

Commission on School Reform

Interim Report
June 2012

reform
scotland



Commission on School Reform

In November 2011 the think tanks Reform Scotland and the Centre for Scottish Public Policy set up the Commission on School Reform to consider whether the school system in Scotland is meeting the present and future needs of young people and to make specific recommendations as to how things might be improved or areas that require further enquiry.

The Commission on School Reform is continuing to accept written evidence up until 29th June 2012. If you have not done so and wish to submit evidence, please send responses to Alison.Payne@reformscotland.com. These should be no more than six sides of A4 in length and sent electronically, wherever possible, and in Microsoft Word format. Further information can be found at <http://reformscotland.com/index.php/school-reform-call-for-evidence>.

The closing date for our online survey is also 29th June and can be accessed at www.surveymonkey.com/s/SchoolReform

For any other information regarding the Commission on School Reform please phone 0131 524 9500

About Reform Scotland

Reform Scotland is a public policy institute or 'think tank' which was established as a separate Scottish charity, completely independent of any political party or any other organisation and funded by donations from individuals, charitable trusts and corporate organisations. Its objective is to set out policies in Scotland that deliver increased economic prosperity and more effective public services based on the traditional Scottish principles of limited government, diversity and personal responsibility.

www.reformscotland.com

About the Centre for Scottish Public Policy

The Centre for Scottish Public Policy (CSPP) is Scotland's only independent, membership based, cross-party think tank. We are a not for profit organisation reliant upon the generosity of our funders who include trusts, public, private and voluntary organisations and individuals.

www.cspp.org.uk

Contents

1.	Background	Page 5
2.	Summary	Page 6
3.	Context	Page 8
4.	Where does Scotland stand?	Page 10
4.1	Measurable performance	Page 10
4.2	Stakeholders' views	Page 17
4.3	Looking to the future	Page 21
5.	Conclusion and future work	Page 26
Appendix 1.	Membership of the Commission on School Reform	Page 28
Appendix 2.	Summary of evidence submitted up to 21 May 2012	Page 29

1. BACKGROUND

The Commission on School Reform was established in November 2011 by the think tanks Reform Scotland and the Scottish Centre for Public Policy. Its membership is set out in appendix 1. The Commission has the following objectives:

- to form a fair and objective view of Scotland's educational performance compared to what is provided elsewhere,
- to consider the challenges that Scottish education is likely to face in the next 50 years and how likely it is to meet those challenges,
- to identify any problems within the current school system in Scotland and try and analyse the root causes of them and
- to develop proposals that will enable young people, whatever their background, to fulfil their potential and meet the unprecedented challenges of the modern world.

It has invited comment from all with an interest in Scottish school education. Evidence is continuing to come in. Appendix 2 summarises the views that were received by 21 May 2012.

The Commission's aim is to take a long-term look at the prospects and challenges facing Scottish schools rather than consider the details of changes that are currently under way. Its intention is to be constructive; to offer suggestions that governments of any political party may find helpful and that may also assist young people, parents, teachers and others to shape their own objectives for the education system. The Commission will issue its main report towards the end of 2012. The current interim report seeks to describe the context in which education will have to operate in the 21st century, to offer an initial appraisal of where Scottish education currently stands and to set out at least some of the major questions that the Commission will seek to address in order to fulfil its remit.

2. SUMMARY

Over the past few months, the Commission has tried to assess the current state of Scottish school education and decide what implications that assessment has for its further work.

Its findings are set out in this interim report and are summarised in this section.

The current position

Better overall educational standards in Scotland are essential if we are even to maintain – much less improve upon – our quality of life and our contribution to world development. Scotland's schools offer a good and remarkably even quality of education. However, their measured performance is not world leading. While Scotland has in place policies, such as Curriculum for Excellence, that potentially contain the seeds of significant improvement, it is not clear that it has developed the kind of change processes that will be required to deliver success.

Further work

Based on this overall assessment, the Commission intends over the coming months to consider a wide range of issues that will include, but may not be limited to, the following.

- 1. The success of any education is ultimately dependent on the quality of teaching. Scotland has appropriate policies in place but does more need to be done to secure their effective implementation?*
- 2. The uniformity of Scotland's school system may be a source of weakness as well as strength. To become a system capable of learning from its experience, does Scotland need to encourage greater innovation and diversity?*
- 3. Successive initiatives have so far not succeeded in breaking the link between socio-economic disadvantage and educational success. What are the implications both for schools and for society more generally?*
- 4. Much more is now known about how children learn and about the importance of development in the very early years. What impact should this be having on our practices?*
- 5. Schooling remains very influenced by its examination processes in the later secondary years. Yet it is unclear whether these truly measure what matters. Should the influence of summative assessment be reduced? Are there better ways of measuring young people's accomplishments? How far does examination success serve as an adequate proxy for school performance? What other measures, such as pupil destinations, should be used?*

6. *New technology has had little impact on education compared with its effects elsewhere. Yet it may have the capacity to free schools from current organisational constraints and enable them to offer a genuinely personalised service. How can more innovative uses of technology be encouraged?*
7. *The Commission welcomes Curriculum for Excellence for
 - a. *personalising the educational experience so that every pupil is encouraged to achieve his/her full potential;*
 - b. *recognising, at least implicitly, that there is much more to teaching and learning than getting students through exams;*
 - c. *breaking down artificial barriers between subjects, and;*
 - d. *endorsing a productive interaction between teachers and pupils, thereby enhancing everyone's analytical and evaluation skills as well as improving their knowledge.*

*In many respects encouraging progress has been made with Curriculum for Excellence, for example in relation to deep learning, interdisciplinary approaches, the development of skills and learner engagement. However, the events of recent months demonstrate that much more needs to be done. How can schools be helped to overcome traditional organisational constraints and create a genuinely broad experience of education? Where does the power lie to effect the kind of changes that are required?**
8. *Change processes need to be improved. There is a need to consider the implications for governance and accountability; professional empowerment and capacity; school autonomy and parental engagement; incentives to innovate and considered risk-taking. How can more innovative approaches be encouraged without endangering Scotland's commitment to increased social justice?*
9. *Change processes rely on effective leadership. What should Scotland do to build leadership capacity at all levels of the system and to empower leaders within schools?*

3. CONTEXT

It is almost universally acknowledged that the early 21st century is a period of accelerating change. Knowledge is expanding at an unprecedented rate. Developments in the fields of science and technology continue to transform the economy, to present unforeseen ethical dilemmas and to challenge traditional beliefs and habits of thought.

These changes are, perhaps, most evident in relation to the economy. The last quarter century has seen the rapid emergence of major new economic powers. Sustained growth has made China the second largest economy in the world although, of course, per capita incomes remain far greater in Western Europe, North America and other developed economies. In the same way, but more recently, India has begun to emerge as a serious economic power. The same is true, although on a smaller scale, of Russia and other countries, particularly in Asia and Latin America.

It is now clear that developed economies such as that of Scotland cannot hope to compete in the production of mass-market manufacturing or in the provision of run of the mill services. Instead, they must be continuously innovative and identify where they can add significant intellectual value.

Of course, there will continue to be opportunities for low-skilled employment, particularly in service industries. Their number will gradually decline and the economic significance will be slight.

More importantly, the demand for craft and technician skills will remain high. It is essential that the education system should help to promote such skills. However, in the past Scottish schools have tended to undervalue vocational and technological education. That will need to change in future.

However, the future of the economy as a whole depends upon creativity and success in areas of highest added-value. These are, of course, precisely those areas of activity that demand the highest levels of skill and the exercise of positive and enterprising attitudes. Scotland will succeed only if it is able to ensure that a steadily growing proportion of its workforce is capable of operating near the cutting edge of knowledge.

All this, of course, has enormous implications for the education service at every level, right through from earliest years to lifelong learning.

The social dimension if, perhaps, less discussed and well understood, is certainly no less important. Many technological changes have social implications that profoundly affect matters of lifestyle, attitude and belief. The growth of social networking is merely the latest example. The pace of change leaves many people feeling increasingly disoriented.

Many of the technological and economic changes of recent times have changed society in ways that were not anticipated and have brought significant problems. Indeed, after a period of at least 400 years in which

most people tended to equate advances in science and technology - and, indeed, in knowledge generally - with "progress", the 21st century has seen increasing scepticism about human activity. In the words of Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal, there is a widespread fear that "man's technological achievements are outpacing his wisdom in knowing what to do with them". Climate change can be seen as exemplifying this kind of concern.

