# All Learners in Scotland Matter:
# The National Discussion on Education

## Final Report

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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**Final Report**

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**(Independent Facilitators)**

**Submitted to Scottish Government and COSLA**

**2023**

# Foreword

We are honoured to be Independent Facilitators of the National Discussion to inform a renewed vision for the future of Scottish education. We have sought throughout this National Discussion to uphold our role as Independent Facilitators by genuinely seeking out and listening to voices across Scotland. In particular, we have sought the views of children and young people, especially those who are not frequently heard in large-scale engagement activities, such as the National Discussion.

In this report, we present and represent the viewpoints of those who responded to the call of 'Let's Talk Scottish Education'. This report identifies themes and suggestions that had broad support in the responses. Our commitment to be truly independent facilitators means that our report also includes views that can be conflicting, controversial, and perhaps uncomfortable for some to hear. We feel strongly that it is our responsibility to represent what we heard in response to the question: "*What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future and how do we make that a reality?*"

The scale of response to the National Discussion was unprecedented in the history of engagement about the Scottish education system. We are deeply grateful to everyone who gave their time and attention to share their views, experiences, expertise, and suggestions. We appreciated the opportunity to meet with people in person across Scotland, to facilitate and participate in online meetings, events, and focus groups, to engage in social media activities for #TalkScottishEducation, to read the responses submitted, and to view photographs, drawings, videos, and other forms of submissions received.

Facilitating the National Discussion has been a true honour.  We have both spent our careers working in education and we believe in the power of education to transform lives and life chances. We approached our role as Independent Facilitators as needing to put aside our own views and genuinely listen to the views expressed by participants. It was inspiring and energising to hear the passion, care, and concern

that participants in the National Discussion had for ensuring the very best education for children and young people In Scotland.

We heard from children and young people about what they liked, wanted, and needed for an education inside and outside of school that respected their rights and equipped them for success in their lives. We met with education professionals who spoke of instilling the joy and igniting the love of learning and their appreciation about the opportunity to talk with each other and with us about learning and teaching.

We heard from parents and carers who wanted the very best for their child/children and to be actively engaged in their education. We also heard from organisations, agencies, and communities who wanted to contribute to supporting the rights, learning, equity, and well-being of children and young people across Scotland.

Many of the National Discussion engagements involved lots of energy, conversations, and ideas. We heard an optimism for the future of Scottish education and an enthusiasm to be part of taking the outcomes of the National Discussion going forward.

Facilitating the National Discussion has also been humbling and, at times, challenging. We heard about experiences that were deeply concerning and troubling. We heard from some parents and carers who felt that their child/children had been failed by the Scottish education system. We heard from young carers who just wanted to 'be ordinary at school' despite their huge responsibilities at such a young age. We heard of children and young people who did not receive the necessary supports and resources to meet their needs, including Additional Support Needs, long-term conditions, and disabilities. We heard about distressing incidents and inequities, including use of exclusions, experiences of violence, suicidal thoughts and attempts, bullying, harassment, discrimination, anxiety, stress, and ill-health. We

listened to people expressing frustration, grief, and anger. We heard a pessimism about what was truly possible and a cynicism about whether genuine educational improvement was intended and could be achieved.

Throughout the responses, there was a concern for the present and future realities. The need to make practical and relevant changes with sufficient implementation supports and time for consolidation was stressed. The National Discussion took place in the aftermath of a global pandemic with its continuing impacts on health, wellbeing, equity, and learning for children and young people (and for adults). The impact of austerity, a cost-of-living crisis, climate change and environmental concerns, and war in our world cannot be downplayed.

The emerging future is also pressing – rapid digital acceleration, increasing diversity and migration, and changing employment, entrepreneurship, and career opportunities and trajectories. While the purpose of the National Discussion was to establish a renewed vision for Scottish education, realising the vision requires attention to the practicalities of designing, implementing, resourcing, and developing the capacity for short term, medium term and long-term educational change outlined in the Call to Action.

We would like to thank the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) for co-convening this historic National Discussion. We are indebted for the support provided by officials in the National Discussion team and the independent analyses of responses submitted conducted by The Lines Between. We appreciate greatly the many individuals, groups, and organisations who hosted and facilitated their own National Discussion events and activities and submitted responses to inform this work. As stated previously, we are deeply grateful to everyone who engaged with, participated in, and responded to this National Discussion.

We have listened to many voices. The experience has been inspiring, insightful, and informative, we felt trusted in the process to listen and learn. While the official National Discussion has ended, ongoing engagement in education must continue, and vital appropriate actions must follow. We are hopeful for a future Scottish education where *All Learners in Scotland Matter* and fundamentally know that they matter. The current and future generations of learners in Scotland deserve nothing less.

Professor Carol Campbell and Professor Alma Harris

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# 1.0 Introduction

1.1 The need for a National Discussion to establish a compelling and consensual renewed vision for the future of Scottish education was recommended by the Muir Review *Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education[1].* In that review, it was also recommended that the National Discussion needed to be as inclusive as possible and not afford a "narrative privilege" to established education organisations.

1.2 Acting on these recommendations, the Scottish Government, and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) agreed to co-convene a National Discussion on the future of Scottish education.

1.3 We were invited to be Independent Facilitators of this National Discussion and commenced work in July 2022. This final report provides an overview of the National Discussion and proposes the vision, values, and the high-level Call to Action based upon what we heard.

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[1] https://www.gov.scot/publications/putting-learners-centre-towards-future-vision-scottish-education/

## 2.0 Overview of the National Discussion

2.1 The National Discussion[2] on the future of Scottish education was a generational opportunity for children, young people, and those who support them to have their voices heard concerning the future direction of Scottish education. The guiding question for the National Discussion was: *"What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future and how do we make that a reality?"* Through analysis of the responses and discussions during the National Discussion, the intended outcome was to produce a compelling and consensual vision for Scottish education accompanied by a Call to Action (C2A) that outlined the strategic steps to achieving that vision in practice.

2.2 As independent facilitators, we worked with a broad coalition of early years organisations, schools, other education organisations, community groups, third sector organisations, youth workers, parents' groups, education professional organisations, local authorities, and policy makers to engage all those involved in Scottish education. In designing the questions and engagement plans for the National Discussion, we consulted with more than a hundred organisations dedicated to supporting and representing children and young people, as well as education partners and parent stakeholder groups. We kept in touch with these organisations, throughout the National Discussion, offering the opportunity for further feedback and commentary.

2.3 The National Discussion was launched by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills and the COSLA Children and Young Spokesperson on the 21st of September 2022. This launch was followed by an intensive engagement phase that ran until the 5th of December 2022. In keeping with the recommendations of the Muir Review, we ensured that the views of children and young people were at the heart of the National Discussion, not exclusively but primarily. We also sought the input of the adults who care for, represent, support and work with children and young people,

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[2] https://consult.gov.scot/national-discussion-scottish-education/

including parents and carers, school leaders, teachers, other education practitioners and support staff.

2.4 The depth and breadth of engagement in the National Discussion far exceeded our expectations. Over 38,000 people took part in the National Discussion. In collaboration with the Scottish Government, an online survey was launched with ten key questions available in multiple community languages, in accessible formats, and in an easy read version (see Appendix 1). A range of age-appropriate tailored discussion guides with further adapted National Discussion questions were produced by Education Scotland to help teachers, parents/carers, and youth workers engage children and young people directly and for adults to also engage in facilitated discussions. A total of 5,671 responses were submitted to the National Discussion, including survey responses and open submissions in a range of formats. Of these, 232 group responses were received (see Appendix 2).

2.5 As Independent Facilitators, we participated in as many on-line and face to face sessions as possible. In total, there were 101 National Discussion events that we or our National Discussion team on our behalf participated in directly. We adopted an invitational, grassroots engagement approach to help ensure that the National Discussion was as inclusive as possible. We hosted public engagement events and participated in meetings hosted by organisations nationally, regionally, and locally. We met face to face with key groups to extend our reach and to gather as much first-hand evidence as we could. A highly successful social media campaign resulted in 10 million unique social media users seeing the hashtag #TalkScottishEducation. There were 6,000 Twitter posts about the National Discussion.

2.6 All schools in Scotland were invited to take part in the National Discussion, using the age-appropriate facilitation guides. Online National Discussion assemblies and classes were provided by e-Sgoil for primary and secondary age pupils. Over 26,000 pupils and students participated in these online events to provide their views to inform the National Discussion.

2.7 We made every effort to ensure that the voices of children and young people who are not usually forthcoming in discussions or debates like this were included through specialist support groups or through their parents, carers, and teachers. Discussions with seldom heard groups of children and young people were organised and we reached out in ways that reduced as many barriers to participation as possible. We facilitated focus groups for advocates who were able to represent the views, interests, and learning needs of those less likely to disclose their experiences within a public engagement meeting. Some of these sessions were emotionally charged and we heard some moving accounts from children and young people that were both insightful and powerful. We strove to build trust and safe spaces for engaging, and we constantly reinforced to participants that we were independent facilitators who were keen to hear all viewpoints.

2.8 We also engaged children and young people in the places that they use, in ways that work for them, in areas of familiarity, including through social media. We also worked through trusted networks such as the safe spaces created by youth workers, and we connected extensively with parents and carers.

2.9 We wrote letters to parents in collaboration with Connect and the National Parent Forum of Scotland that were distributed through schools. National and local parent organisations led their own National Discussion engagement activities and invited us to participate in meetings and focus groups. Parents of vulnerable and marginalised groups were invited to participate or be represented in discussions with relevant organisations.

2.10 We collaborated with professional organisations to engage with the education workforce at all stages, from early years through to university. For example, the GTCS, the EIS, and the University of Glasgow hosted National Discussion events that we attended. We also met with the NASUWT Scotland Black members' network, and we facilitated sessions during AHDS, and ADES conferences and many school leader events hosted by local authorities. We visited schools and met with staff and learners. Many education organisations also facilitated their own discussions and submitted responses to contribute to the National Discussion.

2.11 Local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) facilitated local events and/or invited us to join meetings to discuss the National Discussion. We had opportunities to engage with members of SOLACE, ADES, and COSLA and had invitations to participate in their conferences and meetings.

2.12 In summary, we had an incredible response to our invitation to 'Let's Talk Scottish Education.' The National Discussion is the biggest public engagement exercise on education to have been undertaken nationally in Scotland and is already gaining international attention for a way of engaging people in educational change. To put this in context, the previous National Debate conducted twenty years ago had 1517 responses[3]. We received 5671 formal responses for the current National Discussion. We wish to acknowledge and thank everyone who supported us and contributed their views and voices to shape the future of Scottish education.

2.13 An independent research company undertook an analysis of every National Discussion response submitted and of relevant social media posts. This work has considered all the evidence gathered to ensure that all the voices that we heard, and all those who contributed, are included in the analysis. A separate analytical report is available.

2.14 To inform the National Discussion, we also considered previous reviews and consultations conducted concerning Scottish education in recent years and existing vision statements relating to key educational organisations, policies, and strategies.

2.15 To prepare this final report, we have drawn upon the analytical report produced by the independent company. We have augmented this analysis by examining what we heard directly in National Discussion focus groups, meetings, and the events that we participated in, reviewed social media posts using #TalkScottishEducation and #NationalDiscussion, and undertaken our own reading of submissions received as

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[3] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0267152042000295465

part of the National Discussion. We have systematically reviewed the data, over and over, and undertaken a full comparative analysis to inform the vision, values, and Call to Action outlined in this report.

2.16 Some testing of the initial vision and values was conducted, and revisions were made to take account of the feedback received. Inevitably, each response to the testing phase was accompanied by suggestions to revise the vision and/or values in some way.  On balance, however, the overall response to the vision and values was positive in terms of substance, tone, and positioning. The testing phase was also useful to ensure the wording of the vision and values resonates with key partners and stakeholders, while ensuring we stay true to our commitment that the substance of vision and values would be directly informed and shaped by responses to the National Discussion. Ultimately, our central purpose is to reflect, authentically and clearly, what we heard within the National Discussion.

2.17 We acknowledge that major reviews are underway, and we have been in regular contact with the leaders of the Skills Review and the Qualifications and Assessment Review[4] but we have retained our independence to focus on the National Discussion specifically. We are also aware that there are many policy documents, previous reviews, and position papers that inevitably touch on the key areas that are reflected in our Call to Action. We have considered these as part of the general background to the National Discussion was, however, this report focuses exclusively on what we heard and the responses we received within the National Discussion.

