



## **Scottish Women's Convention response to the Scottish Government: A consultation on the replacement of the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the reform of Education Scotland**

**December 2021**

### **Premise**

The Scottish Government have launched a consultation to seek the views of stakeholders to inform recommendations relating to the future shape of Scotland's national education agencies. This was in response to the OECD report Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future,

This consultation seeks opinions and ideas on:

- the replacement of the SQA.
- the possible creation of a single specialist agency for curriculum and assessment.
- plans to substantially reform Education Scotland, including removing inspections from its functions.

### **The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)**

The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) is funded to engage with women throughout Scotland in order that their views might influence public policy. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at both a Scottish and UK level.

The SWC engages with women using a range of methods, including roadshow events, thematic conferences, and regional contact groups. This submission provides the views of women, reflecting their opinions and experiences in key areas relevant to women's equality.

The SWC is currently engaging with women through digital roadshows, online surveys, asking women to comment by email, and by telephoning those who want to talk. We are also using our wide network to ask women to collate views in their local communities and forward these to us on a regular basis. We are continuing to review innovative ways of engaging with women throughout Scotland using whichever medium is appropriate to them.

**Question 1.1 The Vision for Curriculum for Excellence reflects what matters for the education of children and young people in Scotland. Agree**

**1.2 What do you think should be retained and /or changed?**

The women that spoke with us advised that they felt the vision for education in Scotland was what mattered for the education of children and young people in Scotland, however they did note that although they agreed that the vision was reflective of what matters it also highlighted the disparity of the CFE across different local authorities and sometimes areas within local authorities.

- *“How can we ever achieve equity across our curriculum when some schools have better offerings for their pupils than others just because of the postcode they are in”*
- *“I agree with the vision of Excellence through raising attainment but what happens when schools stop the children from sitting exams and assessments for the fear they will fail, and it will bring the overall scores down for the school. They are not allowing them to see what they can achieve because it may reflect badly on the school, to me this is not excellence as we are limiting the opportunities for these children so as we look as if we are reducing attainment. It’s actually getting in the way of what it was meant to achieve”*
- *“How can the CFE achieve equity when we are failing hitting our national and local child poverty targets? Surely this will only be achieved when we have eradicated child poverty in the whole which looks like it will never happen”*
- *“I like the fact that the vision is ambitious, but it also has to be realistic, and we need to look at other ways in which some of our children will succeed as this can look very different for each child. I love the fact that we are trying to get it right for every child but is this realistic?”*

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

**2.1 Curriculum for Excellence provides a coherent progression in the journey of learners (3-18 and beyond) that gives them the best possible educational experience and enables them to realise their ambitions. Neither Agree or Disagree**

**2.2 Please share what you believe currently contributes to a coherent progression.**

Women who spoke with the SWC had a difference of opinion with regards to the Curriculum for Excellence and whether it provided a coherent progression in the journey of learners (3-18 and beyond).

Women told the SWC they were also mixed with whether that it gave them the best possible educational experience and enabled them to realise their ambitions. Although women seen the benefit of the framework and the flexibility it offered, they also thought that in some instances it did not give their children the best educational experience they could have had and was not aspirational enough for some children with complex needs or from poorer backgrounds.

*“My child has complex medical conditions which are genetic as a parent I am always trying to find the best fit regarding their education and also the therapies they need which can help them. I was told that the school my child was at could only do so much as they had limited*

*staff and resources. I had to research for schools to best fit my child's needs and that took me months of visits to different schools in different local authorities not to mention the emotional and physical turmoil to ensure that it was the best fit. When I got the school which I thought best fitted their needs I was told by my LA that their school was sufficient for what they thought my child needed. It took months of fighting, consultant appointments and letters to eventually get them moved. I was told that my child would not be able to do this or that at the school they were at but at this new school they are thriving, they are doing their exercises alongside their educational learning, and they are doing things that the other school said my child was not capable of doing. There are many parents out there who would not be able to do this due to their family and financial commitments and their children would not have these opportunities. It should not be down to the parents to find these establishments out but for the schools to work with the parents and their children to find the best education and establishment for them. The system is not coherent enough because it does not allow for progression if they think there is limited capacity" "They did not have aspirations for my child as they thought they were not capable this isn't getting it right for every child"*

- Women believe that aligning and logically organising the curriculum to suit the individual learner and ensuring that the resources are there for them is important to contribute to coherent progression.
- Women also stated that professional development and educational policies and practices are also important as is staff accountability.
- Women felt that depending on the management of the school and the aspirations they held for their children that this had implications on the coherent progression of learners.
- Women also stated that sometimes the coherent progression was thwarted due to the financial and liability factors from the local authorities in which the establishment sits.