Very often too, expanding knowledge brings new ethical concerns. The fact it is possible to do something does not mean that it is necessarily desirable. On the other hand, fields such as life sciences which most frequently raise such issues also promise far-reaching benefits. The responsible citizen of the future requires the knowledge and understanding to reach well-informed judgements and the positive attitudes and skills to be able to act on them.

So too does the confident individual. Social change is rapid and accelerating. This is not primarily a matter of material circumstances but of attitudes, beliefs, habits and customs. Without some understanding of the forces for change, it is all too easy for the individual to feel bewildered and powerless.

Thus, whether considering the changes in the economy or those affecting society more broadly, it is evident that education is indispensable. Those with appropriate dispositions and high levels of knowledge, understanding and skill are well placed to prosper and also to live fulfilled and purposeful lives. The prospects for those with more limited educational achievements are very much poorer.

There are, in addition, issues that go beyond the demands of the economy and the changing circumstances of Scottish society. Scottish education prides itself on having made a positive contribution to the world through the thinking, discoveries and inventions of those Scots who have had such a powerful global impact over the past three centuries. This is a time of great challenges, perhaps particularly in relation to global sustainability. An increasing proportion of humanity has achieved astonishing material prosperity – and been rewarded with fresh anxieties and discontents. Tackling these formidable issues increasingly relies both on progress in science and technology and on the development of a thoughtful public able to use its influence for good. An ambitious education system would wish to develop the kind of men and women with a positive contribution to make.

The Commission, therefore, takes as its starting point a belief that education is the essential prerequisite of success in the 21st century. Countries capable of sustaining a creative and innovative economy and, at the same time, of fostering well-informed and critically aware citizens will succeed and offer a high quality of life. Others will eke a poor living at the margins. In a sense, therefore, it is of secondary importance whether Scotland currently has an outstanding or a mediocre education system. In either case, it will need to improve continuously and rapidly to keep pace with the challenges of a changing world and the progress of competitors who are themselves making every effort to improve their own education systems.

4. WHERE DOES SCOTLAND STAND?

The past successes of Scottish education sometimes induce a sense of complacency. There was certainly a time when Scotland was a world leader. The first education legislation was passed by the Scottish Parliament late in the fifteenth century. In 1696, shortly before the Act of Union, the Scottish Parliament passed the School Act establishing a school in every parish, making Scotland the first country to aspire to universal elementary education. In the early industrial age, it was possibly the most literate society in Europe. The unfortunate legacy of a long period when Scottish education was the envy of much of the world is that it is difficult for Scots to look objectively at present day realities.

For that very reason, it seems reasonable to start by attempting an appraisal of where Scottish school education currently stands. Over the coming decades, it may not matter much whether Scotland in 2012 is a world leader or a middle-ranking performer among developed countries but it certainly makes a substantial difference to the prospects of those going through school at present. In addition, making progress from a strong baseline is unquestionably easier than starting from a position of weakness.

There are at least three possible ways of addressing the simple sounding question, "How good is Scottish school education?".

The first and probably the most straightforward, although by no means necessarily the most important, is to consider performance as measured relatively objectively by research surveys and examination performance.

A second approach would be to consider how far Scotland's schools meet the perceived needs of their stakeholders; learners, parents, employers, further and higher education and so on. This is necessarily a less objective approach, but may come closer to "measuring what matters".

A third, and distinctly more speculative endeavour, would involve looking at how well placed Scotland's schools are to meet the anticipated challenges of the future. Each of these is considered in the following sub-sections.

4.1 Measurable Performance

(a) International measures

Various attempts have been made over the past 30 years to measure the quality of the education systems in different countries. There are now three surveys that are firmly established and generally well regarded. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), organised by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, looks at performance in reading, mathematics and science. It measures the attainment of 15 year olds in tests conducted every three years. On each occasion, one of these three areas receives particular attention. Thus, in 2000 and 2009, reading was the lead domain; in 2003 the focus was on

mathematics and in 2006, science. Scotland regularly takes part in these surveys.

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) are two other well-respected surveys. Scotland has participated in these in the past but the Scottish Government has announced that it will not do so in the future. Less information will, therefore, be available in the future on how the performance of Scotland's schools compares with that elsewhere.

In the first PISA Study in 2000, Scotland scored strongly, coming well above the OECD average in all three domains. In subsequent surveys, Scotland has continued to score highly but, as the following table shows, there has been a general pattern of decline (although this appears to have been arrested in the most recent survey). Scotland remains above average in reading and science but only similar to the average in mathematics.

	2000	2003	2006	2009
Reading	526	516	499	500
Mathematics	533	524	506	499
Science	522	514	515	514

The sharpest reductions took place in the earlier part of the period. The 2009 figures suggest that the period of deterioration may be coming to an end although performance has not returned to the levels of 2000. It must, of course, be stressed that PISA measures countries' performance relative to others rather than against any kind of absolute standard. Thus, the figures do not necessarily imply that the quality of Scottish education has worsened, but possibly that performance elsewhere has improved faster than in Scotland. In a highly competitive international environment, relative decline is likely to prove only marginally less disastrous than actual deterioration.

The truly global aspect of competitiveness was brought sharply into focus by the most striking outcome of PISA 2009: the success of the Shanghai region of China. Shanghai schools led the field in all three domains. Unpublished PISA data suggests that very high levels of performance are also being achieved elsewhere in China, not merely in other major cities such as Beijing but also in poorer rural provinces.

The significance of this cannot be overestimated. Those who believed that China might have outpaced the developed world in terms of mass production of cheap manufactures but remained far behind in relation to more sophisticated activities must now come to terms with some uncomfortable facts. China has been engaged for a considerable period in strikingly successful educational reform. Shanghai and other regions now have schools that can compare with (and quite possibly outperform) any schools in the world.

It has sometimes been suggested that other countries have adopted questionable measures in order to improve their PISA scores. In some cases,

it is alleged that pupils have been selected to participate in order to boost results rather than give a fair representation of standards although the OECD maintains that the organisation of the tests will minimise the effects of such efforts. Some countries are said to have tailored their curriculum in order to prepare pupils better for PISA tests.

Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that, for a number of countries, improving PISA scores has become a powerful driver of curriculum policy in a way that is not necessarily consistent with national concerns, priorities, values and state of development. Indeed, there are probably few governments that feel entirely free of pressure in relation to PISA performance - indeed PISA tests are an acknowledged influence on the way in which Scotland's new Curriculum for Excellence has been defined in the so-called Experiences and Outcomes.

Much more important, therefore, than the suggestions of seeking to influence results is the question of whether PISA measures the kind of abilities that are likely to be in demand over coming years. The OECD is keen to point out that PISA does much more than test recall. Questions are graded at six levels with the most sophisticated examples focusing on thinking skills, the application of knowledge and so forth.

TIMSS and PIRLS are now obviously of less relevance to Scotland. However, it is worth noting that, in the latest TIMSS survey in which Scotland participated (2007), its scores were lower in three of the four overall measures than they had been in 1995 when the survey was inaugurated.

Mathematics

Year group	1995	2003	2007
P5	493	490	494
S2	493	498	487

Science

Year group	1995	2003	2007
P5	514	502	500
S2	501	512	496

At best, Scotland's position could be described as broadly static in maths and significantly worsening (at least in relative terms) in science.

In the two PIRLS surveys in which Scotland took part, its scores were almost identical.

Year	2001	2006
Score	528	527

Scotland scored significantly above the international average in both surveys. However, in 2006, 19 countries or regions had better scores than Scotland's. Furthermore, while the 59 participating countries included obvious comparators in Europe, North America and the Far East, almost half were developing countries whose standards would be expected to be much lower than those of Scotland. It is also worth noting that the three highest achieving countries (Russia, Hong Kong and Singapore) scored significantly better than all other participating countries.

There are obviously many methodological problems surrounding all attempts to compare educational performance across different cultures and systems. The results can provide no more than a broad indication of levels of performance. Nevertheless, so far as Scotland is concerned, the picture is relatively clear and consistent across the major surveys. Scotland's performance puts it among the world's higher achieving systems. However, its position is relatively weaker than it was at the time of the earlier surveys. Scotland would appear to have a strong base on which to build but there are legitimate causes for concern about lack of progress in recent years.