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[4] https://www.gov.scot/publications/qualifications-assessment-review-consultation-analysis/

2.18 It important to reinforce that we have based the vision, values, and Call to Action *solely* on the National Discussion data analysis. Our role as facilitators is to faithfully represent the voices and views that we heard while remaining independent. Clearly, given the scale of the responses received, we cannot include everything we heard in the National Discussion in this report. Consequently, we have sought to represent the strongest and most consistent themes emerging from the analysis, cross-checked by a constant comparison of what we heard (and read) individually and collectively from September to December 2022.

2.19 We have no vested interest in that we bring to this report. Our aim is to reflect upon the potential for the Scottish Education system, now and in the future, using the National Discussion data as the basis for what we say and conclude.

# 3.0 Vision and Values

3.1 Following the recommendations of the Muir Review, our task was to develop a compelling and consensual renewed vision for the future of Scottish education. Given the scale and variety of responses, there were inevitable differences of opinion within the views expressed about what needed to be included in a future vision. There were also some individuals, groups, and organisations offering strong positions on what they wanted to see in the vision that differed from what we heard from the majority of submissions to the National Discussion. Hence, we had to take care in how we responded to such advocacy. Consequently, the vision and values in this report reflect the broad findings and key themes from the National Discussion and do not reflect the positions or set views of any one individual, group, or organisation.

3.2 To assess whether the proposed vision and values resonated with children and young people, parents, and those working in and with the education system, during March 2023, we tested the vision at some key stakeholder meetings, including the Teacher Panel, the Education Reform Stakeholder Group, and the COSLA Children and Young People's Board, as well as with individuals, groups, and organisations that we had been in contact with throughout the National Discussion. The general feedback from testing was generally positive with constructive feedback on the positioning and wording of the vision and values. Where appropriate, this feedback has prompted some changes to the vision and values presented in this summary report.

3.3 Overwhelmingly, the phrase that sums up the main message from the National Discussion is: *All Learners in Scotland Matter.* This message has informed the vision, values, and Call to Action. The vision places children and young people at the heart of Scottish education and underlines the importance of valuing collaborative partnerships with all those working in, or connected to, the education system. The vision commits to a Scottish education where *all* learners matter by providing an

inclusive learning environment and high-quality learning experiences for *each* child and young person. The vision is provided below.

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**Vision Statement for the Future of Scottish Education:**
**All Learners in Scotland Matter**

Children and young people are at the heart of education in Scotland. The Scottish education system values collaborative partnerships that engage all learners, the people who work within and with the education system, parents, and carers to ensure that all learners in Scotland matter.

All learners are supported in inclusive learning environments which are safe, welcoming, caring, and proactively address any barriers to learning and inequities that exist or arise. Education in Scotland nurtures the unique talents of all learners ensuring their achievement, progress, and well-being.

Each child and young person in Scotland has high-quality learning experiences which respect their rights and represents the diversity of who they are and the communities they live in.

Each child and young person experiences great teaching, resources, and support for joyful learning that builds their confidence and equips them to be successful and to contribute in their life, work, and world, so they know how much they matter.

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3.4 The vision speaks directly to the voices of the children and young people who said again and again that they wanted a safe, inclusive education system that valued everyone and celebrated all kinds of success.

3.5 Not everything in the vision, values, and Call to Action is new, indeed we heard about features of the Scottish education system that must be continued and further enhanced, such as a commitment to valuing children and young people's views, a broad-based education, the foundational importance of literacy and numeracy, the development of wellbeing, the pursuit of equity and equality, respect for a graduate-level teaching profession, the importance of the work and working conditions of all members of the education workforce, and partnership with parents, carers, communities, and relevant agencies, specialists and service. In many cases, however, there was a recognition that more that could be done to support the quality and consistency of implementation of existing policies and practices, as well as to be proactive about changes to meet the future needs of all learners and to improve the Scottish education system. The vision needs to balance the realism of what is needed now with an inspiring optimism for education in Scotland that equips children and young people for a rapidly changing world.

3.6 While the vision could potentially apply to learners of all ages, and we recognise the importance of children's development from birth to adult education to lifelong learning, the remit of the National Discussion was for those aged 3-18 during the period of early learning and formal schooling.

3.7 Alongside a compelling vision, we heard about the importance of core values informing and underpinning the work of the Scottish education system. Scotland currently uses the phrase "excellence and equity" to encapsulate its aspirations for the Scottish education system and for its learners. There remains a deep commitment to these principles, but we heard that it was time to recraft and re-establish what values lie at the heart of Scottish education, both now and in the future as part of the renewed vision from the National Discussion. Based on the responses to the National Discussion, we propose the following guiding values for education in Scotland – ambitious, inclusive, and supportive.

**All Learners in Scotland Matter:**

**Guiding Values**

**Ambitious –** The Scottish education system will be ambitious by having high expectations for all learners and enabling each child and young person to develop and achieve their ambitions.

**Inclusive –** The Scottish education system will value, respect, recognise, and represent the diversity of all children and young people, and provide equitable educational experiences and opportunities for all learners.

**Supportive –** A hallmark of the Scottish education system will be to engage each child, young person, and adult meaningfully and appropriately in an education process that provides the necessary supports for all learners to progress, achieve, and realise their personal ambitions.
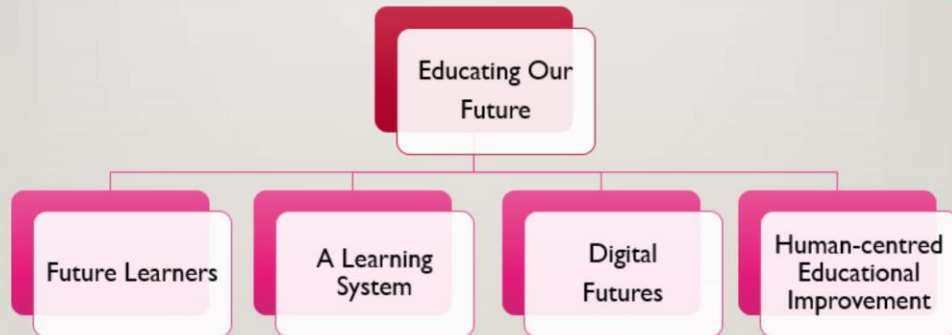
3.8 We also heard that the outcomes of the National Discussion needed to go beyond a vision statement and values to inform actual actions. Next, therefore, we provide an overview of the Call to Action (C2A) which maps out the key steps that need to be taken to achieve the vision and to uphold the values.

# 4.0 A Call to Action (C2A)

4.1 A Call to Action has been formulated based on the strongest themes and most consistent views arising from the National Discussion data. Inevitably, there were differences of opinion in what we heard and sometimes strong, opposing views. Hence, we tried to establish points of synergy, consolidation, and connection within and across the data sets, supported by the data analysis undertaken independently. We undertook a constant comparative approach across the data, testing, evaluating, and revisiting the evidence to ensure that we had a firm basis for the Call to Action that was grounded in a sound analysis of the responses submitted. We also considered what we had heard in the many online and in-person discussions we had engaged in, along with re-reading many of the written submissions.


4.2 While the vision, values, and Call to Action are intended to be future focused, a great deal of what we heard within the National Discussion was about contemporary issues, challenges, and areas of strength within the Scottish Education system. While the National Discussion asked people to look towards a twenty-year horizon into the future, this was challenging for most people dealing with the immediate context of the impact of a global pandemic, a cost-of-living crisis, the ongoing consequences of austerity, war in the world, rapid digital acceleration, and many other urgent changes. Consequently, this Call to Action aims to reflect both realism and pragmatism while also signalling what is needed now and will be needed in the future to safe-guard the learning and life-chances of all children and young people in Scotland.

C2A HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY

Educating Our Future

Future Learners | A Learning System | Digital Futures | Human-centred Educational Improvement

4.3 The most powerful message emanating from the National Discussion in Scotland is the need to educate **all** learners in Scotland for an uncertain and unpredictable future. Within the National Discussion we were asked to produce a vision, a set of values and a call to action that was future focused. Consequently, the central over-arching theme arising from the National Discussion is that of *Educating Our Future*.

4.4 The theme of Educating Our Future reinforces how children and young people in Scotland will actively shape a future society, a future economy, a future nation, and a future world. We heard that a core purpose of education must be to enable children and young people to build their own future with confidence, meaning, and kindness. This is why we have used the phrase 'educating **our** future' in this report, as ultimately the children and young people of Scotland will own that future and will create it.

4.5 It is recognised that to deliver an education system in Scotland that is equipped for a complex and changing future, there is a need to start from the here and now building upon the many strengths that are already present in Scottish Education. The challenge, however, is to put in place a reform process in the short, medium, and long-term that will ensure that the education that is envisaged for the future, based

upon the findings from the National Discussion, is steadily assembled over the coming years.

4.6 As we note later in this report, to secure the changes required to establish a Scottish education that is fit for the future will require informed changes and a departure from many of the current established practices. The National Discussion has underlined that some radical changes are needed to deliver the transformation required for the future. These changes can only take place if the education system in Scotland becomes a learning system that is willing to take risks and to push the boundaries of what already exists for the benefit of all learners in Scotland.

4.7 The Call to Action begins with a focus on *Learners and Learning*. We heard how a future Scottish education system must protect and uphold the rights of all children and young people in Scotland so that their voices are heard, and they are fully supported to learn, to be cared for, and to feel safe.

4.8 We heard about the importance of foundational knowledge and skills including literacy and numeracy. We also heard about the need for a broad-based education with every child and young person having access to subject choices and skills development that reflect their interests and personal ambitions and will equip them in their lives, work, and world. We heard about the importance of a shift from progression based on age and stage of schooling to flexible pathways and supported transitions to meet the developmental needs and interests of children and young school throughout their early years and school experiences. Vitally, we heard about the importance of cultivating joy and igniting a love of learning where learning takes place in a range of settings and approaches, including the importance of play and outdoor learning for all ages.

4.9 To educate *all* learners in Scotland for a future they will create and sustain means that all learners must be secure in the knowledge that they will be treated fairly, equitably, and that they will be free to learn, irrespective of who they are and in whatever setting, context, or circumstance they find themselves. A future Scottish Education has to build upon its long-held commitment to excellence and equity by ensuring that every child and young person will have the best opportunities to learn

in ways that support their individual talents, abilities, and interests supported by a high-quality education workforce in partnership with parents, carers, and communities.

4.10 Within *Educating Our Future*, we heard about the importance of valuing and embracing the diversity of Scotland's people and places, in a global context. Education needs to include learning about and addressing all forms of diversity, discrimination, and disadvantage for children and young people and for education workers. Within the National Discussion, we heard many times how important it was for pupils of all ages to feel secure and free from any form of bullying, intimidation, or harassment. While we fully acknowledge that there are many policies, instances of good practice within schools, and supportive groups that already focus on this issue, from the conversations we had with children and young people, much more needs to be done. A future education system in Scotland must uphold norms, practices, and values, right across the system, to remove barriers to learning that young people encounter.

4.11 We also heard about the importance of a future Scottish education system which was welcoming and inclusive of all children and young people, including attention to early identification and adequate resources and specialist supports to enable everyone to learn and flourish. Educating Our Future cannot be the responsibility of schools alone, networks and collaborations with a range of communities, partners, and agencies is essential to realise a future for truly supporting all children and young people.

4.12 Educating for the future also means recognising the major challenges that children and young people in Scotland, and further afield, will undoubtedly encounter. Issues of climate change and global warming were at the heart of many of the discussions we heard. The environment that children and young people will inherit is clearly of major and pressing concern. We heard a great deal of passion from the children and young people we spoke to about saving the planet, climate

change, and upholding their rights. We also heard fears and anxieties, from them, about living in a world that is dramatically changing and evolving.

4.13 It is now abundantly clear that the wellbeing and the health of children and young people is of one of *the* most pressing and important issue in Scotland and across the world. To live productively and effectively as citizens of a future world requires positive self-regard, confidence, and a sense of self-determination. Without proactively addressing the issue of well-being and mental health in a system-wide way, any attempts to improve learners' achievement and attainment levels will be undermined. For example, there are over 30,000 children and young people in Scotland who are carers for a parent or a sibling. We heard how being a young carer brings stress and worry as well as placing limitations on the ability to concentrate in class and to learn in school. There are simple things that can be done to alleviate this stress and worry which starts with engaging with young carers and the groups that support them. Educating Our Future has to focus on developing happy and healthy children and young people who can thrive in their education, life, and world.