### **2.3 Please share ideas you may have to improve learner progression across stages and sectors.**

Women advised that they thought there should be more accountability from local authorities with regards to providing the correct resources to ensure that children were able to progress. They also advised that this should also be a priority for the Scottish Government to address barriers which LA's were facing to provide these resources. An example of this was one woman's response regarding her child's progression. *"We knew that our child had developmental issues from an early age we had an educational psychologist in early years, and they recommended that they be sent for assessment, the waiting lists were so long so my child ended up in primary still with no diagnosis or help and was expected to be at the same standard as other children. This affected them mentally and affected their wellbeing. They ended up in the CAHM's system and after 3 years got a diagnosis by then they had lost education time and were not on level with their peers the school tried to help but the resources were not there to help enhance their learning a lack of educational psychologists were cited as part of the reason the school and LA couldn't get the correct resources for my child's needs without their input. They are now not on track for their learning and way behind educationally which will affect future learning. If the waiting lists for mental health services*

*and child services were not as long and they had enough educational psychologists working in education my child's progression may not have been adversely affected. This is why it's important that this is not just down to the school or the local authorities the Scottish Government has to address these barriers to enable everyone to have the same opportunities at the moment this isn't happening"*

- Local authorities work together to ensure that children have as many opportunities as possible and sharing good practice was another area that women felt could be improved to improve learner progression as well as looking at other countries and their practices to improve upon what we provide in Scotland.
- Important to look at the barriers to learner progression and what makes for poor attainment and high attainment and address the issues which contribute.

This wasn't just financial as one woman stated *"They government gave schools money in poorest areas to improve attainment, and this was fed into these schools. It's not always the money or the school that can help the learner progress sometimes this is other resources such as educational psychologists etc and schools are directed to what resources they can spend this money on so the flexibility for the needs of each child just isn't practical."* Another woman said *"I believe that not enough consultation happens with parents or the children to see how they feel this money would be best spent. They think they know the need and spend it as they think this will improve learner progression, but this isn't always what's needed. It's hard as if they are trying to get it right for every child that's not going to work"*

- More collaboration with the children and the families involved was necessary to improve learner progression. *"I wasn't listened too, I knew my child best and they said that my child was just refusing to learn it turned out after much pushing and prodding that they were diagnosed with dyslexia if it wasn't for my persistence, they would not have looked at this and my child would have been failed educationally."*

### **3.1 in Practice, learning communities are empowered and use the autonomy provided by curriculum for Excellence to design a curriculum that meets the needs of their learners.**

**Neither Agree or Disagree**

### **3.2 Please share ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance this in future.**

We had some women tell us that they thought the CFE was great and that their children had great opportunities because the educational settings their children where in made decisions which enhanced their learning journeys. One woman stated that *"My child's school have adapted for them whenever it has been required ensuring that they had a way to access the curriculum they needed in secondary they even allowed my child to attend another school so as they could access the subject's they needed to go to the university course they wanted because their school did not offer it"*

However, this started a topic with three more women stating the opposite due to the location of their schools and the availability of teachers in their local authority.