(b) National measures

Another fairly objective way of looking at performance is to consider the outcomes of tests and examinations conducted within Scotland.

The approach adopted to national testing some 20 years ago relied on internal judgements made by the school at a time when it was considered that the individual pupil was ready to be tested. School and pupil attainment data were aggregated and published nationally. Whatever the pedagogical merits of this approach to testing, it relied heavily on the individual teacher's judgement and did not allow reliable measurement of performance at national level or over time.

The collection of data in this way was discontinued in 2004. In the following year a new Scottish Survey of Achievement (SSA) was introduced. Tests were administered to a representative sample of pupils with results being published at local authority and national levels. The tests could not be used for the production of school league tables.

The SSA tested core skills of literacy, numeracy, ICT, problem solving and working with others on an annual basis. The tests focused on English language in 2005 and subsequently on social subjects, science and mathematics. The survey itself has now been discontinued with the last tests being undertaken in 2009, again with a focus on English language.

The 2009 SSA indicated that reading attainment at all stages remained at a similar level in 2005, 2006 and 2009. However, in all cases the proportion of pupils attaining the expected levels in reading decreased through primary and into secondary. By S2, only around 40% were "well established" or performing better than the expected level for reading at this stage.

The same was true of writing with almost all pupils achieving the expected level at P3, around a half doing so at P7 and only a third performing at the expected level or better in S2.

The SSA has now itself been replaced by the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy which was first conducted in 2011, with the results being published in March 2012. The survey monitors national performance in numeracy and literacy at P4, P7 and S2 levels. The 2011 survey focused on numeracy while the 2012 survey will highlight literacy. Around 11,000 pupils took part in May 2011. They sat a set of written and practical tests and completed questionnaires. In addition around 5,200 teachers completed teacher questionnaires. The pupil questionnaires elicited information on factors such as pupil attitudes and classroom experience that are likely to affect performance. Teachers were asked about their experience of delivering numeracy across the curriculum. All parts of the survey were designed to reflect the approaches of Curriculum for Excellence and thus differ in important ways from the design of the SSA.

The following extract from the official report summarises the main findings:

- About 76 per cent of P4 pupils were performing well or very well in numeracy at first level, at P7 about 72 per cent of pupils were performing well or very well at second level and at S2 about 42 per cent of pupils were performing well or very well at third level.
- The percentage of pupils not yet working within their respective levels in numeracy was less than one per cent in P4, about two per cent in P7 and about 32 per cent in S2.
- Boys tended to outperform girls in numeracy at P4 and P7.
- S2 pupils living in areas with lower levels of deprivation were twice as likely to be performing well or very well as pupils living in areas with higher levels of deprivation.
- The vast majority of pupils said they enjoyed learning, though the strength of agreement reduced among older pupils. Over 90 per cent of pupils agreed that what they were learning would be useful to them outside school.
- Over 90 per cent of primary school teachers and over 80 per cent of secondary school teachers reported they were very or fairly confident that they can improve learning using the CfE experiences and outcomes for their area.

The survey thus confirmed earlier findings about the impact of deprivation and the relative decline in performance against expected norms from P4 to S2. There remains an imperative need to ensure that all young people achieve satisfactory standards of literacy and numeracy while at school. Given the recent introduction of key aspects of Curriculum for Excellence and the lack of comparability between the SSA and SSLN, it would be difficult to draw from the survey any meaningful conclusions about the impact of the new curriculum.

A more important point relates to the changes in assessment approaches over recent years. These various changes in approach, together with the lack of any standardised testing in the pre-2005 period means that it is impossible to form any reliable and consistent picture of performance at the primary and early secondary stages.¹

The only information providing comparable data over time, therefore, is that derived from the outcomes of externally-assessed examinations sat in the latter years of secondary schooling. These, of course, have the advantage over the international studies of being based, not on a sample, but on the performance of the huge majority of each age cohort. The following tables show performance at fourth year (Standard Grade) and 5th year (Higher Grade) over the decade from 2001/02 to 2010/11.

Fourth Year

Year	% of S4 with Eng and Maths at level 3 or better	% of S4 with 5+ passes at level 3 or better	% of S4 with 5+ passes at level 4 or better	% of S4 with 5+ passes at level 5 or better
2001/02	91	91	77	34
2002/03	91	91	76	34
2003/04	91	91	77	35
2004/05	90	90	76	34
2005/06	91	91	77	35
2006/07	92	91	76	33
2007/08	91	90	76	34
2008/09	93	92	78	35
2009/10	93	92	78	36
2010/11	93	93	78	35

¹ For this reason many local authorities are currently introducing standardised testing from P4 to S2. For example, the 'Assessment for Excellence' tests produced by the Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring at Durham University, are used in over half of local authorities in Scotland.

Fifth Year

Year	% of S4 with 5+ passes at level 5 or better	% of S4 with 1+ passes at level 6 or better	% of S4 with 3+ passes at level 6 or better
2001/02	45	39	23
2002/03	45	39	23
2003/04	45	39	23
2004/05	45	38	22
2005/06	45	38	22
2006/07	46	39	22
2007/08	45	38	22
2008/09	47	41	23
2009/10	49	43	25
2010/11	50	44	26

NB All figures for S5 are expressed as percentages of the roll of S4 in the previous year.

It will be noticed that small gains have been made in all categories in S4 (where the whole age group is involved). At S5 more significant progress has been made although only in the final three years.

It has to be borne in mind that, across the same period, staying on rates have increased and some part of any improvement in examination performance has to be attributed to this factor.

Improvements in examination success in Scotland have been modest in scale compared with changes in England. Far from being evidence of a slower rate of progress, this suggests that Scotland has been less affected by 'grade inflation', the phenomenon much criticised in the Press that seems to confirm that improved results are more a consequence of 'dumbing down' than of higher standards. Ample evidence of this problem as it affects England has been produced by researchers at Durham University. Comparable work has not been carried out in Scotland.

A pronounced feature of all of this data, both in relation to external examinations and the SSA, is the extent to which performance is correlated with socio-economic circumstances. For example, in S2, the proportion of pupils from better-off areas attaining the expected standards in reading was approximately double that from more deprived neighbourhoods. Similarly, the examination performance of individual schools is very strongly influenced by the nature of their catchment areas. There are, nevertheless, instances of schools performing markedly better or worse than might be anticipated from the circumstances of the areas that they serve. This raises an important question about the system's success in analysing how that better performance is achieved and what more could be done to share the experience systematically.

This point was strongly emphasised in the OECD's "Review of National Policies for Education - Quality and Equity of Schooling in Scotland", which was published in 2007 but written before the decline in Scotland's performance in the 2006 PISA tests was known. The review states that "Scotland is building a strong platform of achievement in basic education. One major challenge facing Scottish schools is to reduce the achievement gap that opens up about Primary 5 and continues to widen throughout the junior secondary years (S1 to S4). Children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes are more likely than others to under-achieve while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide".

This finding is extremely important as it highlights an enduring challenge to the Scottish education system that has never been satisfactorily addressed. It is particularly significant as opponents of radical change in Scottish education often argue on the basis of a supposed equity that cannot withstand scrutiny. It is well established that broadly equal inputs result in predictable and unequal outcomes. Whilst some changes could, of course, increase levels of inequity, it would be difficult to argue that the current arrangements are in any meaningful sense equitable.

4.2 Stakeholders' Views

There is no overall survey of opinion concerning the quality of Scottish education. Evidence on stakeholders' views, therefore, has to be pieced together from a number of sources. The Commission considers that the absence of systematic and reliable data is a problem that should be addressed.

Probably the most systematic sampling of opinion, yielding the most substantial amount of data, is that collected by HMIE as part of the normal inspection process. This currently canvasses the opinions of pupils, parents and staff.

Questionnaires began to be distributed to a sample of parents prior to the inspection of schools many years ago. However, the information that this produced was not collated at a national level until 2003. From that year on, the responses to the Inspectorate's surveys of parental opinion have been aggregated so as to give a picture of satisfaction levels across Scotland. Figures are available covering all inspections conducted between April 2003 and July 2007. In 2008, the surveys were substantially modified and it is intended to produce further information relating to the period 2008 - 2012 in the summer of this year.