4.14 Educating Our Future requires an adaptive, proactive, and coherent learning system, including the importance of the education workforce, curriculum review, and assessment reform, to equip children and young people to learn the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that will equip them for future success.

4.15 We heard that there is great enthusiasm and energy among children and young people to learn more broadly, creatively, and digitally. We also heard, largely from employers, that education in the future needs to be more responsive and reactive to the needs of industry and must be able to adapt quickly to support the development of talent pipelines. We heard from employers about the importance of Developing the Young Workforce by providing skills for learners that will equip them for the workplace, now and in the future. It was underlined how these skills needed to be adaptable to respond to the evolving and changing economic landscape.

4.16 We heard, throughout the National Discussion, about the importance of preparing children and young people in Scotland for a future where jobs, career pathways, and life choices will be fluid and unpredictable. To prepare for such a future, it is suggested, requires an education system that is agile, flexible, and responsive to changing needs.

4.17 The digital revolution is pressing and prescient. The pace of technological change is accelerating at an unprecedented rate. A future education system in Scotland, therefore, will need to be responsive and creative to the new needs of the digital age to ensure that children and young people in Scotland can respond to, and cope with, the changing requirements of a technology-infused world. The opportunities and the challenges that arise as technology advances, in the years to come, has to be a more central and substantial element in a curriculum for the future.

4.18 At the same time as Educating Our Future needs to proactively address the current and rapidly emerging realities of an increasingly digital world, the main message that we heard throughout the National Discussion is that the future of Scottish education must be centrally about, and engage appropriately, children and young people, their parents/carers, and the adults who work in and with the education system and related services. Our conversations, as part of this National Discussion, highlighted that children and young people, parents/carers, and people working in education all want to be listened to, respected, trusted, and valued.

4.19 The big question is what sort of future will children and young people in Scotland encounter, and how far will the education they receive equip them to deal with, and potentially change, the world that they will live in?  Educating Our Future requires a Scottish education system that is proactive, flexible, integrated, and upholds the rights of *all* children and young people.

# 5.0 Learners

5.01 The National Discussion is fundamentally about learners and putting their needs and ambitions at the heart of the Scottish education system. Consideration of our future learners is central throughout this report. In this section, we focus on three aspects specifically concerning learners and their learning conditions, opportunities, experiences, and outcomes: Learning, Inclusivity and Diversity, and Health and Wellbeing.

## 5.1 Learning

**What We Heard**

5.1.1 At its core, education is about learning. Therefore, it is no surprise that a future Scottish education system where all learners matter requires ensuring the highest quality content and approaches to learning to support all learners to fulfil their potential and ambitions. The most frequent topics in survey responses and open submissions to the National Discussion concerned learning, broadly defined, and the curriculum required for future learners in Scotland.

5.1.2 While there were wide-ranging views on which topics, subjects, and skills were important and needed, a main theme in responses to the National Discussion was that literacy and numeracy continue to be fundamental for children and young people's learning and success. However, there were concerns not to overly focus on the assessment of literacy and numeracy to the detriment of a broader focus on children and young people's development and achievements.

5.1.3 There was a strong consensus about the importance of the Scottish education system continuing to value a broad-based education intended to develop well-rounded people who are confident and capable of contributing in their lives, societies, and economies. It was also stressed that a rights-based education was important, including future learning experiences that uphold the United Nations Conventions for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), for example all children's rights to an education which supports them to develop their talents and abilities, to understand their rights and appreciate the rights of all people, value diversity, live peacefully, and to care for the planet and environmental sustainability.

> "I think we should learn maths so you know how to count. It is important when I grow up and want to be a doctor. I will need to count my patients so I know how many I need to see in a day or the amount of medicine to give to help people feel better" (Peel Primary School, Health and Wellbeing Mini Champs)
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> "To stop seeing children as data associated with literacy and numeracy and realise that the aim of our curriculum is to produce well rounded, successful and responsible learners and citizens." (Teacher)
>
> "Learners would prefer to have access to a much broader general education, so they have the basics covered, and then be allowed to choose specialist subjects that they are interested in afterwards." (Scottish Youth Parliament)

5.1.4 There was a consensus that children and young people should experience a broad range of subjects and skills development to assist with what they know, understand, and can do in and beyond their formal education, including to support post-school transitions, future careers, and being confident and contributing citizens in their communities and wider world[5]. It was proposed that all children and young people could have access to subject choices that interested them and there is a

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[5] Responses from young children (ages 3-7) illustrate what they want and like to learn (from most to least mentioned): Maths and English; Science; Languages; Skills for life; Nature and animals; Fitness; Social skills; World issues including the environment; Arts; Technology; Health and wellbeing; History, geography, religious and moral education; and Safety.

need to address current inconsistencies in learning opportunities between schools and local authorities.

5.1.5 The importance of skills development was frequently mentioned, this included life skills, such as financial literacy and home economics, skills for work and career success, including vocational education and practical learning, interpersonal and social skills such as team working, positive relationships and caring for others, critical thinking skills and creativity to adapt to the changing world and to evaluate information and its sources, and technological skills and digital literacy. Children and young people emphasised the importance of learning practical skills that would help them in their lives.

5.1.6 We also heard about the importance of cultivating positive values and attitudes. Respondents spoke of supporting children and young people to be happy, confident, resilient, engaged, motivated, ambitious, social, caring, empathetic, reflective, and independent. Learners spoke of wanting to learn things they enjoy, and young children responded about liking learning that was "fun". We heard about the importance of the joy of learning and igniting a love of learning for children and young people to be creative, curious lifelong learners.

5.1.7 The development of academic achievements *and* of social, emotional, vocational, and life skills to prepare learners to be successful in their post-school destinations, including their future work, was a key theme in responses. The purpose of education emerging from the National Discussion includes equipping children and young people to be capable in what they know and can do to achieve their full potential and personal ambitions, to be happy and healthy, to be technologically savvy and flexible to adapt to and lead changes, to be contribute to the world including in their careers, and to be understanding and caring towards people and the planet.

> "More lessons on things that will affect us in the real world so we will be ready." – Learner
>
> "Helping to grow a generation of caring, humble, fulfilled people who will help to create a better world" – Parent
>
> "Prepare children to make the most of their talents and interests and to be ready to contribute to society (including challenging the status quo and being able to think for themselves)." – Parent
>
> "A nation of innovators, a proud heritage of creativity. Let's look at the world as problem-solvers." - NASUWT Black members' focus group
>
> "In building a new vision of Scottish Education, the EIS believes that creativity and enjoyment should be central to the learning experience. By providing time and space for learners to explore aspects of learning and for teachers to reflect and extend the learning opportunities in creative ways, which capture the imagination of the learner, the richness of the experience will be enhanced, resulting in greater breadth, depth and enjoyment of learning." – EIS

5.1.8 The need for a variety of teaching strategies and resources to meet individual learners' needs, for example neurodiversity, was proposed. Children and young people spoke about liking group work, practical learning, and projects, and disliking lots of classroom time involving memorisation, retrieval of information, and "jotter work".

5.1.9 The importance of play-based learning, especially but not exclusively, in the early years was a theme in responses. Scotland's approach to play-based learning in the early years has gained international reputation. Supporters of play-based learning identified benefits for children's nurture, socialisation, learning, skills, wellbeing, health, and cognitive and physical development. A range of forms of play/activity were considered important, including play-based pedagogy in the early years and the importance of sports, arts, extracurricular activities, school trips, and outdoor learning throughout children and young people's education. An important condition for the expansion of learning opportunities was that these should be available for free to all children and young people.

5.1.10 The importance of education within and outside schools was stressed. Outdoor learning is another important feature of Scottish education and something respondents felt should be expanded. Proposed benefits from outdoor learning

"Make the vision more than just about education being in school. If not, you will already lose young people to education." (Muirhouse Youth Development Group)

"I prefer to learn by doing practical things. Using real objects makes things stick in my memory for longer. I love Science because it's very practical and fun." (Adoption UK Scotland)

"MSYPs in our national discussion workshops agreed that the current 'knowledge-based system' encouraged young people to remember specific information to pass exams. The young people we represent think the system should do more to help develop the skills young people will keep throughout their lives." (Scottish Youth Parliament)

"One size does not fit all... I have a son with suspected dyspraxia. He is very bright, loves to read and learn but currently struggles with the "core" subjects... I fear in high school he will get lost, but I know he would thrive in a practical environment, doing trade style courses, cooking, first aid. I just hope his high school can see his potential, even if not in core subjects and be able to provide him with what he needs." (Parent)

"Children all thought there should be a bigger focus on outdoor learning and less time spent in a classroom. They felt that schools in the future should take into account different ways to learn and not put such a heavy emphasis on writing in jotters. Learning should be more about doing." (Children and young people group)

"I like to learn outside because I get a good breeze like learning at the park with my friends / I like learning at the park with my friends / I like to learn outside. We can learn and play / I like learning at the pond, we can count and learn about the creatures there / I like learning outside because there are lots of fun activities to do / I like learning in the woods because it's fun / I like to learn outside because it's busy / I like learning at the community garden." (Port Ellen Primary School P1/2)

include improved health and wellbeing, understanding of the planet and environment, and skills development. Importantly, several responses from learners emphasised that they liked learning outdoors (as well as in classrooms).

5.1.11 The need for up-to-date curricula to incorporate emerging priority topics was suggested. Developing partnerships with schools, colleges, universities, businesses, third sector, charities, communities, and local organisations were mentioned as important to enabling all children and young people to have practical learning opportunities and supporting their future career ambitions and contributions as citizens. Initiatives like the Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) programme and the importance of access to quality careers' education and guidance were identified.

5.1.12 The importance of flexible pathways to support the learner's journey and appropriate to their development and interests was a theme in responses, this included moving away from schooling structured around age and stage to a more flexible and responsive learning experience. We heard responses explaining the value of early years education and the importance of implementing Realising the Ambition[6]. We also heard about interest in reviewing the appropriate age for staring formal schooling, ensuring all parents were aware of options for delaying the start of schooling and/or the movement to kindergarten stage prior to primary one.

5.1.13 As will be discussed further in the education professionals section of this report, to realise the above ideas for the future of Scottish education, we heard about the importance of developing a high-quality early years and education workforce.

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[6] https://education.gov.scot/media/3bjpr3wa/realisingtheambition.pdf

5.1.14 In summary, key themes concerning learning were:

- Literacy and numeracy continue to be fundamental for learners combined with a broad-based education with every child and young person having access to subject choices and skills development that reflect their interests and personal ambitions and will equip them in their lives, work, and world.
- Cultivating joy and the love of learning where learning takes place in a range of settings and approaches, including the importance of play and outdoor learning for all ages.
- The need for a shift from progression based on age and stage of schooling to flexible pathways and supported transitions to meet the developmental needs and interests of children and young school throughout their early years and school experiences.

**Learning - Call to Action:**

All learners should have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities and experiences and flexible pathways linked to each learner's interests, needs, development, and ambitions. Cultivating joy and a love for lifelong learning is important. The expertise and judgement of the education profession, including deep curricular knowledge and access to curriculum-linked resources, working with support staff and specialists is vital to achieving high-quality learning.

## 5.2 Inclusivity and Diversity

**What We Heard**

5.2.1 A future where all learners matter in Scotland embedded in values of ambition, inclusivity, and support requires identifying and attending to the needs of each child and young person. A commitment to equality is enshrined in Scottish legislation and there is a long-standing commitment to equity in education. In the National Discussion, a continuing commitment to equity was a central theme, alongside the increasing need to value and appreciate the diversity of Scotland's population,

including learners and in the education workforce, and support for but challenges with the current approaches to inclusion.

5.2.2 While Scotland has a long tradition of commitment to equity, initially conceived as meritocracy where a child of humble background could succeed through hard work; we heard that it is now recognised – or needs to be recognised – that fully addressing inequities involves identifying systemic discrimination and structural inequalities. We heard participants call for a shift in from considering equality as everyone being treated the same to an appreciation that equitable education requires also valuing of the diversity of children, young people, and adults and may involve different approaches and supports to meet their individual and group needs. As well as respecting and protecting the different needs of individuals and groups of children and young people, an appreciation of intersectionality recognising the complex and multi-faceted identities of people was also considered important, for example poverty combined with race and gender discrimination.