*"My child loves science she wanted to pick 3 science subjects but was unable to due to the timetable and the availability of teachers in the subject. I asked about going to a different*

*school but was advised due to transport and accessibility this was not feasible. This is going to affect her opportunities for the job she wants as she will have to attend college to pick this subject up which will take another year to 2 years for her to get the qualifications, she needs to do the job she wants. It's hard enough for women to get into STEM jobs but the fact that the way the curriculum is set out in her school disadvantages her is not fair. If she were in the neighbouring local authority school which is not in an area of deprivation this would not have been an issue as they have the teachers and the ability to adapt the curriculum to the child's needs. This is because the kids at our school because of its location are not expected to have as high a level of standard of education as our neighbouring school which is not in an area of deprivation it really is a postcode lottery"*

When we spoke to women, they also advised that digital technology could be used to help learning communities to use the autonomy provided for the CFE to ensure that children for poorer areas were not disadvantaged but they highlighted that the infrastructure has to be there. *"At the moment we cannot get online and physical learning at the same time this would benefit so many pupils who currently are unable to access school whether this be for health, caring, financial reasons if the pandemic has taught us anything is that there are new innovative ways to ensure the CfE works for all"*

#### **4.1 The creation of a Curriculum and Assessment Agency will help to address the misalignment of curriculum and assessment as outlined in the OECD report.**

##### **Neither agree or Disagree**

#### **4.2 Please share your views of the potential advantages of establishing such an Agency.**

Some women stated that they think there are many advantages of establishing a Curriculum and Assessment Agency.

*"It gives us the opportunity to create a fairer system which can be brought into this new digital world we find ourselves in. This would make it easier for us as a country to capture the data and see when things are going wrong earlier. It also means that good practice can be shared more easily across all LA's if they are using the same system"*

*"Another advantage of a digital system is that we can track the attainment gap and also the impact of further education, higher education and work-based learning to see if we are closing the gap especially if we use systems already in place such as the Scottish candidate numbers"*

*"Courses and assessments could be available to everyone regardless of where they are in Scotland this means that learners could access any subjects that they wanted to learn and have the opportunity to be assessed and certificated in that subject taking out the postcode lottery aspect we have now in education"*

A woman that spoke who is a teacher said that this online digital aspect could help teachers cut back on the administrative side of their jobs.

*"This would allow us to spend more time on the individuals learning and working out the resources for them and helping us develop ourselves to ensure we were able to deliver a higher*

*standard of work. We would be able to show what standards we have for an A, B, C etc and help the individual work to their fullest potential"*

Another advantage is that it could help to address the issues found in the OECD and improve on these as we create a new assessment structure which would hopefully be fairer on everyone who accesses the system.

*"It would be a great opportunity to get everyone around the table working collaboratively, this would include all stakeholders including the learners themselves and using all of their experiences to build a flexible enough curriculum and assessment agency that we do get education right for every child"*

#### **4.3 Please share your views of the potential disadvantages of establishing such an Agency.**

Some women are still unconvinced that a creation of a curriculum and Assessment Agency will help address the findings found in the OECD report in fact the time it will take to set up and establish this agency will affect children who are due to sit exams in the next 2 -3 years.

*"It's already bad enough that because of the pandemic the attainment gap is getting bigger. The fact that they have decided to change the whole system whilst these kids are already struggling to cope with circumstances beyond their control is just crazy. Kids are sitting continual assessment, then mock exams and exams it's exerting a lot of pressure not just on the children, but their families and also the teaching staff at the school's and now they have to cope with the uncertainty of a new system which we don't know when it will even be in place, what it looks like or if it will solve the issues, it just beggars belief"*

Another disadvantage will be if this new system just focusses on schools, then you lose a lot of the economies of scale around things like online assessments, digital certification, and data management. Some feel that this will lead to a system where vocational qualifications will be lost in the merger or seen as less than.

*"Other vocational certificates which my child gained might not be available if they change the current system if it weren't for these qualifications she would not have got into college. I am afraid that if we reform all of these then colleges and universities won't recognise their importance, and this will lead to less opportunities for our children in the future. We need colleges and universities to be invested in this or our children will lose out on places, and these will be given to students from other countries where their educational qualifications are established"*

Another woman commented with regards to the cuts in funding to the SQA over the last year.

*"How are the Scottish Government intending to fund a whole new agency with half the money it previously did and ensure a high level of quality is ensured? "How does the government maintain the quality which will be expected by other parties? Are they aiming to retrain old staff from the SQA and if so, how will this be any different than a rehash and reshuffle of staff?"*

There were also worries about the loss of the SQA brand and how that would damage awarding and accreditation business across the UK and internationally. A few women voiced

their concern that by removing SQA it won't solve the issues which have been highlighted by the OECD report.