The overall response rate from parents to the questionnaires issued in the 2003 to 2007 period was slightly over 40%. This was made up of a 44.8% return in the case of primary school inspections and 38.6% in the case of secondary school inspections. The decline between primary and secondary is

symptomatic of the way in which parental engagement tends to reduce as children proceed through the educational process.

Overall, the responses to the 20 questions included in the survey show very high levels of satisfaction. Once again, levels are higher in primary than in secondary. Perhaps the most relevant questions for any survey of the overall quality of Scottish education are the three that are summarised in the following tables.

My child enjoys being at school

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not answered	All
Primary	52	45	2	0	0	100
Secondary	32	60	6	1	1	100
All	46	49	4	1	1	100

My child finds school work stimulating and challenging

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not answered	All
Primary	37	57	5	0	1	100
Secondary	23	66	9	1	2	100
All	33	60	6	0	1	100

Teachers in this school set high standards for pupils' attainment

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not answered	All
Primary	39	52	4	0	3	100
Secondary	32	56	7	1	4	100
All	37	54	5	1	4	100

Given the existence of other data such as figures for exclusion and unauthorised attendance and the volume of less formal evidence suggesting that significant numbers of pupils find school work boring, it is hard to take at face value findings that suggest that 95% of young people enjoy being at school. Most people would probably also find the suggestion that 91% of parents feel that schools set high standards inherently improbable.

The HMIE surveys found more negative responses to a number of other questions, particularly those relating to the quality of information about children's strengths and weaknesses, the quality of school buildings, the guidance given on homework, information provided on schools' priorities for improvement, clarity about schools' expectations and consultation with parents. Nevertheless, even the question which yielded the most negative responses ("I have a clear idea of the school's priorities for improving the education of pupils") revealed that 78% of parents were broadly satisfied compared with 19% who were broadly dissatisfied.

Evaluating the information yielded by these HMIE surveys is somewhat problematic. On the one hand, the surveys are extensive and systematic. In a four-year period, at least half of Scotland's schools will have been inspected and, therefore, a proportion of parents in all of these schools will have had the opportunity to provide their opinions. Over 40% of those sampled did so. On the other hand, as indicated above, the results are positive to a degree which is difficult to reconcile with other information available.

It is perhaps likely that the 60% of parents who did not respond contained a higher proportion of those who were dissatisfied with their children's education. Furthermore, some parents may well have felt that loyalty to their child's school at the time of inspection required them to provide as positive as possible a response. It is also possible that parents are in many cases relatively indiscriminating customers. This would have serious implications for any attempt to use parent opinion as a driver for improving standards.

Nevertheless, the chief message emerging from this body of evidence seems clear. Most Scottish parents are generally satisfied with the quality of education provided in their child's school. It should be noted, however, that parents' responses relate to overall quality and take no account of internal differences in quality, for example from one class teacher to another or between subject departments. The fact that differences within schools can be as important as differences between schools has implications for the process of raising standards. A general indication of satisfaction by no means removes the need for targeted improvement.

A different kind of evidence can be inferred from the level of voluntary uptake of education beyond the years of compulsory schooling. Over the 40 years since the leaving age was raised from 15 to 16, the proportion of young people choosing to remain at school has steadily risen. The following table set out the position for those voluntarily remaining from S4 to S5 and from S5 to S6 since session 2000/01.

	00/01	01/02	02/03	03/04	04/05	05/06	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
S4-5	79	79	77	77	77	77	78	78	78	81	83
S5-6	46	45	46	45	44	44	44	45	45	50	54

Furthermore, the proportion of the age group entering further and higher education has also risen (although with some fluctuations). Thus, it is not the case that the numbers remaining in school have risen because of declining uptake of other kinds of education. Both the upper secondary and the tertiary sectors have expanded steadily.

This expansion has, of course, come about for a number of reasons, some of which relate to labour market conditions and families' perceptions of employment opportunities. The number of openings into employment for school leavers has declined whereas the market for graduate-level employment has expanded. Thus many young people have decided that their employment prospects will be enhanced by staying on at school. Not all of

these will have been motivated by the intrinsic interest of the curriculum. Nevertheless, the increasing voluntary uptake of schooling has to be reckoned a positive comment on Scottish education.

In theory further evidence of pupils' attitudes could be obtained from national statistics on attendance, absence and exclusion. In practice, the value of the figures is slight, partly because different local interpretations of terms like 'unauthorised absence' mean that it is difficult to compare like with like and partly because, as in the case of exclusion, policy initiatives can have a marked effect.

The following table summarises figures for attendance and absence over the past five school sessions.

	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Attendance	93.3	93.2	93.3	93.2	93.1
Unauthorised absence	1.4	1.5	1.5	1.8	1.9

It will be seen that there has been no significant change in levels of attendance but a rise of nearly 36% in unauthorised absences. Whether this reflects changes in categorisation of absences or a real increase is impossible to say.

The following table gives figures for exclusions over a six-year period.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Total exclusions	42990	44794	39717	33917	30211	26844
Exclusions per 1000	60.4	63.9	57.5	49.9	44.7	40.0

It seems highly unlikely that the drop of one third in the exclusion rate can be attributed to rapid improvements in behaviour. Policy imperatives from central and local government are certainly the decisive factor, thus raising questions as to how valuable the figures are as an indication of pupil attitudes to school.

Looking beyond parents and young people, evidence of stakeholder attitudes necessarily becomes more impressionistic. Thus, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and other employers' organisations have been broadly supportive of developments such as *Curriculum for Excellence*. The broad concept of education embodied in the new curriculum is largely in accord with employers' submissions to the 2002 National Debate. The CBI, for example, is clear that "We look to our schools to prepare the UK's young people for the future and give them the skills and confidence to lead fulfilling and successful lives. That includes entering the world of work and developing productive and rewarding careers".

The CBI recognises that it is unrealistic to expect schools to produce young people ready in all respects for working life. "UK employers do not expect schools to produce job-ready employees by the time they leave secondary school. But what they do expect is to be able to recruit young people with the right skills, capabilities and attitude for the workplace".

However, according to the CBI, 70% of employers experience weaknesses in new recruits' employability skills while two-thirds believe that standards of literacy and numeracy are too low. A similar proportion considers it necessary to provide remedial support. Relevant employers detect shortcomings in specialist areas such as STEM and modern languages. Although the figures relate to the UK as a whole, the CBI does not believe that the Scottish position is markedly different from that in other parts of the country.

Among the skills being referred to are communication and ICT skills, literacy and numeracy, and employability skills. Employers also value qualifications that are recognised, understood and relevant to business. On the one hand, this leads employers to look beyond the simple measurement of academic attainment when considering applicants and to take account of other qualities such as positive attitudes, leadership and so on. This has led many employers to attach importance to, for example, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. On the other hand, employers do remain interested in academic attainment, including fairly traditional aspects such as spelling and grammar. Overall, surveys of employer opinion tend to suggest significant concerns about educational outcomes.

Taking the available information on stakeholders' views as a whole, it would be difficult to maintain that any consistent picture emerges. The hard evidence of increased numbers remaining voluntarily at school at least suggested that many young people see value in educational success but probably says little about their views of the educational process. Parental opinion – at any rate as sampled during inspections – appears indiscriminately positive while the views of business emerge as being ambivalent.

4.3 Looking to the Future

The final and most problematic approach - although possibly also the most important - is to consider how likely Scottish education is to meet the needs of the next, say, 50 years or so. This approach is obviously more speculative and involves thinking about what those needs might be. Implicitly it raises the question, "What are the abilities and personal qualities that are likely to matter during the lifetimes of today's school students and how well is Scottish education doing in developing them?".

Predicting what the world will look like even 20 years hence is a difficult undertaking so anticipating the needs of 2062 might appear a hopeless task. However, some prediction is necessary. As the majority of those currently going through school will still be in the workforce in 2062 (and some of them

will in leadership positions), present day schooling will continue to have a significant impact 50 years hence. In any event, some reasonable predictions can surely be made. It seems very likely that high-level skills – especially cognitive, personal and interpersonal skills – will be even more in demand than today. Enterprise, curiosity, a willingness to take well-judged risks, a disposition to innovate and qualities of creativity will certainly be wanted.

