REPORT TO: **EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S AND LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE 24 NOVEMBER 2021**

SUBJECT: **INFORMATION REPORT: ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT (OECD) REPORT ON CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE AND WORKING PAPER – UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENT ASSESSMENT**

BY: **DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

1.1 To provide Committee with oversight of the two published OECD reports which were instructed by the Scottish Government.

1.2 This report is submitted to Committee in terms of Section III (D) (1) of the Council's Scheme of Administration relating to all the functions of the Council as an Education Authority.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 In 2020, the Scottish Government, invited the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to assess the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) in primary and secondary schools. The assessment was undertaken by the OECD Implementing Education Policies team, which conducts comparative analysis of education policy implementation and offers tailored support to help countries in the design and effective implementation of their education policies.

2.2 This report, presents the findings of the reviewers based on their analysis of documentation, academic literature and experiences from other OECD countries; and on group interviews, school visits and events conducted online with stakeholders from across Scotland. No Moray school contributed to the review.

3. THE FINDINGS

3.1 The OECD report was published on 21 July 2021 and is available in **Appendix A**. The review finds that CfE continues to offer a vision and a philosophy of education widely supported and worth pursuing but highlights 12 recommendations for consideration.

Balance Curriculum for Excellence so students can fully benefit from a coherent learning experience from 3 to 18 years

1. **Re-assess CfE's aspirational vision against emerging trends in education** to take account of evolutions in education and society: Scotland should consider updates to some of its vision's core elements and their implications for practice, in particular, the role of knowledge in CfE; and define indicators aligned to the vision to help understand students' progress across all four capacities set out in CfE.

2. **Find a better balance between breadth and depth of learning throughout CfE** to deliver Scotland's commitment to providing all learners with a rich learning experience throughout school education: Scotland could consider how the design of CfE can better help learners consolidate a common base of knowledge, skills and attitudes by the end of the Broad General Education (BGE), and nurture and hone this base for them to progress seamlessly through the Senior Phase and the choices it offers.

3. **Adapt the Senior Phase to match the vision of CfE**: Scotland could consider adapting the pedagogical and assessment practices and the structure of learning pathways in the Senior Phase to enhance learners' experience of upper-secondary education and help them develop CfE's four capacities continuously.

4. **Continue building curricular capacity at various levels of the system using research** by developing the environment of curriculum design support around schools, including in supporting exchange and collaboration between practitioners for curriculum design and experimentation within and across schools; and collaboration between schools and universities.

   Combine effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities

5. **Ensure stable, purposeful and impactful stakeholder involvement with CfE**: System leaders at national and local levels could continue encouraging the involvement of stakeholders (and in particular, students) with CfE by better structuring each engagement initiative they offer, clarifying its purpose, designing it accordingly, and letting stakeholder input inform decision making.

6. **Revise the division of responsibilities for CfE**: System leaders and stakeholders could revise the current allocation of responsibility for CfE, including responsibilities for its strategic direction, its reviews and updates, and the response to schools' needs of support with curriculum issues. The revised allocation should be stable over time to fulfil Scotland's commitment to shared ownership of CfE.

7. **Structure a coherent communication strategy to support developments of CfE**: System leaders, with the Learning Directorate and Education Scotland at the forefront, could develop a communication strategy in support of CfE's next developments and collaborate with practitioners, scholars and other CfE stakeholders as they do so.

   Consolidate institutional policy processes for effective change

8. **Provide dedicated time to lead, plan and support CfE at the school level**: In support of the next phase of development of CfE, Scotland could consider the provision of additional dedicated and ring-fenced time for all teachers, for curriculum planning, for monitoring of student achievement and in support of moderation of assessment outcomes.

9. **Simplify policies and institutions for clarity and coherence**: To align the institutional structures with clear ownership of CfE, Scotland could explore assigning leadership and development responsibilities for curriculum (and perhaps assessment) to a specialist stand-alone agency; and consider refreshing the remit of an inspectorate of education regarding CfE.

10. **Align curriculum, qualifications and system evaluation to deliver on the commitment of *Building the Curriculum 5***: Scotland could first identify modes of student assessment that could be used in school and external settings at Senior Phase levels, in alignment with the four capacities and CfE philosophy; and second, re-develop a sample-based evaluation system to collect robust and reliable data necessary to support curriculum reviews and decision making.

11. **Develop a systematic approach to curriculum review**: Scotland could consider establishing a systematic curriculum review cycle with a planned timeframe and specific review agenda, led by the specialist stand-alone agency.

Lead the next steps for Curriculum for Excellence with a long-term view

12. **Adopt a structured and long-term approach to implementation**: Building on the system's existing strengths, Scotland should consider how to take on board the recommendations in this report as a coherent package rather than individual policy actions for the next steps.

3.2   The OECD report will have significant implications for Scottish Education, for schools and local authorities and will likely guide and inform our work and strategic direction in Moray over the next five to ten years. Many of the recommendations will require significant change and some of the recommendations may well also be significant in terms of the financial implications involved once expectations are fully known.