**5.1 The full breadth of existing SQA qualifications play an important part of the curriculum offered by secondary schools. Agree**

**5.2 Please identify the main factors, if any, that support a broader range of SQA qualifications being included in the curriculum in secondary schools.**

The majority of women the SWC spoke to believe the more opportunities there were for broader qualifications meant more children from more disadvantaged backgrounds would be able to study these subjects when predominately they may have not been taught in their local authority or secondary school due to lack of teachers or resources. Having the opportunity to have more access to more subjects allows individual learners to access subjects which interest them and would allow them to gain the skills and knowledge to go onto higher education or jobs which they may not have had the opportunity to do so before. It would also have the benefit of teachers working with different students from different backgrounds and help develop their teaching practices. It was felt that this would create a more equitable environment as long as the resources were in place to sustain it.

**5.3 Please share any ideas you may have on what is needed to enhance the role of a broader variety of qualifications in the curriculum in secondary schools.**

Women felt access to digital technology for all learners was needed this includes programmes for individual learner needs which would help them access the broader range of qualifications. An example of this was given *"A resource which could translate the materials for pupils were English was an additional language or software for Dyslexic students which made reading the materials easy or ensuring that there was an auditory version if the learner could not read the materials."* Women also felt that having an infrastructure in place for collaborative working may also benefit a broader variety of qualifications as teachers and students would be able to learn from their peers and enhance their own personal development.

- It was important for practitioners to stay up to date with education and that this as well as the variety of qualifications would be reviewed regularly.
- That we need to keep the variety of qualifications challenging and use innovative ways to keep learners engaged.
- It was important that learners seen the worth in other subjects and the possibilities these might open up.

One woman stated that this could be done by arranging events and training and developing these into their teaching style to *"ensure that you capture the enthusiasm of the learner to enhance personal development."*

**6.1 Technologies are fully and appropriately utilised as a support for curriculum and assessments. Agree**

**6.2 Please share any comments you may have on the use of technologies to support curriculum and assessments, and what could be done to deliver improvements.**



Women have stated that technologies can be used to break down barriers especially with regards to language and disabilities which often learners do not have access to due to resources and funds at a school or local authority level. Using technologies can help learners access parts of the curriculum they may have been unable to access before. There were concerns with regards to digital exclusion due to broadband and connection issues and also the electricity used to power some of these devices. It is therefore important that learners when needed have access to charging points throughout the day to sustain their learning and have access to Wi-Fi and broadband connection where there is limited availability. It is also important that there are replacement technologies available and the infrastructure to hold the data that learners will be accessing and storing with regards to their learning and assessments. This also has to protect privacy and must conform to GDPR.

There are many children who cannot access the physical school building for a variety of reasons, so it is important that these children get the same opportunities as others. This means ensuring they have access to the technologies and know how they work. It should also spread across different local authorities. One woman mentioned care experienced children who may be moved from household to household and from one local authority to another for safety reasons and how they should be able to access the same learning from wherever they may be placed as this is outside their control and they should not be disadvantaged because of it. Women also brought up families fleeing domestic violence and one stated that *“Having access to online curriculum and assessment means these can be done from anywhere and can ensure the safety of the families who are having to flee abuse. This would save worry over the perpetrator turning up at school buildings to follow the children to their place of safety”*

### **SECTION 3 - ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

**8.1 There is clarity on where the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence lie. Neither Agree or Disagree.**

**8.2 Please indicate where you think the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence should lie.**

The women the SWC spoke with said they did not know where the responsibilities for the strategic direction, review and updates for Curriculum for Excellence lie although one did say she felt this was with the SQA and Education Scotland.

**9.1 There is clarity on the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs for support with curriculum and assessment issues.  
Neither Agree or Disagree**

**9.2 Please share which aspects of the support currently provided by national agencies and other providers is working well.**

Most women the SWC spoke with did not know the roles played by national agencies and other providers to say what was working well or not.



**9.3 Please indicate where you think greater clarity is needed in relation to the roles played by national agencies and other providers for responding to needs / requests for support with curriculum and assessment issues.**

As most women we spoke to have no idea of the relation of national agencies or other providers for responding to needs/requests for support with curriculum and assessment issues. It is important that more work is done to speak with parents regarding the CfE and everyone involved with it. There was a lack of understanding of who would be responsible for it all and if this would be the new Curriculum and Assessment Agency going forward.