5.2.3 A broader commitment to inclusivity of recognising and respecting all people's needs, characteristics, identities, talents, and potential was a common theme in responses to the National Discussion. Awareness raising and the development of understanding of all forms of diversity and preventing harassment, discrimination, bullying, and violence are a high priority.

5.2.4 We also heard children and young people's strong commitment to and interest in rights, diversity, equalit, and inclusivity. Responses to the National Discussion included that there was the potential to be at a turning point in Scottish education and society.

5.2.5 While we heard some mixed views about the role of schools in educating about the full range of diversities, overall, there was a concern to ensure that all people were represented in education. This includes addressing stereotyping, racism,

gender inequalities, sexism, disabilities, and LGBT+ rights in creating safe and inclusive school cultures. The need to address bullying, name calling, and slurs and to prevent violence were common themes. The importance of embedding representation and understanding of diversity in the curriculum content, teaching resources and assessments, including anti-racist education principles and approaches, was proposed. We also heard about the need to celebrate diversity throughout the school year rather than only on special days or weeks. The importance of respectful relationships was considered paramount, including between and among all learners and educators, and engaging with minority cultures and communities to share their experiences with learners.

5.2.6 We also heard that to achieve these goals of being equal, equitable, inclusive, and valuing diversity required adequate funding and specialist resources. As discussed further in the education professionals section of this report, the second most frequently recurring theme in responses to the National Discuss was the need for more teachers and pupil support staff. To achieve the aspirations of meeting the needs of all children and young people, it was proposed that more teachers were needed to enable smaller class sizes and more capacity for individual support and time with learners. We also heard about the importance of hiring and training more support staff. There were also calls for increasing the number, status, training, and career opportunities for specialist staff, such as Support for Learning teachers, Qualified Teacher of Children and Young People with Vision Impairment (QTVI) and Teacher of Deaf (ToD). We also heard about the importance of diversifying the education workforce, including attention to addressing barriers for the recruitment, retention, and promotion of a diverse workforce.

5.2.7 We heard about the need for professional development and continuing professional learning for existing education and support staff to understand and know how to appropriately work with the full range of children and young people and their needs in schools. Awareness and understanding of neurodiversity and of disabilities was considered essential, as was developing teachers' racial literacy, understanding of anti-racism, and of gender inequities. Of course, schools and

teachers should not and cannot be solely responsible to addressing all the needs of children and young people. A commitment to equality, equity and inclusivity requires multi-agency working with relevant agencies, organisations, and specialists.

> "Scotland needs to be brave – our system is currently good but doesn't fit all and it will be a brave move to alter it to make it truly socially just" (Anonymous group)
>
> "If the foundational structure of Scottish education is one in which learners are placed at its heart, that must include all learners and all schools; and recognise each learner as an individual with their own experience, background, and future." (TIE)
>
> "We're at a turning point where the views/prejudices of my parents' generation can be leap frogged, so they don't exist. Where I had to unlearn lots of things or learn new things about racism etc hopefully [diversity] will just be the norm for our children." (Parent)
>
> "We need to see and value for their own purposes the diverse children and families who are in our schools. Too often LGBTQ+ visibility is ignored in schools, race is seen as a tick box exercise, disability as the child's problem." (Parent)
>
> "anti-racism should be a leadership priority and we must have accessible professional learning opportunities, informed by the lived experience of educators and young people, which build racial literacy and support leadership at all levels." (NASWUT)
>
> "Every child in Scotland deserves the right to access a safe, well-informed and holistic education system by suitably trained and experienced teachers. The framework must allow for every child to begin their education on the 'same footing' but also has the ability to support pupils of all abilities: those who benefit from additional support and encouragement and those who develop at a faster rate than their peers. Essentially, the system must be equal, agile and ultimately aspirational. World leading!" (Parent)

5.2.8 A major area of concern in responses to the National Discussion was ensuring children and young people with Additional Support Needs (ASN) receive the individual support that they need. With Scotland's commitment to Getting It Right for Every Child (GIRFEC)[7] by ensuring the right provision of the right support at the right time, the importance of supporting all children and young people achieve their full potential is engrained in policy and intended to be implemented in practice. The Morgan Review of Additional Support for Learning (SfL) Implementation[8], published in 2020, identified a wide range of experiences for children and young people identified as having ASN with the need for further attention to quality implementation of needed supports. Three years after the Morgan consultation and coming out of a global pandemic, we heard a wide range of experiences and views about ASN in the National Discussion.

5.2.9 While there was broad support for the importance of diversity and inclusivity, there were mixed views specifically on the presumption of mainstreaming for inclusion of pupils in schools. There were two main strands of responses. One was that the current approaches to inclusion were failing children and young people with identified ASN as there were insufficient resources and supports to enable their effective integration in the academic and social life of mainstream schools. Another response was that current approaches to inclusion were failing the children and young people in classrooms who did not have an ASN as teachers' time was stretched with meeting the needs of learners with complex needs and there could be disruptive behaviour.

5.2.10 We heard of children whose needs were being addressed and Support for Learning teachers, teachers in general, and support and specialist staff who were doing their very best. However, we also heard concerning and troubling experiences from parents about their child not receiving timely or necessary supports and

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[7] https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/
[8] https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-additional-support-learning-implementation/

sometimes inappropriate use of exclusions and other sanctions. The need for timely attention to, and resourcing for, appropriate ASN provision is now urgent.

5.2.11 The proportion of school-age pupils identified as having an ASN has grown significantly over the past decade. In 2022, over a third of pupils (34.2%)[9] in Scotland were identified as having an ASN. There are a couple of important factors to contextualize this figure - the definition of ASN is very wide and all-encompassing to identify as many potential "additional" needs as possible to ensure that all children who require support receive this[10], and with improvements in awareness and identification, the increasing proportion of ASN may reflect more children being identified sooner. That said, when over a third of the school-age population have an "additional" need, it no longer becomes something "additional" to the education system and children's experiences, it is a central feature of Scotland's school population.

5.2.12 We heard that identifying children requiring support as early as possible and provision of linked early interventions is essential. The need for appropriate assessments both to identify ASN and to enable identified pupils demonstrate their learning and skills was proposed, as was the importance of individualised teaching and supports for each child and young person to achieve their full potential.

5.2.13 The remit for the Morgan review of the implementation of Additional Support for Learning did not include reviewing resources. However, responses from the

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[9] https://www.gov.scot/publications/summary-statistics-for-schools-in-scotland-2022/pages/classes-and-pupils/

[10] The Additional Support for Learning: statutory guidance 2017 lists the following ASN criteria: Children or young people may require additional support for a variety of reasons and may include those who: have motor or sensory impairments; have low birth weight; are being bullied; are children of parents in the Armed Forces; are particularly able or talented; have experienced a bereavement; are affected by imprisonment of a family member; are interrupted learners; have a learning disability; have barriers to learning as a result of a health need, such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder; are looked after by a local authority or who have been adopted; have a learning difficulty, such as dyslexia; are living with parents who are abusing substances; are living with parents who have mental health problems; have English as an additional language; are not attending school regularly; have emotional or social difficulties; are on the child protection register; are refugees; are young carers. The guidance also states that this is not an exhaustive list.

National Discussion were clear that there were currently insufficient appropriate resources, including staffing and specialists, to fully support all children and young people's individual needs. For example, we visited a school where the majority of young people had an identified ASN. An innovative approach to Support for Learning was being implemented through welcomed Pupil Equity Funding (PEF), but there were concerns as PEF is temporary and time limited funding. While there are current budget constraint and austerity, there is an urgent need to review and improve approaches to ensuring adequate, secure, and sustainable funding to provide staffing, specialists, and necessary resources to fully achieve the aspirations of meeting individual needs and an inclusive system.

"In my class of 30, 4 have ASD (one also has ADHD and depression), 3 have long-standing separation anxiety difficulties (CCH/CAMHS involved), one has been adopted, one has a difficult home life and experiencing a form of trauma, one is a young carer, 2 others have severe learning difficulties (not including the 8 with 'normal' behind-track difficulties). There is only one of me - I can't give those 12 children enough of my attention to support their wellbeing, never mind their and the other 18 children's learning needs...We have got to have smaller class sizes to have a hope of meeting the children's basic rights/needs and to then also help them to progress in their learning. I know exactly what support each child needs but can't split myself 30 ways to give them the individual attention they all need to be able to thrive." (Individual)

""Inclusion must be discussed and looked at for the future of our children and teachers. Inclusion seems to exclude more than it includes at the moment. Inclusion for one child is NOT a 32 person classroom at National 5 as not all learners flourish in this environment. It is so unkind to young people to force this and our children are not flourishing. This is not GIRFEC. Specialist provisions should remain and be celebrated." (GTCS hosted National Discussion group)

"Embrace diversity including neurodevelopmental differences such as autism and ADHD. Don't send those kids away. They can be creative, inventive and an asset to your school if provided the right support. This goes for all flavours of diversity." (Parent)

"Scotland will have to work harder to provide the resources to ensure all children – particularly those with additional learning needs – receive their right to education. At present, there are too many examples where schools do not seem to have the correct resources to help young people with additional needs and behavioural issues can often see young people excluded from the classroom for long periods of the week and denied their opportunities to learn." (Barnardo's Scotland)

5.2.14 We also heard about the importance of understanding, valuing, and supporting all forms of physical disabilities and long-term conditions. As well as training for the adults working in and with the education system, the need for engaging learners in understanding about disabilities and conditions is important to valuing diversity and supporting appropriate relationships within schools. Some respondents representing disability groups pointed to the relevance of UNCRC Article 23 (rights of disabled children to get the support they need, including in education) and Article 30 (minority language rights, including in education) for a future Scottish education system.

5.2.15 Responses from organisations representing visually impaired and hearing-impaired children advocated for the importance of communicating in ways that support these children, for example, full implementation of the British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan, modifications to assessments to move away from written exams for visually-impaired learners and incorporation of BSL for hearing-impaired learners, and a commitment to integrate accessibility features as a statutory element of curriculum, including Curriculum for Excellence (CfE).

5.2.16 Respondents commented that buildings and learning experiences needed to be accessible. In one example, we heard of a child with a hearing-impairment who was in an open plan classroom with over 100 primary school children – the auditory experience made learning very difficult. As well as accessibility, having education facilities, including schools, that were fit for purpose was noted.

5.2.17 Several of the suggestions for children and young people with disabilities and long-term conditions also reflected comments made about supporting and valuing all forms of ASN. For example, the importance of therapeutic approaches and trauma-informed teaching for delivering on The Promise Scotland[11] to support care experienced children and young people. The importance of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and recognition of BSL as medium of education available to every

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[11] https://thepromise.scot/

learner that needs this, irrespective of where they live in Scotland or what school they attend, was proposed. The use of interpreters and communication with new immigrant, asylum seeking, and refugee families was proposed to ease the transition of children and young people into education in Scotland. As well as supports for language learners, some young people proposed that they would like to learn a range of languages to communicate with each other in people's languages and to minimise stigma or bullying. The recognition and provision of Gaelic medium Education was also noted.

> "An important value is equity (for everyone to have equal access to education). To achieve this we will need to build schools where there are lifts so schools are accessible buildings to meet all learners and schools should have more staff to help the needs of kids with disabilities like dyslexia, autism or down syndrome." (Baljaffray Primary School, children and young people group)
>
> "The optimal learning environment for Deaf children whose future will have signing at its centre is one in which BSL is the medium of education. Wherever possible, this means a whole school that has BSL at its heart as its primary language in every aspect of operation: signing pupils, signing assistants, signing teachers, signing headteacher, signing administration. We consider this to be the ultimate target and the ideal environment to nurture capable, confident, happy and resilient Deaf lives." (British Deaf Association Scotland)

5.2.18 A persisting aspect of disadvantage in Scotland is poverty. The current government's commitment to closing the poverty-related attainment gap is seeking to address this issue. We heard support for continuing to address poverty affecting children and young people's educational engagement, opportunities, experiences, and opportunities, while recognising that tackling child poverty requires a wider multi-agency and community strategy beyond schools and education alone. We heard support for targeted funding for schools in the most socio-economically deprived communities, alongside concerns to provide funding and resources to tackle student inequities in all schools. School and community partnerships, for example with Community Learning and Development (CLD) and third sector organisations for home link workers, was mentioned as needed. We heard about the importance of

ensuring that all children have free and equitable access to educational opportunities and resources for all aspects of education that they have a right to, for example in the provision of technology, devices, and online learning. It was proposed that there should be no upfront, hidden, or voluntary costs including free school meals, school uniforms/clothing, extra-curricular activities, and school trips.