3.3 The OECD report highlights the inconsistencies and variability in supports provided to teachers locally and nationally and as such there is a perception that a "postcode lottery" exists when it comes to support for teachers' roles as curriculum makers and designers. The report also highlights that teachers in Scotland have some of the highest class contact time in the developed world and that this prevents teachers from having sufficient time for curriculum design, innovation and assessment and moderation activities. The Scottish Government has since indicated through the Education Recovery: Key Actions and Next Steps, report released in October 2021 they will "continue discussions, through the SNCT, on **reducing teachers' class contact time** by an hour and a half per week, with the aim of giving teachers the time they need to reflect on, plan and collaborate in the interests of good quality learning and teaching". This proposed change to class contact time will have an impact on budgets and also on the learning estate and will require resource to plan and implement the change so that the staffing formulae within the Devolved School Management (DSM) scheme takes account of this requirement.

3.4 In the context of developing an empowered system, local leadership capacity should be freed up to support curriculum development and whilst the OECD found that some Head Teachers welcomed local authority priorities for curriculum development, others found these constraining in a system where local school-level autonomy and flexibility were to be key drivers. To that end, there is a balance to be reached between central prescription and local empowerment.

3.5 The OECD team who conducted the review note that there are too many agencies/groups involved in shaping the curriculum and that their roles and remits are unclear. Reviewers recommend that a standalone agency for the curriculum be established and that this will require a review of the remits of current agencies such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Education Scotland. Current confusion around remits has resulted in key messages around the curriculum being lost as other key initiatives such as the National Improvement Framework and the work of Regional Improvement Collaboratives have been driven forward. OECD recommend that communications about the curriculum need to be stronger, clearer and more accessible and believe that national structures around the curriculum need to be simplified. Reviewers also note that stakeholders with responsibilities should have the capacity and resource to match their responsibilities and that duplication should be avoided.

3.6 OECD noted that the unclear remits around curriculum have resulted in a plethora of guidance on curriculum being available which are both overwhelming and unhelpful.

The Senior Phase and Qualifications

3.7 In response to the cancellation of SQA exams in 2020 and 2021 and the controversy which surrounded this decision and the processes put in place to allocate awards, the Scottish Government further commissioned the OECD to provide a comparative analysis of the upper-secondary school assessment system in Scotland to allow further reflection on how the Scottish system

could adapt in future. Assessment, and particularly assessment across the senior phase, features heavily in the report. The report notes that there is a need to fully implement Building the Curriculum 5 across the senior phase and identified the significant and unhelpful changes which occur from the mostly formative assessment in the Broad General Education to the traditional single stage and subject exams in the Senior Phase. The authors note that assessment practices in the senior phase constitute a, '***clash between 19th century assessments and a 21st century curriculum'.*** This area is considered more fully in the working paper entitled 'Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland: A comparative perspective. The working paper provides some helpful additional context on why some national education systems continue to rely on a formal exam diet and suggests that teacher judgement should have more weighting as we move forward.
This report was published in August and there are three main themes which emerge from this report;

1. How external assessment could be more innovative in order to capture a wider range of student capabilities.
2. The role of teacher assessment and the emphasis placed on continuous school-based assessment
3. Improved integration of academic and vocational strands within the assessment system

3.8   The Covid pandemic undoubtedly highlighted that countries with a heavy reliance on external examinations faced a greater crisis in determining student awards and grades than those countries which drew on multiple sources of assessment evidence and thus were able to adapt to the unprecedented circumstances more swiftly and easily.

3.9   The OECD comparative study provides a range of options for moving beyond the legacy system currently used to assess students in Scotland and these are;

1. Exploring the replacement of examinations at age 16 by a school graduation certificate
2. Developing a more resilient upper-secondary assessment system
3. Seeking better alignment of assessment with curriculum and pedagogy through broadening the forms of assessment
4. Reconfiguring and increasing the role of school-based assessment and adapting the central moderation system
5. Systematically investigating students' perceptions and views of assessment arrangements
6. Further developing the role of vocational qualifications in broadening the curriculum

3.10   The Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed the risks of over-reliance on a largely high-stakes assessment regime and the future of qualifications and assessment in the Senior Phase will be a key priority during Covid-19 recovery. It is argued that we have a 21st century curriculum operating with a 19th century assessment model and this needs to be challenged to ensure a Senior Phase, including qualifications, which leads young people effectively to

the world beyond school, and one which parents, employers and society at large understand.

3.11 The OECD comparative study will likely generate significant debate about the future direction of upper secondary assessment in Scotland and this is a debate which is to be welcomed and which is much needed. The Scottish Government announcement that it plans to replace the SQA, along with the many other recommendations arising from OECD in both reports published in 2021 provide unique opportunities to make significant changes to how we approach senior phase assessment in Scotland.