(a) New Curriculum

Curriculum for Excellence was itself planned as a long-term process. It sets a strategic direction that Scotland can appropriately follow for the foreseeable future. Of course, it will be necessary to define future requirements in greater detail and to evaluate Scotland's performance objectively.

In 2010, the Cabinet Secretary set up a number of "Excellence Groups" to look at future educational requirements, mainly in individual subject areas. One of the Excellence Groups, however, had the cross-cutting remit of looking at the issue of advanced skills in all areas of the curriculum. In its report, published in 2011, the Higher Order Skills Excellence Group stated that, "Deep learning is the central principle of *Curriculum for Excellence*. It involves knowledge, understanding and the skills needed to apply knowledge in useful ways."

The promotion of skills is, therefore, a key function of the curriculum. These skills are of many types; cognitive, social, personal and relevant to employment. They can be developed through the school curriculum but also through other activities. Furthermore, people acquire skills at every stage of life. Schools have an important role and, therefore, teachers should cultivate skills from the earliest years onwards but they should also recognise and value the contributions of many others.

The social and economic realities of the 21st century mean that the work of schools has to become increasingly ambitious. Young people need to acquire complex and sophisticated skills and ways of thinking. But they also need the positive attitudes, (such as optimism, resilience and courage), ability to communicate and interpersonal skills that are prerequisites of success and fulfilment.

Similar concerns and aspirations have been expressed across the developed world. Models for the development of these advanced skills are starting to emerge. Examples would include critical skills programmes, collaborative and cooperative learning approaches, the "Assessment is for Learning" initiative and specific courses such as the Harvard Graduate School's "Teaching for Understanding".

As well as seeking to develop advanced skills, all of these programmes use "constructivist" approaches to learning. Such approaches reflect the ideas of Jerome Bruner who saw the creation of meaning as being the central educational concern. In other words, the educational process is not so much concerned with conveying information from the mind of the teacher to the mind of the learner as with the intellectual process taking place in the mind of

the learner whereby he/she makes sense of the information provided. The measure of educational success is not the extent to which the learner can recall what is taught but the success with which he/she can think, understand and apply knowledge.

Something of a global consensus appears to be emerging around this educational philosophy. It is noteworthy, for example, that PISA claims that its test questions are designed to measure understanding and skill as well as the retention of factual information and facility in routine procedures.

Furthermore, education systems in several countries have been changing in ways that reflect constructivist thinking. Thus, reforms in Singapore have sought to reduce curriculum content in order to give increased emphasis to intellectual skills. China has sought to give schools greater autonomy and to encourage higher level skills among learners.

This is important because there is a tendency in the West to stereotype Asian education systems as relying on rote learning to purvey a diet of low-level factual content. The outstanding success of the Shanghai schools (which led the field in every domain; reading maths and science) was the most eye-catching feature of the last round of PISA tests. The Shanghai pupils excelled in those parts of the tests that demanded critical skills as well as in the more basic elements. The comforting narrative that Asian education systems can produce legions of capable factory workers but only a western education can develop thinking is clearly invalid. The implications of this both for Scotland's economy and its education system are momentous.

A crucial issue for Scotland, therefore, is the extent to which *Curriculum for Excellence* is taking schools in appropriate directions. *Curriculum for Excellence* sets very broad aims. It hopes to ensure that all young people emerge as *successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens*. Such broad objectives are obviously far removed from the aims of the traditional academic curriculum. Furthermore, they apply well beyond the school gates. The four sets of qualities that Curriculum for Excellence is intended to develop bring success in any walk of life.

Furthermore, *Curriculum for Excellence* recognises that much valuable learning takes place outwith school altogether. The formal curriculum is only part – often, a relatively minor part – of the young person's overall experience. The influence of family, peers and increasingly of new media such as social networking is often much more powerful. One of the most radical changes introduced by Curriculum for Excellence is that schools are now urged to encourage and recognise learning beyond their own boundaries and to make connections between the formal curriculum and learning that takes place elsewhere.

In addition, the *Experiences and Outcomes* are essentially a new way of defining the curriculum. Instead of specifying areas of content to be covered, the new guidance focuses on the kind of learning experiences that young people should go through and on indicating what it is that they should be able

to do as a result of those experiences. Not all the Experiences and Outcomes are of equal validity. Nevertheless, they encourage an emphasis on the quality of classroom practice and on understanding and skills.

There are many other aspects of *Curriculum for Excellence* development which are also fully consistent with the intellectual ambition and constructivist pedagogies that global opinion now sees as the essential ingredients of future educational success. Thus, in recent years, many schools have engaged learners in decisions about their own work to a degree that was never previously the case. Assessment is being seen as a means of assisting future progress rather than simply a matter of measurement. Academic disciplines remain important but establishing the connections between them has assumed a greater significance.

Furthermore, Curriculum for Excellence encourages a new emphasis on the life of the school as a community and on the kind of school ethos needed to develop confident individuals and responsible citizens. The potential contribution of the school to the development of positive attitudes and values is now considered an issue of importance.

All of this is highly encouraging. There is good reason to believe that Scotland has set itself appropriate objectives and may have taken the first necessary steps in the right direction. However, it is as yet too early in the development programme to be able to see whether real progress will be made – or, indeed, whether the broad philosophy of CfE is sufficiently realised in the detailed guidance that has been issued or in the practice that has developed from it.

(b) New Professionalism

An ambitious programme, such as *Curriculum for Excellence* is intended to be, will not succeed unless Scotland has a teaching profession of the highest calibre. There is a lot of evidence from all over the world that this issue of professional competence is of the highest importance. Finland is the country that has topped the international league table of the developed world's education systems for much of the past decade. Finland's success has been described by Professor Jari Lavonen of the University of Helsinki in the following terms, "We decided all teachers should have a Master's Degree – putting teaching on an equal footing with law and medicine. Teacher education is, therefore, very attractive." The prestige accorded to teaching is such that, last year, it was more difficult to enter a primary teaching course than go to a medical school.

Similarly, in 2011, the Education Secretary in England published a White Paper called "The Importance of Teaching" in which it says, "The evidence from around the world shows us the most important factor in determining the effectiveness of a school system is the quality of its teachers." Similar evidence can be drawn from other countries and from the OECD, which stated in its 2009 Education Prospective that, "There is substantial evidence indicating that the quality of teachers and their teaching is the most important factor shaping student outcomes that is open to significant policy influence."

In the same way, the McKinsey report on how the world's best education systems keep improving stated that recruiting the right people and then investing in their professional development are crucial success factors.

Once again, Scotland can point to some promising developments. In early 2011, the Donaldson report "Teaching Scotland's Future" was published. Its conclusions are clear. "The two most important and achievable ways in which school education can realise the high aspiration Scotland has for its young people are through supporting and strengthening, firstly, the quality of teaching, and secondly, the quality of leadership." Among the report's recommendations (which have been accepted by the Scottish Government) is one that more of teachers' professional development should be formally accredited with the long-term aim that Scotland should work towards a Master's Degree level profession of the kind that exists in Finland.

Also during 2011, the report of the Review of Teacher Employment in Scotland, known as the McCormac report, was published. It too stresses the importance of teaching quality and makes a series of recommendations designed to enhance teacher professionalism.

As in the case of *Curriculum for Excellence*, these reports represent a good starting point but it is too early to say how successfully their recommendations will be carried into effect.

(c) New Technology

One further issue deserves to be mentioned because it is certain to be vitally important to education in the future. The potential of ICT has yet to be seriously exploited in school education, whether in Scotland or elsewhere. It is remarkable that new technology that has revolutionised so many spheres of activity such as finance, tourism or retail has such a limited effect on the knowledge industry itself.

Certainly ICT has brought about improvements in school administration and timetabling. Imaginative use is made of computers in many classrooms. Technologies such as whiteboards have become well established.

There are concerns, however, about the nature of teaching about new technology itself. Computer science is not well developed in schools. There are concerns that young people do not generally acquire programming skills or the capability to create using new technology.

Of perhaps even greater importance, the ability of new technology to transform the nature of the educational process is largely untapped. The possibility of genuinely personalised education is not yet being realised. Use of technology to free schools from the traditional organisational constraints of class organisation, fixed operating hours and so forth is scarcely developed.