5.2.19 There were also calls to value the diversity of places, while addressing current inconsistencies in resources and opportunities available between schools and local authorities. There was a concern that there all learners, in all schools, in all locations should have access to well-resourced schools and high-quality learning experiences. However, this was not a call for uniform standardization, it was important for schools to be rooted in their local contexts.

5.2.20 We heard about the desire to ensure children and young people in rural, remote, and island school had the same opportunities to thrive with a wide range of subjects, courses, trips and extra-curricular activities, vocational opportunities, work or college placements and/or progression to university, access to technology, and ability to receive specialist supports, such as mental health services. The need to incentivise and retain teachers and head teachers to work in island, remote, and rural schools was identified as requiring attention. We heard about the need to consider the needs of small schools in any policy decisions. Alongside noting challenges, we also heard about the importance of allowing island, rural, and remote schools to develop unique identities linked to strong community connections, including consideration of local career opportunities in the learning provided to young people, development of entrepreneurship skills, and appreciation of place and cultural heritage.

"Children and young people need the kind of education where there are no upfront, hidden, additional or 'voluntary' costs related to the curriculum, assessment or wider school life and no expectation that families will fund any aspect of the education to which their children have a right. The removal of practical cost barriers to learning must be consistent in every school across Scotland with widespread recognition that this is essential for children and young people's wellbeing, attendance, attainment, inclusion, participation and engagement in education." (Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland)

"Scotland is a very diverse country. The vision for the future of Scottish Education should promote empowerment at all levels within the system. There is not a one size fits all as the geography of Scotland includes urban, rural and island communities. It is important that this is recognised and there is trust and confidence within a clear framework of collective accountability taking into account the unique context of each community and setting." (Shetland Islands Council)

5.2.21 In summary, responses to the National Discussion concerning inclusivity and diversity included:

- There needs to be early identification of children and young people's needs with provision of adequate supports and resources, including funding, staffing, and accessible buildings.

- Education needs to include learning about all forms of diversity, discrimination, and disadvantage for children and young people and for education workers and support staff, including attention to curriculum, teaching and learning resources, and to diversifying the workforce.

- Accessible buildings, safe, inclusive, and welcoming cultures, and free access to educational opportunities and experiences are vital to include, value and protect all children and young people.

- Recognising that diversity of place, community connections and unique contexts, alongside ensuring equitable educational experiences, must continue to be a central feature of Scottish education.

- Schools alone cannot address systemic and structural inequities and meet the needs of all children and young people, multi-agency, third sector and community working is required.

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**Inclusivity and Diversity – Call to Action:**

There is a need to ensure adequate sustained funding to provide staffing and specialist resources to be able to achieve the commitment to inclusivity and meeting the individual needs of each learner, with a particular urgency for children and young people identified as having Additional Support Needs (ASN).

Learning about and appreciating the diversity of people and places is important and needs to be reflected in curriculum, teaching and learning resources, and represented in the education workforce.

Safe and inclusive cultures that nurture respectful relationships and address discrimination and harassment are imperative.

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## 5.3 Health and Wellbeing

### What We Heard

5.3.1 We heard broad support for the importance of health and wellbeing and that this should continue to be core to CfE. Respondents pointed to the connection between children's rights, meeting their needs, and support for their health and wellbeing. Many of the suggestions to advance health and wellbeing for children and young people echo suggestions made for learning and for inclusivity and diversity – the need for more resources and specialist supports, a safe learning environment with a caring ethos, positive and healthy relationships, and multi-agency working and access to external specialists. Achieving the vision of all learners in Scotland matter includes supporting children and young people to be healthy, happy, safe, and cared for.

5.3.2 The importance of pastoral care was frequently mentioned, including the need for access to guidance counsellors and youth workers where young people could discuss issues with a person they trust. Another prevalent theme concerning wellbeing was the need for funding for more and better access to specialists and services. A wide range of services were mentioned: mental health supports, nurses, counsellors, therapists, education psychologists, social work, Health and Social Care Partnerships, GPs, health visitors and NHS services, Community and Learning Development (CLD) workers, Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), youth work and third sector organisations, and community police officers. We heard that approaches to joining up and accessing services need to be improved, accessible and available quickly, including addressing current identification, referral, and planning processes which could be cumbersome. The need for children and young people to have an Individual Health Plan that was understood and acted on by all professionals involved was noted.

> "changes in Scottish education have been dominated by a focus on curriculum and assessment. Given the recent and dramatic changes in schools' operational environment, now would be an ideal time to widen the focus of reform to include a re-evaluation of the capacity of schools to provide appropriate pastoral care and support to young people and their families." (Commission on School Reform)
>
> "Funding and training need to be put into guidance type roles so that every single child has access to someone who can help and more importantly, someone they can relate to and feel comfortable with." (Parent)

5.3.3 The benefits of whole school approaches to nurture were mentioned by learners, practitioners, and other respondents. We heard about the importance of proactive and holistic whole school mental and emotional health supports, and the need to address sources of stress and anxiety within education, primarily linked to exams, behaviour, and bullying. Children and young people mentioned the importance of learning to understand their mental health. In our visits to secondary schools, students often referred to the importance of Personal and Social Education to support their learning and understanding of a range of issues related to health and

wellbeing. It was also important for education professionals to be aware of, and understand, factors affecting their pupils' mental health that may have an impact in school, for example, we heard of concerns that the experiences of young carers and of care experienced youth were not always recognised or understood.

5.3.4 Safe spaces were identified as important by children and young people. As mentioned in the Inclusivity and Diversity section of this report, we heard major concerns about the prevalence of harassment, discrimination, bullying, and violence in schools across Scotland. It was proposed that it was time to revisit and improve the national approach to anti-bullying and for this to be consistently embedded in schools' local anti-bullying approaches and recording of incidents, including racist incidents, gender-based violence, and all forms of harassment for children and young people, including those with protected characteristics.

5.3.5 The need for positive relationships was mentioned, including tackling cyber bullying and other forms of online and in-person harassment. We also heard about the need for learning about healthy relationships in relation to sex education, consent, and gender-based violence.

"Nurture clubs, Worry box, Destress zone, A point in the day for mindfulness colouring and calm music just to relax, Therapy animals" – (P6/7 Currie Primary, children and young people group)

"Have a focus on Health & Wellbeing, making sure that there is a safe space and available staff to support pupils who are struggling. People need a safe place to go and calm down and someone safe to speak to when they are upset, overwhelmed or angry." (Anonymous children and young people group)

"Better education on mental health. Also having an education that doesn't overwhelm and cause severe, crippling anxiety for pupils." (Learner)

"Stronger anti-bullying powers. No workplace would stand for the racism, homophobia, physical, mental torture that school children are put through by their peers." (Parent)

"Prejudice and bullying exist in every school in Scotland, and the negative outcomes on learners are near universal, but the action in response to reports differs greatly. A cohesive and consistent approach to implementing and streamlining anti-bullying measures locally would support the realisation of national ambitions to help schools effectively respond to bullying and support all teachers to fully understand their professional responsibilities to address all forms of prejudice and bullying." (TIE)

5.3.6 The need to proactively support physical health was also mentioned. Several respondents spoke of valuing Physical Education (PE) and needing to instil habits of physical activity, this included ensuring sufficient numbers of PE teachers were trained, recruited, and retained. The need for free, nutritious school meals available to all children and young people without stigma was also identified.

5.3.7 In summary, key responses concerning Health and Wellbeing were:

- The importance of a range of pastoral care, whole-school approaches to nurture, attention to mental health, and access to specialist resources and experts is needed.
- Safe, caring spaces and healthy relationships are fundamental, including addressing all forms of bullying, harassment, and violence.
- Attention to children and young people's physical health requires more opportunities for play, physical education and activities, and nutritious school meals for all.

**Health and Wellbeing – Call to Action:**

There is a continued need to proactively learn about and support mental, emotional, and physical health, and healthy relationships, and to provide whole-school approaches to nurture, safe learning spaces, and anti-bullying practices.

## 6.0 A Learning System

6.0.1 It is hard to think of an agile and responsive education system in Scotland without focusing on curriculum, assessment, qualifications, and the workforce. Along with learning and pedagogy, that have been covered earlier in this full report, these are the essential components of any education system and collectively, they determine and define its performance. Often, these key components are viewed as mutually exclusive entities within the system, each with their own organisational boundaries, set of priorities, rules, and specifications.

6.0.2 In the National Discussion, we heard a great deal about curriculum, assessment, qualifications, and teaching. Mainly, however, these were viewed and commented upon as being separate parts of the system. Respondents readily talked about the curriculum or assessment or teaching but rarely did they discuss these as integrated parts of a *holistic system-wide* approach to realising improved educational performance in Scotland. As the sections that follow highlight, the connections between different parts of the system were rarely made. The comments and opinions we heard tended to focus on specific parts of the system, often in terms of issues that needed addressing, from the participants' own vantage points.

6.0.3 It is suggested, therefore, that a future education system in Scotland would benefit from system-synergy where the structural, cultural, and practical realisation of all key components reflect a coherent, co-ordinated, and interdependent system. We also heard of the need for the entire Scottish education system to be much more of a learning system, that was able to take risks and affect change, at the local point of need. If the Scottish education system is to meet the needs of all learners in the near and distant future, then a move away from centralised control towards greater subsidiarity could be more productive. We heard repeatedly, as part of the National Discussion, about the need for more locally instigated change and innovation that could be shared or scaled up within the system.

6.0.4 We heard a great deal about the education workforce, assessment, qualifications, and the curriculum. Each of these themes will now be explored building upon what heard in the National Discussion and drawing upon the independent analysis of the data.

## 6.1 Education Professionals

**What We Heard**

6.1.1 One very strong theme that featured heavily in the responses to the National Discussion was the importance of valuing and appreciating all educational professionals working with and within schools. We listened to some robust views about the importance of teachers and the need for more support staff, including classroom assistants, learning assistants, support for learning staff, and pupil support staff. Children and young people also shared with us how they felt it was important to have more adults supporting them with all aspects of their learning. Many learners told us that they wanted more teachers, more support staff, and more adults to help them in school. We heard about the importance of class sizes affecting how much time and attention a teacher or support staff member could give to each individual child or young person.

6.1.2 As discussed previously in this report, we heard about the importance of having professionals with different expertise and specialist knowledge, such as ALN expertise or mental health expertise to support children and young people in their learning. Similarly, we heard, from a wide range of respondents, how teachers and support staff felt they needed the time to fully support learners with their learning.

"[12]Education staff need to have the opportunity and time to complete staff training and professional development throughout their career that is related to mental health (Change Mental Health)

'Teaching timetables and classes are too full meaning no-one is winning; Class sizes should be capped at 25. (Education practitioner)

"Increase staffing from teaching staff, support staff and curricular experts e.g., art specialist needs to come back along with other areas of specialism to ensure pupils are getting the input they need. (Education practitioner)

6.1.3 We heard the importance of having high teaching standards and the centrality of good pedagogy as the basis for effective learning. We also heard concerns around teacher recruitment and retention. We heard how some schools, particularly in certain areas of Scotland, are struggling to recruit teachers and are currently over-reliant on supply or replacement teachers. Concerns were raised by parents and educators alike about the long-term impact of 'missing teachers' on learners' progression and achievement, particularly those learners with specific or additional needs.

6.1.4 When we asked about what is working well in Scottish Education currently, and what should be retained, without exception there was a strong view that the teaching profession, and those who support teachers in schools, continue to do a remarkable and important job. Inevitably, we also heard some differences of opinion about the nature of support. Conversations about ASN was a flashpoint in many of the discussions we had, particularly with parents. As noted earlier in the Inclusivity and Diversity section of this report, there as a strong sense that many children and young people with an identified ASN were not

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[12] All indicative quotes are either directly from the independent analysis and reporting of the National Discussion data undertaken by the 'Lines Between' or from the notes taken during the session by the independent facilitators or Scottish Government representatives.

receiving the expert support or resources they needed. It was also clear, in what we heard, that the profession is generally valued and considered to be 'doing the very best possible' for all learners in Scotland.

