation of children and young people

To put children and young people at the heart of the conversations within government and policy decision making and in schools, we could:

- ensure we have environments where children and young people feel safe and have agency to share their views and experiences.
- create parallel structures with clear boundaries so that children’s and young people’s voices and experience are at the heart of all aspects of education policy and design.
- as part of this, be mindful of tokenistic and superficial young people’s voice, and instead learn from deep, structured engagement with children and young people about important aspects of their school experiences and outcomes.
- support skilled youth work-type approaches based on trust and over extended periods
- work with learners and teachers for whom the system has failed.

Let's have an education system that supports sustainability

To help us meet the challenges of the climate and ecological emergencies, we could:

- embed sustainability as a guiding principle of the education system, with 'learning for sustainability' as an interdisciplinary theme in the curriculum.
- ensure the core sustainability concepts and values are part of initial teacher education and career-long professional learning.
- ensure all school buildings and their campus areas are designed and built to the highest sustainability standards and support biodiversity.

Let's have an inclusive and equitable education system

To make our education system work for everyone, we could:

- celebrate diversity by embedding inclusion and equity as a guiding principle,
- implement whole-school equity plans across schools and clusters, consistently from early years to the senior phase, to ensure stereotypical images are eradicated and all children and young people genuinely feel they can follow any education and career path.
- implement the recommendations from the "Support for Learning - All our Children, All their Potential Report 2020."
- ensure plans continue to be in place to support children and young peoples' wellbeing and education recovery because of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Let's empower all stakeholders

For everyone involved in education to be supported to thrive, we could:

- ensure all stakeholders in education understand the complex ecosystem that is Scottish and what their place in it is.
- progress towards a truly humanised education system in which children and young people consistently and sustainably experience respect, kindness, trust and respect for their human dignity.
- within an agreed framework, shift power, control and influence away from the centre (Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament) and towards local authorities, head teachers and classroom teachers.
- agree what flexibility and local autonomy means in relation to accountability to central agencies.
- move from a hierarchical education system to one that is flatter and more trust based, supporting those who are implementing change on the ground.
- establish a clear safeguarding process, including independent and transparent pathways for reporting concerns.

Let's review the current structure and stages of education

To ensure the stages of schooling are relevant and help realise the purpose of education in Scotland, we could:

- conduct a review of the current stages model and then initiate focused research to establish and review experimental approaches for how the learning journey for children and young people could be organised.
- review the school day and year to make sure the school year is relevant for a 21st century education system.
- ensure the core expectations and entitlements for learners at different stages through their education are clear, recognising that different stages may need different things, have their own complexity and/or have overlaps.
- use the Regional Improvement Collaboratives and the process of inspection as a basis for professional engagement and learning.
- build from early years, giving children solid foundations to thrive.
- consider the feasibility of a gap year before the Senior Phase, drawing on the Transitional Year offered in the Republic of Ireland.

Let's make sure that schools are properly designed

For schools to be fit for 21st-century education and learning, we could:

- stop building schools and start building community assets that encompass different public and community services.
- stop building schools on the edges of a town or village and start helping communities by making schools a central feature of local life.
- introduce universal design for schools, with built-in flexibility that ensures the potential to support the needs of all children and young people.
- build in the capacity for hybrid learning, providing flexibility for learners while ensuring space for socialising.
- develop a robust and helpful schools building funding model in which the on-going role of local councils is clear.

Let's make learning fit for the future

For a curriculum and pedagogy fit for the 21st century and not afraid of complexity, we could:

- identify what is required from educators, acknowledging that different sectors and stages require different pedagogy but clarifying the priority of knowledge alongside skills such as creativity, critical thinking and building capacity.
- as part of this, provide time and space for educators to develop curriculum and pedagogical approaches with children and young people.
- implement interdisciplinary learning, giving children and young people experiences across different disciplines: utilising a mixture of approaches with digital, online, outdoor/indoor, school and community learning the norm.
- as part of this, review teacher deployment, including the use of subject specialists in primary schools, the support for generalist primary teachers, and the establishment of multidisciplinary teams.
- make learning learner led with children and young people able to learn through a passion or interest, balanced with the need for a practical approach that can work for teachers and in different contexts e.g., remote rural settings.
- improve the focus on the needs of the individual learner by changing the expectation that every learner must have the same experience and leave with similar set of knowledge and skills.
- offer a more vocational education system, working with partners to deliver different pathways.
- be creative with timetabling and not be restricted by a 50-minute period.

Let's measure what matters

To ensure that assessment and qualifications support the agreed purpose of education, we could:

- agree with employers and universities an assessment system for the Senior Phase based on the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence.
- as part of this, develop metrics for qualities that are important but difficult to measure, such as innovation, wellbeing and confidence, and consider project-based and more open forms of assessment.
- explore the challenges and opportunities balance needed between the value of teacher judgements, coursework and portfolios and the amount of power given to teachers in such a system.
- focus on those who are "failing" or falling down the attainment or achievement scales, suspending judgment and staying curious about why.
- address the unintended consequence of Curriculum for Excellence of narrowing the number of subjects' pupils can study in S4.