These are issues that Scotland will have to explore seriously over the next few years if it is to maintain pace with other countries that are beginning to grasp the potential of new technology.

5. Conclusions and Future Work

The preceding sections of this interim report present a picture of contemporary Scottish school education that is, in many ways, encouraging but ought not to promote complacency. By international standards, Scotland's schools perform well. However, they do not come at the head of any international league table and their relative position has declined (although it is possible to argue that the decline may now have been arrested). Contemporary economic and social circumstances mean that progress in the future will require to be more rapid and more decisive than in recent decades.

At the same time, Scotland has taken a number of policy initiatives that accord well with global thinking, both on future educational needs and on how to secure educational improvement. It is not yet possible to demonstrate the success of these initiatives. Indeed, the lack of any systematic evaluation of them has to be a cause of concern.

The Commission has, however, set itself the task of looking to the long term. It has to consider how the process of educational improvement can be both sustained and accelerated. How, for example, can our rapidly increasing understanding of how people learn be turned to practical effect?

The Commission will look at issues of curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. For example, it will consider how teachers can help to make young people better learners and how schools can face the huge challenges of curriculum principles such as personalisation, challenge and enjoyment and depth. However, it will also consider whether action is required in other fields such as governance. Is it right that schools are not directly accountable to those (such as young people and parents) to whom they feel most responsible while being formally accountable only to public bodies to whom they often have much less feeling of responsibility?

These will include a consideration of the change process itself. The *Curriculum for Excellence* programme has had among its objectives a reduction in central prescription and increased discretion at the level of the individual school and practitioner. It was intended that setting clear long-term objectives for the system – promoting the qualities of successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens – would give individual schools and teachers greater freedom of action in deciding how they should be pursued. This decentralised approach is designed to strengthen the role of the profession, liberate the creativity of teachers and provide an impetus for innovation. The Commission will consider whether there are lessons to be learned from the experience so far. However, its review of the change process will extend beyond the circumstances of Curriculum for Excellence. How can far-reaching change be brought about in a complex system like education? Does Scotland's education system have the requisite level of diversity to sustain a process of radical change that can transform young people's educational experience? Is the necessary performance data and management information available to support the process of improvement?

The standards achieved by Scottish education may be one of the factors that make reform difficult. Successive governments and local governments have been faced with a system which was experiencing sufficient success to make big change risky. In considering any form of radical change, where success is not guaranteed, any Minister or local leader has to consider the risks associated with change to a broadly successful system. Any prospect of risking very significant disruption or worse, any threat to standards, is almost bound to limit radical or adventurous educational reform.

In addition, this will almost inevitably be intensified when there has been opposition to proposals for reform. Such opposition has often come from within the teaching professions and has combined principled objections and concerns about workload. Arguably, all the major curricular reforms of recent years have been affected by this. The more radical elements of Standard Grade, for example, were either never implemented or were short-lived. The same could be argued in the case of Higher Still or the 5-14 programme where workload concerns brought the publication of 5-14 A Practical Guide.

Parents tend to be naturally cautious about education reform, fearing that their children will be “guinea pigs” in an experiment that has no guarantee of success.

As a result, educational reform in Scotland has tended to be ambitious in conception, but compromised in implementation. The consequence of this is that improvement has been incremental and not transformational and weaknesses in the system have continued.

One of the tasks for the Commission will be to make recommendations on the process, as well as the nature, of any reforms required.

Throughout the world the prevailing orthodoxy seems to be that improvement in education can only take place incrementally in small steps. Yet many other fields of human activity have undergone genuinely transformational change. Progress in nutrition and medicine has enabled people to grow taller, mature earlier and live longer. Is it not possible also to help them become smarter? In the modern world it may be that simply raising the average school to be as good as the best will not be enough. The Commission will explore these far reaching issues in its attempt to suggest how Scotland might establish the world’s first education system, genuinely fit for twenty-first century purpose.

22nd June 2012

Appendix 1

Membership of the Commission on School Reform

Keir Bloomer (Chair)	Former Director of Education
John Barnett	Economist
David Cameron	Former Director of Education
Heather Dunk	Principal, Kilmarnock College
Hamira Khan	Chief Executive, Scottish Youth Parliament
Frank Lennon	Headteacher, Dunblane High School
Ross Martin	Policy Director, Centre for Scottish Public
	Policy
Geoff Mawdsley	Director, Reform Scotland
Anne Marie McGovern	Headteacher, St. Benedict's Primary
	School, Easterhouse
Linda McKay	Principal, Forth Valley College
Paul McLennan	Councillor, East Lothian Council
Peter Peacock	Former Education Minister
Morag Pendry	Scottish Co-operative Trust
Catriona Reoch	Teacher, Govan High School
Graham Simpson	Councillor, South Lanarkshire Council
Dame Joan Stringer	Principal, Edinburgh Napier University
Angus Tulloch	Investment Manager

The Commission received research support from Jim Goodall.

Appendix 2

Summary of evidence submitted up to 21 May 2012²

'Whilst it has been widely noted that the Finns have seen positive results from measures such as children starting school at age seven and no national inspection of schools or league tables, the event's first speaker from the University of Helsinki, attributed Finland's success to their educational approach. She highlighted the fact that Finnish culture regards education as a source of hope for a better society and life. This requires the same educational opportunities for every child, hence a completely comprehensive system. At the forefront of this are excellent quality teachers, who are trained to at least Masters Level, with only ten per cent of those that apply being accepted onto the teacher training program. Although teachers are not paid especially highly, prestige and status attracts the best candidates into the profession, who are then given the freedom and trust they deserve.' (Part of report of a meeting in the Finnish Embassy: Finnish-English meeting)

'Staff are much more likely to show commitment and gain job satisfaction if they are treated with respect, listened to when changes are proposed, given support when under pressure, and accountable to managers who lead by example rather than exhortation. Sadly, however, in a culture which prefers spin and celebrity, common sense is likely to have little appeal.' (Professor Walter Humes, *Scottish Review*, 26th April 2012).

'The review must not begin from a position that Scottish education is a deficit model – but it is, of course, perfectly legitimate to look at ways in which Scotland can improve.' (Submission to the Commission, 2012)

Introduction

The Commission called for written submissions as part of its overall evidence gathering process. Responses continue to come in and this appendix summarises what has been received up to 21 May 2012.

Evidence was sought under three headings. These were:

1. What are the main challenges facing Scottish Education and how are these best addressed?

² This appendix provides a summary of evidence as it was actually presented. The opinions expressed are those of the respondents and are not necessarily shared by the Commission. The deadline for submitting evidence to the CSR is 29 June 2012. The summary only includes evidence submitted prior to 21 May 2012.

2. Is Scottish education sufficiently ambitious? What should it do to ensure it meets future challenges and remains internationally competitive?
3. What are the outcomes for children and young people we should hold as being most important?

This summary follows this general format although much of the evidence submitted did not.

1. What do you think are the main challenges facing Scottish schools and how are these best addressed?

Submissions reflected a broad perspective on the challenges facing school education in Scotland. In the main these could be seen as falling into the following broad categories;

- a. Governance
- b. Finance
- c. Equality
- d. Personalisation and choice
- e. Early intervention
- f. Quality of teaching and leadership; teachers' conditions of service
- g. Curriculum and assessment
- h. Inspection and school effectiveness.

a/b Governance and Finance

In relation to governance, there was a consistent expression of support for headteachers, working in close association with parents and the communities served by their schools, to have greater delegated authority to lead, manage and administer their schools or their schools operating in clusters of one form or another. It was noted that any such arrangements would provide a context for young people/pupils to play a more significant role in the governance of the schools they attend. It was noted too that such arrangements might allow much more significant partnerships to develop between schools and local businesses, including social enterprises.

One submission made a very strong plea for parents to be provided with very much more support than is available to them currently. A number of submissions argued that the involvement of parents in their children's education needed to be enhanced significantly. The effective performance of current parent roles, e.g. in Parent Councils was thought to be difficult without their having well-grounded and research-informed information about different educational approaches and the capacity to engage with 'experts' to make sense of that information; a more results-focussed emphasis being introduced into the School

Improvement Planning process; and their having access to more and richer information about the work and impact of the schools their children attend. This interest in having more and richer information included some interest in there being more rigorous testing of young people's skills in literacy and numeracy.