6.1.5 There were strong views expressed in both the written responses and in the discussions that teachers in Scotland should be skilled, well-educated, qualified, experienced, and have time for ongoing training and professional development. We heard repeatedly about the importance of better preparation, training and support for teachers and professional staff, at all levels. In many of the written submissions and face to face sessions we heard the importance of raising standards and securing improvement within the Scottish education system.

6.1.6 We heard about the importance and the power of university-led Initial Teacher Education (ITE) to create a high-quality education profession. Across the themes identified as important in the National Discussion, there were responses signalling the importance of embedding any changes in curriculum, assessment, learning, wellbeing, inclusivity and diversity in teachers' preparation and development from ITE onwards. For example, integrating anti-racist education principles and practices in the professional expertise and work of teachers. Approaches to improve university-school partnerships to support the future generations of teachers were mentioned.

6.1.7 For some children and young people, we heard that a learning connection with one teacher often did not go far enough. All too frequently, those in under-represented groups, the marginalised and the vulnerable highlighted that they needed to fit around the school and not the other way around. We heard some upsetting accounts of children being excluded and treated punitively because of the behaviours they exhibited. We also heard how certain groups of children and young people felt silenced and not valued because they 'did not match the version of what was expected within the school setting'.

6.1.8 We listened to many views which underlined the need for a greater focus, in the preparation and ongoing training and professional learning of teachers, on wellbeing, neurodiversity, dyslexia, disabilities and additional support needs. The mental health and well-being of children and young people was strongly advocated as being of prime importance in any professional learning or training programme both now and in the future.

6.1.9 It is not feasible to include every aspect of an aspiring teachers' professional knowledge and practice within a relatively short ITE programme. Therefore, we heard also about the importance of supports for early career teachers, particularly the availability of induction and mentoring.

6.1.10 While views about the nature of training and professional development varied, it was generally accepted, and noted in the comments as part of the National Discussion, that collaborative learning, networking, and sharing good practice was critically important in building the proficiency and capability of the profession moving forward.

6.1.11 As indicated in the section on Inclusivity and Diversity in this report, many of the respondents we listened to, as part of the National Discussion, called for greater awareness raising through substantial professional learning on a range of themes. These included LGBT+ issues, inclusivity, racial awareness, and diversity. It was also reinforced that to fully engage with such issues teachers should have the knowledge and mandate to take appropriate action when the situation required.

6.1.12 We also heard about the importance of subject-specific and curriculum-linked professional development and learning. There was interest in the co-creation and national availability of curriculum-linked teaching resources, developed with and by teachers, subject

specialists, and curriculum experts, that teachers could draw upon and adapt for use in their own classrooms and contexts. It was suggested that the new national improvement agency could provide an important role in the co-development and provision of such resources in collaboration with the education profession.

6.1.13 Continuing development of depth of subject knowledge was also considered important over a teachers' career. Any further changes in curriculum or assessments must also include attention to professional development to equip education professionals to understand and implement these changes.

6.1.14 The availability of time and space for education professionals and support staff to develop their professional knowledge, expertise and practice was important. We heard from teachers about the importance of protecting non-contact time and we heard from school leaders and the need for time to think and act strategically. Implementation of the existing government commitment to non-contact time was identified as necessary.

"Teachers need considerable support if they are to change their practice. Currently, Scotland's teachers have some of the highest contact hours in the world - there is no space for professional development, curriculum innovation and greater internal assessment." (Education practitioner)

"A teaching profession is needed with outstanding [Career Long Professional Learning] programmes that share their good practice both within specialist areas and across sectors. Student teachers need an outstanding experience of [Initial Teacher Education], perhaps within identified training schools." (Local Authority)

"Teachers need the promised extra 90 minutes of non-contact time, and more, to collaborate to improve their teaching and the learning of our young people. Time must be protected to allow improved collaboration of the right groups of people." (GTCS hosted National Discussion group)

"IOP Scotland strongly believes that widespread subject-specific professional learning is an essential element of high quality teaching and learning. Specifically, we believe there should be a systematic approach to developing teachers' subject knowledge, including a consistent national system of subject-specific professional learning within each subject which is integrated within the system, appropriately resourced, based on evidence-based practice, properly evaluated and which allows schools and teachers to plan for years ahead." (Institute of Physics Scotland)

"we have gathered a consistent theme from teachers – they need time and space to reflect, think about their learning, the impact it has had, plan what to do next and fulfil their plan. They need space to ensure their pedagogy is responsive and to discuss their ethical dilemmas, to develop their professional judgement and therefore to further enhance trust. This work is relational and should be grounded in an ethics of care. As we have said previously, our system is our people." (GTCS)

6.1.15 We heard, from many groups and respondents, how more high-quality, motivated, enthusiastic, creative, engaging, and inspiring teachers are needed throughout the Scottish education system. The passion, dedication and commitment of teachers was consistently appreciated, by many of those we talked to and seen as an absolute strength of the Scottish Education system. We listened to different groups who articulated their deepest respect for the profession but also underlined the importance of growing and sustaining the profession in the future.

6.1.16 We heard about the importance of having stable staffing within a school environment, in terms of continuity of high-quality teaching. The challenges of teacher turnover were noted and its adverse effects on learners was highlighted again and again. Job insecurity including use of part-time, short-term contracts were a concern for ensuring continuity of professional staff and supports for children and young people. Issues of teacher recruitment and retention were raised as potential fault lines in the system now and potentially, in the future.

6.1.17 The need for clear career paths, flexible training options, better salaries, and benefits, and reduced administrative responsibilities to improve teacher recruitment were raised in many of the focus group sessions. On balance, the value of the professional workforce in Scotland was clearly acknowledged and the centrality of retaining great teachers in the profession in the future was strongly supported.

6.1.18 It was raised with us that offering more permanent contracts and better pay could be a solution to teacher turnover. The issue of making the teaching profession more diverse was also highlighted.

6.1.19 Many participants stressed the passion, dedication and commitment reflected in the profession generally. A small number of participants felt that more rigid teaching standards could improve the quality of teaching, arguing for higher minimum teacher qualifications such as post-graduate degrees, regular reviews and assessments, and enforced retirements.

> "Employ the right people for the right job. The teachers for the future of our children need to interact, connect, inspire, be a role model and engage with children." (Parent)
>
> "Teachers who excel in their role should be recognised, their skills identified and shared, we all know particular teachers who have an ability to capture the attention and engage with pupils who in another class doesn't, use these teachers as the gold standard and try to determine how we encourage all staff to achieve this." (Parent)

6.1.20 As mentioned in the section on Inclusivity and Diversity, we heard calls to diversity the education workforce. We heard about experiences of discriminatory barriers in preparation, recruitment, and promotion within the education system that require addressing. We also heard about the importance of children and young people learning with and from adults who have similar lived experiences and could act as role models. Diversity and representation at all levels of the Scottish education system is important.

> "There also needs to be more diversity in the hiring of more BAME teachers. Representation is so important. Young people need to see more "people like them" in professional roles to believe they can achieve and reach their potential." (Teacher)
>
> "It is vital that not only is the teaching profession in schools from a diverse background but so are the institutions that hold the power in the system. There needs to exist a diversity of lived experiences and perspectives across all our institutions such as the GTCS, Education Scotland, SQA and any future inspection bodies. This will help to ensure that the aims of providing an education system that is truly inclusive, striving for equality and social justice can actually become a reality at all levels." (Diversity in the Teaching Profession & Education Workforce subgroup)
>
> "Members report that the current career pathway system is inherently discriminatory" (NASWUT)

6.1.21 Evidence from the National Discussion underlined how motivated, enthusiastic, creative, engaging, and inspiring teachers are vital to future educational provision. The issues of recruitment and retention in the workforce, however, was raised as a considerable challenge. Clear career pathways, flexible training options, better salaries, and benefits, and reduced administrative responsibilities to afford more time in the classroom were all highlighted as potential ways to ensure that good teachers remain in the Scottish system.

6.1.22 We heard concerns about the wellbeing of people working in the Scottish education system. For example, we heard about exhaustion, stress, anxiety, and burnout affecting people's capacity to do their work and negatively impacting their personal lives. The need for a priority commitment and linked strategies and supports for addressing the wellbeing of education professionals and support staff we proposed, for example availability of counselling services and specialist supports when needed.

> "Recognition that staff and leadership wellbeing has to be actively supported to ensure a workforce who have the capacity to adequately support learners. 'Can't pour from an empty cup'." (AHDS conference discussion feedback)
>
> "Teachers' wellbeing must be given higher priority in order that they are in the best position to be able to help pupils. The provision of professional support and also counselling, where appropriate, would be recognition of the vital role teachers play in safeguarding and supporting pupils and would be an investment in both the welfare of teachers and pupils." (NASWUT)

6.1.23 Calls for more funding, investment, and resources were common in what we heard, as well as calls for teachers to be more centrally involved in policy making by bringing their experience to bear on future decisions and actions. It was also noted that learning assistants, early years staff, support staff, and office and janitorial staff were critically important in any school, and it was suggested that a more holistic view of the workforce was needed going forward.

6.1.24 Early years education was a very strong theme in what we heard as being fundamental to all subsequent stages of education. Going forward, therefore, early years professionals need to be recognised for the foundational work that they do and rewarded in ways that reflect their expertise. Similarly, learning assistants or support assistants play a pivotal role in learning, particularly but not exclusively, by offering children or young people with additional learning needs the support they need to navigate their way through schooling and to learn successfully. We heard that all these professional groups need more recognition for the expertise that they bring and for the work they do across the Scottish Education system.

6.1.25 In summary, key responses concerning education professionals were recognition of:

- Centrality of the education workforce to the system and its importance in supporting learners and learning now and in the future.

- The pivotal need for high quality professional learning for professionals at all levels in the system.

- The need to diversity the workforce and address barriers to entry into a career in education and discriminatory practices affecting recruitment, promotion, and retention.

- Attention to staff wellbeing and working conditions are essential to respect and protect a high-quality education workforce.

**Education Professionals – Call to Action:**

The education workforce should be viewed holistically as a system-wide resource. The recognition, and reward, for the important work undertaken, by all in the workforce needs to be established and reflected in career opportunities and high-quality professional learning to support high-quality practice as a common entitlement for all. Attention to diversifying the workforce and to supporting staff wellbeing is needed.

## 6.3 The Curriculum

**What we heard**

6.3.1 During the engagement phase, we heard many viewpoints about Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). In fact, many comments about the curriculum featured in the written responses we read and in the group sessions where we participated. While there were mixed views, overall, we heard general support for CfE. In particular, we heard support for retaining the four capacities in CfE – successful learners, confident individuals, responsive citizens, and effective contributors. There was a consensus that maintaining a broad -based curriculum in the future was important. On the other hand, there were also other views expressed about whether, going forward, CfE was still a curriculum that was 'fit for purpose'.

6.3.2 Views about changing or overhauling or, even ending the CfE appeared in the National Discussion data. It was argued by some that CfE is too full, too cluttered, too crowded, or too congested to be delivered effectively. There were calls, particularly from those in the primary phase for CfE to be reduced, streamlined, and made clearer. Comments covered the fact that CfE should be more focussed, easier to follow and more realistic to teach.

6.3.3 Even among people who supported the continuation of CfE, there were views that it needed review and revisions. In particular, there were concerns that the essence of CfE had been lost due to the addition of further guidance and

"Curriculum for Excellence was well meaning in its desire to hand back professional judgement to the teaching profession but was vague and open to a huge degree of interpretation by practitioners about what the outcomes actually mean."  (Teacher)

"Teachers across the country spend so much time reinventing the wheel. One consistent programme for literacy, numeracy, reading and writing would save on so much time - giving teachers more energy and motivation to meet their children's individual needs" –(Teacher)

requirements. Some views that were shared with us maintained that the number of Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os) was excessive and unwieldy to deliver. Concerns were also expressed about the introduction and use of benchmarks.

6.3.5 More standardisation and direction, standard resources, and consistency in the curriculum was felt, by some, to be urgently needed. Even though views were expressed to us that the CfE should be dismantled, others wanted the Scottish Government to 'stick with it', by giving teachers and schools more time, resources, and the opportunity to create resources for its successful implementation. It was generally felt that CfE was a 'labour intensive' curriculum requiring a great deal of professional time to deliver effectively.