**10.1 There is clarity on where high-quality support for leadership and professional learning can be accessed to support practitioners. Agree**

**10.2 Please share any comments you may have on support for leadership and professional learning.**

The women we spoke to referenced Education Scotland as being a place to get high quality support for leadership and professional learning to support practitioners.

**11.1 There is sufficient trust with all stakeholders, including children, young people, parents & carers, so they are genuinely involved in decision making. Disagree**

**11.2 Please share any ideas you may have on how trust and decision making can be further improved.**

The women we spoke with advised that they felt the meetings they attended for discussion were mainly tokenistic and that views were not valued. They said they did not trust their views to be taken forward especially if they went against what the local authority stance was and if their views were going to cost the LA and school money even if it was to enhance the experience of learning of the children in their school. They felt they and their children were often excluded from decision making and would be brought in to say that they had involvement in the decision making once the decision was already made.

An example one of the women gave was regarding the attainment fund that some schools received. *"The parents were invited in by the school to discuss how the money was going to be spent. The decision was already made, and we had to agree or disagree with their decision. There was no genuine input or valued discussions with the parents who had ideas of their own about how this money could have been spent."*

One woman said she felt the school had the power and because they didn't have enough information about the CfE she felt that the school knew best and went along with their decisions. *"It often felt like they pulled us in to tell us what they were doing rather than gain our opinion. It felt like being back at school and be directed to what they were doing whether we had any views or not"*

Women told the SWC that at every level from schools to the Scottish Government that they genuinely had to listen to what parents and children were saying. They often felt that things

were being done to them rather than having a genuine voice and say about the changes regarding their children's learning.

*One woman said "It would be nice to have parents and children having active roles with regards to the national organisations and partners who were making the decisions to ensure lived experiences were used so as changes that were being made would be beneficial for all the children. We talk about getting it right for them all but how can you if you do not shape your services around the experiences on the ground"*

### **12.1 Independent inspection has an important role to play in scrutiny and evaluation, enhancing improvement and building capacity. Strongly Agree**

### **12.2 Please give examples of how you would like to see scrutiny and evaluation being carried out in the future.**

The women that the SWC spoke to felt it was important that there was accountability across the board to ensure that the highest standards were being delivered and maintained in schools in Scotland. They felt that it was important that this was independent and that the inspectors had powers to report and act on failings. They also felt it important that the inspectors promoted positive experiences they had and were able to share this with others who may need additional support. It was felt that scrutiny and evaluation were good tools to gain feedback on improving current practice. Women also stated that more emphasis should be put on children and families lived experiences of working with the schools and their feedback on how they felt the schools were building capacity and improving learning experiences for the learners.

*One woman said "the last time there was an inspection it was as if the parents who would give positive reviews of the school were picked. There were many more who wanted to give feedback to improve on the way they felt the school was being run from their experiences, but they were never picked. It seems unfair and is not reflective of best practice."*

The women we spoke to wanted inspections to be more transparent around how they work and how inspectors would hold the schools accountable and what that process would be. They wanted to ensure that every parent knew the process in how to raise concerns with inspectors to ensure that everyone had the ability and capacity to raise any issues or highlight good practice.

### **13 Please share any additional comments on roles and responsibilities in Scotland's education system.**

Women who spoke with the SWC stated they wanted:

- Accountability for failings.
- Good practice highlighted and shared throughout Local Authorities.
- Independent Inspections with power to hold schools, LA, and SG accountable.
- Better collaborative working to ensure children were getting the best education.
- Stakeholder events which included parents and children which was meaningful and not tokenistic.

- Every child to have the same opportunities within education regardless of area, disability, colour, religion, poverty etc.

### Conclusion

The SWC is grateful for the opportunity to respond to the Scottish Government's consultation on the replacement of the Scottish Qualifications Authority and the reform of Education Scotland. As an organisation, we will continue to work with women from across Scotland to gather voices and experiences relating to this topic and its effects on women's equality.

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