The submissions indicated a concern about the scale of the funding available to schools currently – it was thought to be insufficient, even though it has doubled in cash terms since 1999. There were concerns that this lack of funding was having a significant effect on schools' operations. The submissions indicated also strong support for more financial control being delegated to headteachers so that the efficiency and effectiveness with which they deploy their budgets can be increased. Some submissions indicated that it would be beneficial if there were a more substantial delegation of authority to headteachers including staff recruitment and other personnel matters.

The review of *Devolved Management in Schools (2011)*, which was carried out by David Cameron, is very apposite in this connection. Much of what it has to say is echoed in the comments made on this matter in submissions.

Partnership working was very strongly favoured by one submission from the further education sector.

There was a concern expressed that schools were over-controlled by local (education) authorities and that the support provided by these agencies was highly variable and, often, ineffectual. One submission echoed calls, which have been made elsewhere for schools to be brought under the management of regional boards. There were concerns expressed that the Scottish school system lacked diversity and that this was, increasingly, a factor contributing to perceived declines in the attainment and achievement of young people in Scotland, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Arguments were made in one submission that approaches similar to that defined by the 'free school movement' should be adopted in Scotland to support the development of a more diverse system of provision, expanding pupil and parental choice. At least one submission argued very strongly however that the state comprehensive system is a continuing strength of the Scottish education system, that we need to continue to carry out reform within that context and that there is a lot of straightforward evidence that this is wholly possible, e.g. the gains in young people's attainment and achievement secured recently by St Luke's High School in East Renfrewshire and Our Lady and St Patrick's High School in West Dunbartonshire.

c/d Equity; Personalisation and Choice

A number of comments in submissions indicated that a need was seen for more individualised action, based on strong evidence about individual attainment and achievement, to be taken to address under-achievement, often correlated with disadvantage, such as that which can be observed in boys from the middle of primary school onwards. In this connection, one submission indicated the importance of providing young and adolescent boys with male mentors, particularly ‘makers’, who can display practical skills.

Continuing and intractable gaps in attainment and achievement between the relatively advantaged and the disadvantaged were commented on in a number of submissions. These are observations that reflect comments made in the OECD Review of the Quality and Equity of Education Outcomes in Scotland that took place in March 2007. It says;

“One major challenge facing Scottish schools is to reduce the achievement gap that opens up about Primary 5 and continues to widen throughout the junior secondary years (S1 to S4). Children from poorer communities and low socio-economic status homes are more likely than others to under-achieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide. A second challenge relates to the need to build on the strong platform of basic education through socially broader and more successful participation in upper secondary education and greater equity in Scottish higher education. Inequalities in staying-on rates, participation at different academic levels of national courses, and pass rates in these courses are a concern. So, too, is the number of young people leaving school with minimal (and in some cases no) qualifications and the comparatively high proportion in precarious transition.”

There were explicit concerns that little or no progress had been made in relation to the achievement gaps identified in the OECD report.

At least one submission indicated the need for the work of schools to be made more accessible to adults and the community more generally. While this happens in some schools, it is an ambition which has been unfulfilled now for many years.

A clear implication of a number of submissions was that personalisation and choice, the creation of a wider range of progressive pathways for a wider range of young people, the creation of a capacity within schools to support a wide range of learner journeys would depend very certainly on the establishment of cluster and other partnership arrangements; no single establishment is likely to be able to do this.

e Early intervention

A number of submissions have been very clear about the importance which should be attached to the early years, with that being taken to include primary education in some submissions, and the need for this stage, or these stages, in the education system to be given greater and consistent focus.

The role of librarians in promoting early literacy was emphasised in one submission. The importance of free play was emphasised in another.

One submission raised the issue of whether or not Scottish children start their experience of formal schooling too early arguing that this should be delayed for a year adopting models which appear to work well in Scandinavian countries.

f The quality of teaching and leadership

A number of submissions referred to the Donaldson Report and made clear the importance which should be attached to its early and full implementation. There was also reference made to the McCormac report as well. The importance of securing consistently good or better standards of teaching was made clear in a number of submissions as was the need for teachers' conditions to be held under review so that they did not become restrictive, barriers potentially to changes in practice which might become necessary in the future; the need for flexibility was spoken of in relation to class sizes.

There was some concern expressed about the quality of some Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes and about the extent to which the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) might be compromised in a time of significant budgetary constraints.

The continuing and central significance of high quality Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teaching and support staff was given emphasis in a number of submissions. The need to ensure that staff are familiar with new technologies and their role in emergent delivery methods was seen as being of some importance; access to these technologies needs to be improved in schools too. Good quality training in a range of teaching methods of proven significance in the development of young people's personal, social and cognitive capacity was recognised as being of importance in a number of submissions. Some respondents indicated concerns about the range, scale and quality of much of the CPD available to teachers and the funding being made currently. Concerns were also expressed about the extent to which Curriculum for Excellence has been and is dominating the CPD agenda currently and the failure of much of that training to address the pedagogy and principles underpinning the programme. Some submissions stressed the importance of teacher professionalism and

argued that a focus on pedagogy underpinned by meaningful reflection will be vital for quality learning.

Current issues of staff morale were commented on; these were related to concerns about demands arising from Curriculum for Excellence, the scale and pace of change generally and pay and conditions issues.

The issue of how the problems posed by under-performing teachers might best be addressed was raised in a number of submissions. Equally, a number of others noted that there was a need for employers to give greater emphasis to the general welfare of teachers.

The central role of headteachers in leading schools, motivating and inspiring staff and young people was referred to in a number of submissions. The recruitment of head teachers and other senior promoted staff in schools was seen as being a matter of great significance; concerns were reported about what might be done when an appointment did not work out as well as had been anticipated. Fixed-term contracts for headteachers were suggested as a way of addressing this concern. Concerns were expressed about the disparate nature of much leadership development across the country.

g Curriculum and assessment

There was general support expressed for the principles informing Curriculum for Excellence and for its overall aims; its strategic significance was recognised and valued in submissions. There was some concern expressed that these principles remained poorly understood by many involved in and with an interest in education.

The implementation of Curriculum for Excellence was a strong focus in the submissions from local authorities. There was concern expressed that support for its implementation had been insufficient in a number of important regards. A recent submission from an eminent national society reinforced these concerns. The submission criticised the lack of an evidence base for the effectiveness of the educational approaches advocated through Curriculum for Excellence and the absence of a clearly articulated concept of how an integrated continuum of general education and skills might be established.

There was strong support for the notion that headteachers and their staff should have a level of delegated authority sufficient to allow them to make decisions, in association with parents and young people, about how Curriculum for Excellence might best be implemented in their schools. While Curriculum for Excellence was supported in submissions, sometimes strongly, there were concerns expressed that the focus on interdisciplinary enquiry needs to take more account of the skills and knowledge learners might need to carry out such enquiries with effect. Librarians could be expected to have a major role in

supporting the design and delivery of such enquiries which would, of course, not have to be undertaken in the traditional setting of the school but in more virtual settings and with peers drawn from a variety of contexts, nationally and internationally.

Some submissions noted the significance which Curriculum for Excellence has placed on the development of young people's personal and social skills and raised questions as to how they might be developed more systematically and inclusively than is seen to be the case currently.

Some submissions expressed concerns that generous assumptions about the quality of learning in primary schools in relation to literacy and numeracy, since one in six pupils leave Scottish primary schools without being functionally literate, and nascent higher order skills, might not be fully justified; progression between sectors might continue therefore to be problematic.

There were concerns expressed that vocational and practical skills were still very under-valued in secondary schools – that this remained an intractable problem, diminishing opportunities for many young people. Should there be opportunities, under certain circumstances, for young people to leave school at 14 to follow apprenticeship and similar programmes? There was a desire expressed that more, much more, should be done to ensure that young people moved from school into positive post-school destinations.

The need for disciplined, calm schools was referred to in one submission; it was seen as a pre-requisite for the delivery of a positive experience for all young people.