6.3.6 A wide range of views on the current structure of CfE were expressed along with some concerns about the potential for too much variability in interpretation and delivery. There were those who advocated a more traditional approach to the curriculum that was tightly structured and clear while others advocated a more innovative, contemporary curriculum that would respond to future needs. Several parents expressed a view that CfE was intended only for primary age children and not for those in the secondary phase. The parents we spoke to raised concerns about the fact that in the senior phase of education CfE 'failed to matter any longer', as qualifications were then 'the most important thing'.

6.3.7 Some participants commented that access to a wide variety of subjects during the broad general education phase and then a depth of learning through specialising in chosen subjects in the senior years of high school still made perfect sense. We also heard concerns about a narrowing of the curriculum in the senior phase with an over emphasis on examined subjects.

6.3.8 Reading, writing, spelling, and maths were described as fundamental for learners' success during and after formal education. Many respondents, particularly

learners themselves, were keen to suggest new subjects or a new prioritisation for certain disciplines. Recommendations included more: arts and music; drama and crafts; Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM subjects); languages, including Gaelic; history; home economics; Personal and Social Education (PSE); and Religious and Moral Education (RME).

6.3.9 Generally, the views we heard were supportive of a more joined-up approach to the curriculum between different educational phases and a smoother transition throughout the learner journey, including the senior phase. Many of the group discussions echoed this position emphasising the need for greater clarity and coherence for the learners on the curriculum journey. The need for dedicated staffing, with time and resources, to support collegiate planning to smooth transitions between stages and sectors of education was noted. We also heard calls for teachers and schools to have greater flexibility to adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs and to offer the curriculum through varied learning pathways.

6.3.10 In terms of the future, it was felt by many that we spoke to, that CfE would benefit from a continual review process to ensure that it remained relevant, up to date, and fit for purpose to meet the needs of learners in a changing world.  It was suggested that a regular curriculum review process would ensure curricula remained relevant and provide a planned approach for professional development and curriculum-linked resources to support teaching and learning.

6.3.11 It is important to note, however, that we heard strong support for CfE and particularly for the four capacities. Many respondents highlighted how these capacities offered learners in Scotland a positive foundation for education, providing structure and offering teachers both flexibility and autonomy.

"The four capacities capture the intention of realising the human right to education and preparing young people for democratic citizenship. It is critical that these are retained, but with the added clarity that the capacities co-exist in equal measure to one another." (Education practitioner)

"Whilst the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence are still relevant and provide a good skeletal framework for teaching, it needs to be updated in line with recent advances in the field of learning and education in the digital age." (Local Authority)

"Decluttered curriculum with children prepared for life, children having wider experiences and an understanding of their interconnectedness in the world." (Education practitioner)

"we should retain the Curriculum for Excellence but strip it back down to the original text (i.e., lose all the extra directions, such as the Experiences and Outcomes, which leave teachers bogged down in bureaucratic detail). Teachers should be trusted to teach and children to learn." (Upstart Scotland)

"A move to regular curriculum review cycle will allow stability over a known period to allow expertly developed core curriculum resources for teachers to use, high-quality professional learning etc. Too often in the past teachers have been left to inefficiently reinvent the wheel for themselves. Good curriculum frameworks and resources developed by expert practitioners, those with expertise in curriculum-making and assessment will give a good base from which teachers can build. Teachers can then focus on developing their pedagogy and classroom practices to improve the learning of our children and young people." (GTCS hosted National Discussion group)

6.3.12 We also heard that there were things that needed to be included in the curriculum to address and reflect some really important aspects. We heard about the importance of rights and understanding and respecting all forms of diversity and equality should be integrated in the curriculum and curriculum-linked resources, for example understanding and appreciation of race, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, poverty, and other protected characteristics. One of these aspects was having an anti-racist curriculum. A number of

participants raised concerns that CfE is largely mono-cultural, with alternative perspectives regarded as an add-on. While it was acknowledged that some issues around racism and Black history are covered in the current curriculum, it was noted that this could be viewed this as tokenistic. It was also noted that within CfE the language on equality and inclusion is not robust enough to encourage teachers to build anti-racist approaches explicitly into the curriculum. Hence, there was a strength of feeling common and some very vocal calls to decolonise the curriculum by teaching black and ethnic minority history which reflects the experiences of ethnic minority individuals, their influence on Scotland, and Scotland's role in the slave trade and colonisation.

6.3.13 Other comments about changes to CfE included ensuring that the curriculum reflects and responds to linguistic and cultural diversity. There were also some suggestions to embed anti-racist principles into assessment processes and for careers guidance and vocational learning to avoid casual stereotyping, for example linked to gender or race.

6.3.14 We also heard about the importance of retaining a focus on wellbeing in CfE and that this needed to receive the same importance and prominence as academic attainment in literacy and numeracy. As discussed in the section on Health and Wellbeing, issues of mental, emotional, physical, and cognitive health require attention in Scottish education, especially in the context of the impact of a global pandemic and a cost-of-living crises.

"Children need to be exposed to a wide range of stories and cultures, so that they build empathy. It's important to encourage reading stories about/written by people of different ethnicities, of different social backgrounds, of different levels of ability, different genders and gender identities etc." (Education practitioner)

"While the vagueness and flexibility of the current Es & Os and Benchmarks allow for creativity and innovation, it is our perspective that fundamental issues of human rights, inclusion, and anti-discrimination/prejudice/bullying should not be lost to impreciseness" (TIE)

"Education Reform presents an opportunity to reconsider the curricular content of education in Scotland. As it stands, the Curriculum for Excellence does not recommend or require gender equal curricular content, nor content which is anti-racist, LGBTQ+ or disability inclusive (Scottish Government, 2008). In practice, this means that some young people will have access to progressive learning, where many others do not. Access to a curriculum which emphasises equality and rights must not be available to all." (Zero Tolerance)

6.3.15 The main ideas emerging from the National Discussion feedback on the curriculum suggest that while there is general support for retaining CfE and the four capacities, there is a question mark though over whether CfE reflects contemporary issues and important aspects, such as rights, diversity, and equality. There was not an overarching view that CfE needed to be withdrawn, but there was strong support for updating CfE in ways that encompassed issues of a more contemporary nature. On balance, the evidence underlined a general concern that the CfE is too cluttered and there is a gap between the principles of CfE and its application in practice. We heard a great deal about the need for a regular curricular review process and for national available curriculum-linked resources to support teaching and learning.

6.3.16 In summary, the key findings concerning curriculum are:

- CfE in both its realisation and delivery is viewed as being unnecessarily variable. It is viewed as overly cluttered with too much content and potentially not the right content.

- The four capacities remain a real strength of the curriculum and should be retained.

- As part of the review of the curriculum the technical framework of the BGE (including the Experiences and Outcomes) needs to be re-visited to ensure it is still fit for purpose and aligns with emerging recommendations about the Senior Phase from the 'Hayward Review'.

**Curriculum – Call to Action:**

A regular curriculum review process should be established to ensure that the curriculum remains fit for purpose, reflects contemporary learner needs, and can be effectively delivered in ways to ensure that all learners in Scotland have high quality curricular-linked learning experiences.

## 6.4 Future Assessment and Qualifications

### What We Heard

6.4.1 Many of those we listened to, within the National Discussion, including parents, employers, teachers, young people, and specialist organisations that support young people, were particularly exercised about the issue of assessment and qualifications. In summary, the data reflected two completely polarised positions. Firstly, there was strong support for the current assessment and qualification process as a guarantee of high academic standards. Secondly, there was also a strength of feeling that the current assessment and qualifications framework was deeply flawed, narrow, and inherently discriminatory.

6.4.2 On the second of these positions, we heard a great deal of advocacy about the need for a change in assessments and qualifications to offer more opportunities for success for more learners. We heard the need for effective and flexible learning pathways with academic, practical, and vocational options, that recognised and rewarded a broader set of skills, abilities, and talents.

> "The qualification system, as it stands in Scotland, is a highly privileged and closed system. It excludes learners, who do not learn in the way the qualifications require and signals to those learners that their talents, abilities, and skills are simply not recognised, so will not be rewarded". (Parent)
>
> "How can an education system write off so many young people simply because they do not fit into the qualifications funnel?" (Education practitioner)
>
> "Vocational skills, technical skills, practical skills are needed in society, but they are seen as not being worthy of an exam or a qualification". (Employer)
>
> "We hear so much about excellence and equity in Scotland but really excellence depends on discounting equity. This is a system with failure and disillusionment, for so many young people, hard-wired." (Education practitioner)
>
> "Relentless focus on attainment, has pulled us away from focussing on each child's journey at their pace." (AHDS conference discussion feedback)
>
> "Giving parity of esteem to each of the four capacities would see the current narrow focus on attainment being replaced by a system which recognises and celebrates the achievements of all learners – one which considers a diversity of pathways which are genuinely suitable and accessible for all learners in the senior phase; which challenges system and societal assumptions that do not value so-called vocational and academic learning equally; and one in which every young person is seen and valued." (EIS)
>
> "Change exams to make them more suited to everyone's strengths by making a wider variety of questions that don't just benefit those with a good memory. Show children what their exams will look like and tell everyone how they will be set up." (Learner, 15)
>
> "Develop data metrics that allow for integrated measurements of success." (UCAS)
>
> "Supporting the individual needs of every child and young person in Scotland's schools can be achieved by widening our measurement of success." (Barnardos)

> "I hope that a radical move away from a high-stakes exam diet is being considered. However, I believe it is vital that a robust and anonymised external assessment system remains." (Education practitioner)

6.4.3 While the importance of literacy and numeracy continue to be recognised as fundamental, we heard concerns about an overly narrow focus on attainment and the subjects that are tested and measured. We heard very strong opinions about the need to recognise a broader, wider set of achievements reflecting the wealth of talent that children and young people bring to school, whatever their context, situation or setting. The need to give equal value to all four capacities in CfE was noted. Young people expressed their support for wider achievements to be valued and they reinforced how opportunities to showcase more practical skills in education should be valued and counted. Children and young people, particularly those caring for adults, underlined how life skills should be taught, and how subject content should be made more applicable and relevant to real life.

6.4.4 We heard, from learners, that they wanted to see a Scottish education system in the future as one where everyone's learning progress matters, with an individualised approach to learning rather that a standardised approach that they felt simply discounts learners who do not fit. Many young people we spoke to talked about the need for a divergence from the standard curriculum allowing young people to have the freedom to learn and to follow their own individual interests.

6.4.5 Within the National Discussion, many learners raised the examination system as a highly contentious issue, expressing how stressful and delimiting exams could be. We also heard that the focus on qualifications was having a washback effect to drive all stages of schooling was noted with concern. As a secondary school student commented, there needed to be a shift away from "learning as compliance" associated with their regular experience of test preparation and retrieval as part of their schooling.

6.4.6 It was clear from what we heard that many young people do not consider exams to be an ideal assessment and feel strongly that a continuous assessment

model, across subjects, would be the preferred, if not fairer, approach. We also heard from the education profession about the importance of developing and using formative assessment to provide timely, specific feedback to scaffold and support children and young people's learning and progress.

> 'Exams are a quick-fire judgment on you. The results affect your life for better or worse'. (Learner)
>
> 'How can an education system that states it is equitable just shut down the options for so many young people in Scotland willingly, and in the full knowledge that so many talented young people in Scotland will feel discarded and not good enough'. (Education practitioner)
>
> 'I am scared the exam system will just show that I am worthless.' (Learner)

6.4.7 Young people of all ages were very vocal about the need for a range of assessment options and pathways that afforded them recognition through a broader range of qualification options that underlined what they could do not what they could not do. It was clear, from what we heard, that the narrative about assessment and qualifications, needs to change to provide a better balance of learning options and learning pathways, for young people, that offer them parity of esteem, the opportunity to be recognised and qualifications that will be accepted whatever career path they choose.

6.4.8 Many learners, who were preparing for examinations, raised with us the acute pressure that they were feeling because of the importance of the exam outcomes for their future careers and lives. These young people underlined the stress that they felt from ongoing external assessments, particularly in the senior phase, where the 'stakes are very high'.

6.4.9 We recognise that an Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment[13] is also being conducted. We have shared what we heard from the National Discussion with Professor Louise Hayward and look forward to the detailed

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[13] https://www.gov.scot/groups/independent-review-of-qualifications-and-assessment/

recommendations from the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. The content of our National Discussion report is based on responses to the National Discussion exclusively, not other reviews in progress. We also heard that while the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessments is mainly focused on the senior phase of schooling, there is a need to review and update assessments at all stages of schooling in Scottish education, including in primary and early secondary years.