Let's support our workforce

To deliver high-quality and inspiring Initial Teacher Education [ITE] and Continuous Professional Development [CPD], we could:

- review and define what it means to be an educator in 21st-century Scotland: roles, responsibilities, employment contracts, work patterns and career paths.
- as part of this, consider a “para teacher” role in line with the medical and legal professions and explore roles where teachers can work part time in another sector
- develop parallel or dual career pathways in which the teaching pathway has parity with the leadership pathway.
- as part of this, reward excellent teachers to stay in the classroom and consider the question: Does the leader of a school always need to have been a teacher?
- place greater focus on pedagogy and learning approaches that deliver successful learning, and reflect these ambitions in the design and delivery of ITE and CPD
- ensure the profession is one of the most respected in the country (as in Nordic countries), with appropriate rewards and structures, time and space for continuing professional development.
- encourage a wider group of people into teaching beyond those who meet the current required competencies and create opportunities for educators to immerse themselves in the world beyond their school's context
- create opportunities for placements for student teachers in special needs schools and units.
- develop health and wellbeing support pathways for the education workforce e.g., for the impact of COVID-19, professional support and buddy systems.

Let's evidence our work

To underpin, drive and validate change in the system, we could:

- establish an independent research body, to disseminate and build on the excellent research already taking place in Scotland and to review any gaps between theory and reality.
- maintain a relentless focus on the impact of proposed changes on the experiences and life chances of the children and young people, rather than on structures or systems.
- build new sources of evidence to guide practice and inform policymaking.
- seek to understand the impact of COVID-19 and other stressors on the system e.g., teacher recruitment, the workforce and learners.

Let's work together

To support effective relationships among all those who have a stake in education, we could:

- embed collaboration among learners, parents and carers, businesses, other public services and the wider community.
- develop leadership approaches that promote collegiality, greater democratic decision making, and creative collaborations.
- create resource and spaces for trust-building initiatives, meaningful engagement and network building between schools (state and fee paying), colleges, universities, businesses and communities.
- encourage educators to help parents and carers understand professional research and ask for their input.
- look to the Cabinet Secretary for Education to share the vision and strategy and encourage a collaborative approach to drive meaningful change.

Let's be brave and creative

To create a culture that gives 'oxygen' to innovators allowing experimentation and learning from mistakes, we could:

- create time and space for the leadership of ideas and make experimentation the norm by establishing an Education Incubator or Innovator hub where educators can test, share and celebrate new ideas.
- undertake research into what children and young people find risky, rather than make assumptions on their behalf.
- explore how to celebrate risk taking in school inspections.
- keep teaching fresh and relevant by moving teachers every five years, offering sabbaticals.
- make movement up and down in school management and leadership the norm, with senior leadership team required to have a significant teaching commitment
- start in ITE to encourage educators to be innovative, creative risk-takers (and managers) both in their teaching and in their relationships with employers, parents, communities, colleagues, children and young people.

Let's build a culture of trust

To rebuild trust throughout the education system, we could:

- conduct a review and research to explore where the trust issues are in the system: at all levels, interpersonal or organisational?
- develop opportunities for stakeholders to work together to build relationships.
- develop flatter structures, reducing the different organisational cultures and sub-cultures to be navigated.
- aim for stakeholders to have ownership for education policy and the work to make it a reality.
- develop a narrative of a society in which professionals are given more trust and respect, as in Nordic countries.
- aim to recreate the excitement and creativity that led to the development of Curriculum for Excellence, with a joined-up approach that involves schools and communities, professionals and parents, and—importantly—children and young people themselves.

Let's resource our education system properly

If we want a child-centred approach to be at the heart of the future education system in Scotland, we could:

- review the funding model for our education system, recognising that meaningful change requires investment in resources (human and material)
- learn how other countries have incorporated the UNCRC and/or have a child centred approach funded their education system.
- consider how to keep the show on the road while creating space for educators to think proactively and creatively about the future, to debate, discuss, to innovate and experiment.
- be prepared to terminate employment of those who do not perform to the agreed standards.
- learn from the approaches adopted over the COVID-19 lockdown
- explore whether technology companies would collaborate with education under one brand as part of their social responsibility agendas to provide up-to-date technology and programmes to schools.

Let's build strategic leadership

For the education system to be agile enough to meet future needs, we could:

- create a culture of innovation in education to identify and build on the great work being done.
- establish a forum to engage with the complexities of the challenges of making change a reality and generate evidence-based options for wider engagement.
- identify brave, inspirational leaders, including those not already embedded in education.
- develop leadership approaches that promote collegiality, greater democratic decision making, and creative collaborations.
- proactively scan the horizon, pulling on the talent of key stakeholders, including children and young people and teachers, to produce models of education futures that inform and/or influence policy and the curriculum.
- ensure there is a clear, holistic strategic plan that all stakeholders understand and can engage with and be very sadaparing in structural/governance changes.