3.12 The lack of an on-going evaluation strategy was highlighted as an area of considerable concern. Reviewers noted that the lack of any formal review has limited the ability of the curriculum to take account of emerging trends which would have been picked up through periodic review. The OECD go on to note that measures used to judge the impact of the education system should reflect the 4 capacities of Curriculum for Excellence and not only those of being a successful learner currently in place. Their view is that a more holistic and accurate evaluation framework will help the system better understand progress and identify next steps. The highly politicised nature of education was also seen as unhelpful at times and the reviewers noted that a clear evaluation strategy encompassing periodic reviews could help to guide change in a more manageable way.

3.13 The reviewers also noted that '***efforts to reduce the attainment gap will not be possible solely through schooling – we need coalitions with housing, welfare and health policy'*** which raises further questions around how to measure and judge the system as we move forward.

3.14 The OECD noted that despite extensive engagement being undertaken with stakeholders there is a lack of clarity around the extent to which consultations had informed final policy. They noted that consultation should draw on all levels of the system and that the feedback loop must be clearer. In general terms the OECD suggest less consultations but with a clearer feedback loop.

3.15 The need for research (at school and wider system level) was identified as necessary to help shape future innovations. OECD conclude that there should be no more prescriptions from above, changes should be practitioner led with horizontal collaboration so that those at classroom level can drive and shape change beyond their own department and school. The OECD noted that a 'top down' approach would not realise improvement.

3.16 The need to invest in curriculum capacity was highlighted in order to ensure that practitioners have the time they need to undertake school- based research and drive innovation. The OECD also noted the need to ensure adequate time for the recording of pupil progress and moderation of professional judgements.

4. **<u>NEXT STEPS</u>**

4.1 The Scottish Government has accepted all 12 recommendations in the report and has published how it intends to take them forward on the following link.

[Curriculum for Excellence: Scottish Government response to OECD Review](). Scottish Government has confirmed that pupils taking national qualifications this year and next will not be affected and will take decisions on how to progress work around assessment in the senior phase following publication of the working paper. The Scottish Government has confirmed a planned exam diet for 21/22 school session.

4.2 The Scottish Education Council will be reconvened. The Council will have a refreshed membership, including young people, and a renewed purpose to support the delivery of the OECD's recommendations.

4.3 A new Children and Young People's Education Council will also be created to ensure that the voices of those who are most affected by any changes in education are always heard in strategic discussions.

4.4 Professor Ken Muir CBE, who was until recently Chief Executive of the General Teaching Council for Scotland, will lead work to replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) with a new specialist agency for both curriculum and assessment. Further consideration of changes to the qualifications and assessment system will be heavily informed by the next OECD report, expected by the end of August. His remit is detailed in the following link. [Reform of the SQA and Education Scotland: advisor draft remit]()

4.5 Professor Muir and an advisory panel will also look at reforms to Education Scotland, including removing the function of inspection from the agency. A wider consultation period has started with engagement with practitioners at all levels and with many professional bodies and associations. Officers will be working with school leaders to provide a Moray response and staff at all levels are encouraged to submit individual and group responses as appropriate.

5.   **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) **Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))**
This report was informed by the priorities within the Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan and in particular to Our People, Our Place and Our Future and A Growing and Diverse Economy and Building a better future for our children and young people in Moray.

(b) **Policy and Legal**
The Standards In Scotland's Schools Etc. Act 2000 places an obligation on Local Authorities to secure improvement in all schools. The OECD report will change expectations of school staff and influence how the quality of schools is determined in the future.

(c) **Financial implications**
There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

(d) **Risk Implications**
These reports come at a time when the education system is still coming to terms with the impact of Covid-19 with continued disruption across all schools and nursery settings. There is a risk that school leaders and

staff will feel overwhelmed by more change and new expectations of their practice. The central team will continue to engage in dialogue with school leaders and through collaboration, workload will be shared to ensure readiness to implement any expectations.

(e) Staffing Implications
There are no staffing implications arsing directly from this report, however they may become apparent as related work is taken forward, including reduction of teacher contact time.

(f) Property
There are no property issues arising from this report.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact
None arising directly from this report.

(h) Consultations
The Depute Chief Executive (Education, Communities and Organisational Development), the Head of Education Resources and Communities, Quality Improvement Managers, Quality Improvement Officers, Head Teachers, Early Years Service Managers, Senior HR Advisor, Paul Connor, Principal Accountant, LNCT Joint Secretaries, the Equal Opportunities Officer and Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer, have been consulted on this report and agree with the sections of the report relating to their areas of responsibility.

6. <u>CONCLUSION</u>

6.1 Committee is asked to consider the OECD reports which pave the way for major reform across Education and to take cognisance of the associated review and consultation currently underway to take forward key recommendations contained within the reports.

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Background Papers:	OECD Report – Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence
	OECD Working Paper – Upper-secondary education student assessment
	Education Recovery: Key Actions and Next Steps
	Curriculum for Excellence: Scottish Government response to OECD Review.
	Reform of the SQA and Education Scotland: advisor draft remit

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