Some submissions indicated that there was a need for much more and more appropriate use to be made of information and communication technologies to promote and support learning; this included a desire to see greater use being made of social media. There was a desire expressed in some submissions to see the deliberate and systematic development of a range of alternative delivery systems which did not depend on the school, as traditionally conceived and operated, as the sole context for young people's learning. The development and management of at least some aspects of such systems may provide school and other librarians with an extension of their role in supporting young people's learning. How education keeps pace with the speed of change was seen as a challenge in some submissions.

A number of submissions argued very strongly that Scottish schools need to make more use of new approaches to learning which draw upon a range of insights into the human brain, the functioning of human societies, and learning as a self-organising activity.

The continuing domination of the Higher syllabuses and examinations in schools was called into question in some submissions. Other comments on the current examination arrangements included a desire to see more criterion-referenced assessment, examinations which reflect the need for young people to develop a range of skills, including higher order cognitive skills, although it was recognised that attempts were being made to do this in the context of Curriculum for Excellence. In this connection, one submission raised the issue of whether or not secondary schools should be free to use examination bodies other than the SQA. In this connection, a number of submissions identified the latter stages of what would now be called the 'Senior Phase' as being in need of significant reforms which would strengthen accreditation systems in, for example, STEM courses and give further education colleges, universities and others, perhaps, a much bigger and more direct role to play in supporting purposeful progression in learner journeys.

h Inspection and school effectiveness

There was considerable concern expressed about the measures which are used currently to assess school effectiveness. The current emphasis on attainment measures was seen as distorting the work of schools, skewing it in favour of the academic; it was seen as discriminatory and, possibly, antithetical to the successful introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, it encouraged 'teaching to the test'. Measures such as those relating to young people's movement into positive post-school destinations were thought to merit greater emphasis; measures based more on 'narratives' were commended in some submissions.

One submission contains a very well-argued and well-grounded critique of international surveys describing them as "totally misleading". This same submission is critical of school inspections. Other submissions saw the information provided by such surveys as providing strong, negative indications of the 'health' of the Scottish education system.

Inspection programmes, while giving a very welcome new emphasis on self-evaluation, were described in some submissions as being too judgemental and needing to take further steps towards becoming altogether more formative in character.

Alternative methods for assessing school effectiveness are commended to the Commission; those operating in Queensland, Finland and Chile were referred to specifically.

2. Is Scottish education sufficiently ambitious? What should it do to ensure it meets future challenges and remains internationally competitive?

It was quite common for submissions to indicate that many schools, particularly secondary schools, were not thought to be sufficiently ambitious for all of their pupils, that they displayed insufficient aspiration for many young people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those who presented schools with disciplinary and other challenges, e.g. those associated with additional support needs or with young people being in care. Clearly there are schools which would not conform to this picture.

Some respondents questioned whether there are the incentives to raise attainment and enhance achievement across the board.

There was a clear and strong indication that more emphasis needed to be given to the systematic, comprehensive and determined implementation of *Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)*; there was also reference to the demands which current additional support needs legislation had placed on schools, needs which many schools had found it difficult to meet fully.

Here is what one parent, also a teacher, had to say on the matter of the ambition of the Scottish education system.

“During the years I've lived in Scotland what I've found alarming is the lack of urgency on the part of policy makers and political leaders to address this. More alarming, and probably connected, is the absence of accountability. Friends, teachers and even politicians I know in England are gob smacked when I tell them schools have no Governing Bodies and that tests and assessment results are kept secret. In England some would argue that politicians have been overly involved. However, there is no doubt that the Blair years injected energy and a renewed purpose into the English school system. The pressure to improve performance was immense down south, particularly in inner-city schools. The pendulum may have swung too far towards targets/outcomes but the focus was at least upon the people the system is there to serve – pupils.

Other submissions take a rather more positive view:

“We possess a remarkable curriculum structure, with incredible versatility, a very high quality teaching force, while standards in formal national examinations meet the highest world standards.”

and speak less positively about England's experience;

“Teachers in England continually expressed their frustration with continual government interference and the endless series of disastrous

‘reforms’ being carried through there. They often spontaneously spoke warmly of Scotland and how ‘we managed to do things better’.”

In general terms, Curriculum for Excellence was seen as representing ambition on the part of the Scottish education system but a number of concerns were expressed about the detail of its implementation – a number of submissions were concerned that it might not be the ‘cure-all’ which it is sometimes presented as.

Some submissions expressed, and strongly, the view that the ambition of Scotland’s schools had been, and is being, limited by the context in which they are expected to operate and by low levels of competence shown by many national agencies and local authorities.

3. What are the outcomes for children and young people we should hold as being most important?

A significant number of the people and organisations which submitted evidence sought, at some point, in their submissions to indicate the overall aims they thought Scotland’s schools should be working with young people to achieve in the course of their overall experience of schooling. These outcomes are listed below;

- a. Resilience and perseverance
- b. Self-sufficiency and initiative
- c. Ambition and competitiveness
- d. Confidence
- e. Adaptability and flexibility
- f. Independence and responsibility
- g. Emotional intelligence
- h. (Global) Citizenship.

A number of submissions recognised that the outcomes sought with young people would need to place less emphasis on the acquisition and (temporary) retention of detailed knowledge and more on core ideas, concepts and skills.

A number of submissions referred to broad notions of personal and social skills. Others referred to the development of some kind of ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ in young people as being one of the key outcomes that the Scottish education system should be promoting.

The core skill model utilised currently by the SQA was described in some submissions as having continuing merit – the components of this model are Communication, Numeracy, ICT (including information literacy), Working with Others and Problem Solving.

It was thought important that young people should be supported in developing healthy lifestyles through systematic exposure to sport, the

arts and outdoor education, including outdoor free play, the importance of which was emphasised in a number of submissions.

In addition there was a strong, if fairly general, notion that it was important they should be developing employability skills on a more systematic basis than might be seen to be the case currently.

It was thought important that young people should develop skills in the use of modern technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, as well as skills in literacy and numeracy. One submission argued strongly for arithmetic to be taught in its own right with much of mathematics, more generally, becoming an optional part of the curriculum. There was also strong support for the notion that young people should be supported in developing higher order cognitive skills along the lines of those described in the Report of the Excellence Group which looked at these skills. The use of inter-disciplinary projects was seen as being of importance in this connection; a number of submissions stressed the importance of young people having opportunities to acquire appropriate bodies of knowledge, key ideas and concepts, which would provide a context for them to develop such skills.

One submission set out a taxonomy of practical outcomes. These are shown below;

What they know:	The learners need to have knowledge of key ideas;
What they understand:	The learners need to understand key ideas (if we understand something, we can use that knowledge in a novel situation with some prospect of success);
What they can do:	The learners need to develop key skills (anything from mathematical procedures, verbal communication, to skills of basic food hygiene, to the skills of respecting the views of others);
How they evaluate:	Given the information technology revolution, learners need to know how to evaluate knowledge in terms of validity, accuracy, value, relevance
How they think:	The greatest educational inheritance of all these skills have been analysed, to date, into critical thinking, creative thinking, scientific thinking, systems thinking.

These outcomes bear a close relationship to those identified in the report of the Excellence Group which looked at Higher Order Skills.

Overall, the outcomes set in submissions could be seen as being broadly equivalent to those set out generally for Curriculum for Excellence. Curriculum for Excellence is described as providing a good basis for delivering important educational outcomes in many submissions.

Some comments made specific reference to the need for the curriculum to emphasise economic relevance. Arguments for the study of modern foreign languages to have a central place in the curriculum were presented by relevant interest groups. More frequently, the STEM subjects were referred to in this context.

The need for there to be more developed partnerships between schools and industry was also referred to as being seen to be of significance for young people's education.

Other comments and submissions sought to stress the importance of due prominence being given in the curriculum to issues of global significance such as climate change and sustainability.

Other submissions noted that the curriculum and the systematic management of its development on an on-going basis, along with CPD and issues of how opportunities for learning are delivered to young people, would need to take more explicit account of the still accelerating pace of the development of our knowledge and understanding in, for example, science and technology; this would be likely to demand a greater focus being placed on outcomes relating to core ideas, concepts and skills.

One submission concluded with this (slightly paraphrased) statement;

“We believe that this (a broad education which allows young people to flourish outside the classroom as well as in it) is best achieved when there is good leadership, self-discipline, a caring environment in which people matter more than systems management, and when the school experience will inspire as well as teach”.