6.4.10 In summary, the responses concerning future assessments and qualifications identified:

- The need for a broader set of qualifications that affords learners, more opportunities to demonstrate a breadth of learning progress and achievements.
- Changes are needed to the current examination system to offer learners more opportunities and diverse pathways to success and recognition.
- The importance of continuous assessment and formative assessment, as well as external assessments, in providing feedback to support learners' progress.

**Future Assessments and Qualifications – Call to Action:**

A future education system should capitalise upon, and harness, the abilities, skills, and talents of all children and young people in Scotland. It should break down the academic/vocational divide, offer a broader set of assessment and qualification options, and formally recognise and reward the achievements of all learners.

## 7.0 Digital Futures

**What We Heard**

7.1 While technology and digital resources did not feature in the data as heavily as we expected, there were some strong views from employers, parents, and teachers of the need to recognise that digital technology must be a central aspect of any education system that is future focused. Technological innovation is set to disrupt the world of work and organisations in ways that are not easily foreseen. This leads us back to the critical question of how we educate children and young people for a future fraught with uncertainty. Educating Our Future, as we highlighted earlier, will require reimaging education in ways that can ensure that now, and in the future, all learners have the best chance to be successful, health and happy.

7.2 Inevitably, within the National Discussion we heard a great deal about the here and now, what should change, what should stay and what should be improved. Less was said about the future world that children and young people will live in, the impact of artificial intelligence or the consequences of greater automation on future careers and work prospects. Understandably, it is difficult to think a decade ahead with any sense of confidence, so what appears in this section reflects what we heard in relation to digital futures, and it considers some of the implications for a future education system in Scotland.

7.3 One thing is clear; the digital world will open immense opportunities for the children and young people in Scotland who are prepared for it. The possibilities seem endless but so are challenges and the potential for inequity through the digital divide. The ethical issues that surround social media deeply worried many of the parents we spoke to, and they also raised concerns about using technology safely and wisely.  Parents also spoke about how the amount of screen time that children and young people were exposed to highlighting the dangers of being in a world without checks and balances.

> "In the future technology will evolve so we will need to evolve with it." (Learner, P7).
>
> "Education should focus on preparing us for the future as much as teaching us about specific things in subjects. We should make use of the technology that has been developed in recent times to improve learning." (Learner, 16)
>
> "Engage with parents, carers, employers, FE and HE to recognise the more rounded skill sets and capabilities that will be required to thrive in the 21st Century." (Parent)
>
> "Technologies should only ever be used as a support for teachers undertaking curriculum and assessment and never as a replacement." – NASWUT

7.4 We heard from employers about how digital skills are now at a premium and are key for employability today and in the future. While employers noted that the digital over the next ten years could potentially bring new job opportunities, they also questioned how far the current education system, in the shape of the curriculum, teaching and assessment, was a good foundation for a future world where technological proficiency would be essential. Both employers and young people recognised the need not just for digital skills which are contemporary but also the skill of constantly adapting to an evolving digital landscape. We heard from employers and parents how they feel that the current education system is 'stuck in the past, preparing young people for jobs that very soon will not exist'. Many parents spoke of the importance of having the skills to learn but also to re-learn to live, work, and thrive in the future digital world.

7.5 Technology continues to evolve and outpace educational reform not just in Scotland but in many systems across the world. At the click of a button, artificial intelligence can run your home, organise your work, sort out your social life, book your holidays, remember key facts about you and manage to anticipate most of your shopping needs. Ten years on artificial intelligence, virtual or augmented reality will be familiar and accepted learning resources used within a variety of learning contexts.

7.6 In many ways the future is already here, the question is how does the education system in Scotland grasp the opportunities that the new technologies bring and be ahead of the curve in preparing children and young people in Scotland for a different way of learning? We heard from some respondents in the National Discussion that the Scottish education system has to be more adaptable and flexible to changes in the modern world and to the larger challenges facing society as a whole.

"The world is advancing rapidly in the area of technology. With this advancement, children must be equipped with sufficient science, engineering, technology and mathematical skills. Even the current hot issue of climate change requires scientific knowledge to enable further research to be undertaken in tackling the matter." (Employer)

7.7 In this rapidly evolving digital world, we heard from teachers and the professional organisations that technology could not, and should not, replace the importance of the in-person teaching and the role of the education workforce in supporting children and young people. The appropriate integration of technology to augment and support professionals' work and pupils' learning was proposed.

7.8 The most common theme, raised by participants around the issue of digital futures concerned the importance of infusing the curriculum with topics of direct relevance to a future world. Examples of such topics included contemporary politics, citizenship, environmentalism, sustainability, human rights, social issues, and sex education. It was generally felt that a robust, comprehensive, modern, engaging, and inspiring curriculum that encompassed digital learning more centrally was needed to move education forward.

"It is difficult to think about preparing young people for a digital future when the curriculum does not have this at its epicentre". (Education practitioner)

"The curriculum is the first place to start, it needed to be redesigned so it is future proof." (Education practitioner)

> "A little more digitalized education like online assignments in English, Geography and History etc. Doing this means less paper will be used and the assignments would be harder to lose." (Learner, aged 15)
>
> "Create a curriculum that includes more independent digital learning and specific courses." (Learner, aged 13)
>
> "The technological and digital revolution has changed the traditional ways to gain knowledge and communicate. We must provide children with the skills to be life-long learners, to be problem-solvers, solution focused and to make meaning of the world around them. The emphasis should be on effective learning and learner self-efficacy rather than attainment." (Mental Health Foundation)
>
> "Individualised learning using technology would allow teachers to adapt tasks in a lesson to the level required by any pupil at any given time." (Education practitioner)
>
> "Include effective use of AI and technology, including understanding the dangers of fake news and healthy use of mobile phones etc." (Crieff High School Parent Council)

7.9 General comments we heard about digital learning largely fell into two strands of opinion. One strand reflected calls for better provision of technology in schools, covering Chromebooks, iPads, Wi-Fi, and computer labs, for example. Some respondents raised the issue of equity and note that ensuring that all young people have the same access to technology will be important going forward. The scope for increased digital learning in the future was also raised along with the need to address and inequities in access to technology that many students in Scotland encountered. Technology to support professional collaboration, for example across the different geographies of Scotland, was also identified as important.

7.10 The second strand of opinion focused on ensuring young people are digitally literate, confident, and safe. In relation to health and wellbeing, there were calls for schools to support young people with internet safety, discourage excessive technology and social media use, and increase understanding of the potential harms of social media. In relation to diversity and equity, concerns about the content of some social media and online spaces spreading discrimination, prejudice, and hate were noted.

> "Children and young people should be supported in particular to navigate the online world, taking a balanced approach which recognises the benefits and opportunities (such as increased engagement with social justice issues) as well as potential harms (for example in relation to mental health or exposure to 'Incel' culture or far-right extremism.) Educational approaches should go beyond a 'risks and dangers' focus and emphasise critical thinking so that children and young people are better equipped to recognise misinformation and make informed choices about how they want to engage online. (Rape Crisis Scotland)

7.11 Among learners, there was a strong appetite for more opportunities to gain information and knowledge digitally. A prevalent theme among learners was for education to help develop their digital literacy, and skills to help prepare for work. Learners highlighted the need for specific subjects; better provision of technology in schools; opportunities for extra-curricular activities and trips; and more freedom of choice.

7.12 Currently, while there are many pressing issues and needs that policymakers and businesses must manage, the long-term challenges for education are numerous and pressing.  The question is whether education in Scotland can change sufficiently quickly to prepare children and young people for a world that will demand new sets of digital skills, capabilities, and attributes. Such changes will require far more than just tinkering at the edges of the current education system of having a digital strategy. A significant shift is needed, within Scottish Education, to ensure that the learners of tomorrow are prepared for a very different world of work and way of life.

7.13 A radical rethink of digital literacy is needed to safeguard the lives and life chances of children and young people in Scotland, in the future. Bold actions are needed now to change the education system in Scotland so that it is future focused and equips all learners to survive and thrive in a digital age.

7.14 In summary, the National Discussion responses concerning digital futures highlight:

- Investment in digital learning is a critical issue for the education system in Scotland. Without large-scale investment, over time, learners in Scotland will find themselves disadvantaged and disenfranchised, in a future world of work.
- Digital learning must be at the core of Scottish education so that all learners in Scotland have choice, opportunity, and security in their lives, both now and in the future.

**Digital Futures – Call to Action:**

Digital upskilling and digital transformation across the Scottish education system, at all levels, is an urgent priority for all learners in a future digital world. Attention to maximising the existing skills and infrastructure available to further build digital capacity is essential.

## 8.0 Human-Centred Educational Improvement

**What we heard**

8.1 The National Discussion was intentionally called "Our National Discussion" to signal that this process needed to be inclusive of, and listen to, the voices and views of people across Scotland, particularly children and young people and those whose voices are often marginalized or unheard. The major message that we heard throughout the National Discussion was that valuing people and positive relationships must be the essential features of Scottish education.

8.2 While the future of Scottish education may be more digital, it absolutely must be more human too. It may seem obvious that educational improvement is – and should be – human-centred, but we heard of concerns about an overfocus on structures, systems, data, and documents. Respondents' vision for Scottish education is one where people are listened to, heard, respected, represented, engaged, and valued in decisions and actions.

8.3 Consistent with the Muir Review's title of *Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education*, the National Discussion deliberately places the discussion about education into a bold new future, which ensures that children and young people are at the centre of the education system, carefully and expertly supported by professionals, parents/carers, and the wider community. We heard from children and young people who wanted decision-makers to remember that their education was about them.

8.4 Relationships mattered to the children and young people we heard from. They wanted to have friends, to like their teacher and to be liked by them, to have trusting relationships with adults who could help them, to learn lots of subjects and skills, to have fun, to play, to be listened to and be heard, and for their individual

characteristics, needs, interests and ambitions to be respected, recognised, and supported. In many respects the adults that we spoke to want the same for children and young people, and indeed a version of this for themselves too.

8.5 We also heard concerns that a truly human-centred approach focused on building strong relationships was challenging in the current conditions, requiring attention to adequate staffing and appropriate class sizes.

> "It is impossible to build strong relationships with every student in the current system. And I strongly feel this is what students need for ALL to be successful in Scottish Education." (Teacher)

8.6 Human-centred educational improvement requires engaging and listening to all people. Most importantly, children and young people must be at the heart of the Scottish education. The importance of UNCRC Article 12 which calls for respecting the views of the child and initiatives such as UNICEF's Rights Respecting Schools Awards were identified as important examples of why listening to children and young people matters.

8.7 We heard that the meaningful engagement of children and young people required attention to how best to connect and communicate with them, for example the use of child and youth friendly approaches. The need to ensure all learners were listened to, not just those who were most able or most dominant in speaking up, was stressed, including attention to children and young people with neurodiversity, disabilities, and long-term conditions and ensuring gender equality in listening to girls and young women. Individuals and organisations that can support the engagement and representation of vulnerable or marginalised groups have an important role, for example youth workers providing safe spaces for discussion.

8.8 Importantly, we heard that consultation alone is insufficient. Children and young people need to be listened to and they need to know how their views have been informed decisions and actions.

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"We like to be asked what's important." – (Barrhill Primary School, children and young people group)

"Listen!! Come into schools and talk to young people" (Learner)

"Ask them. let everyone have a voice and let them say what they need to about Scottish education as everyone has their own believes / opinions. Let students have their say! You ask them what they want." – (Inverness High School, children and young people group)

Article 12 in action means decision-makers listening to the views of young people and acting to incorporate those views into all decisions that impact young people. This applies at all levels of decision-making including both the collective voice of young people as a group and the individual views of each young person in the education system. An education system based on the views of children and young people not only respects their article 12 right, but also better addresses the needs of the learners it aims to serve. This is because young people are able to identify the problems in their education and input into developing solutions, they are more likely to support and invest in." (Scottish Youth Parliament)

"Participation must be meaningful with children and young people knowing where their input has gone and whether it has made a difference. Decision makers must commit to not just 'listening' to what is said but to responding back to the people who have said it." (Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland)

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8.9 Human-centred educational improvement also involves serious engagement with parents, carers, families, and communities. The importance of schools and local authorities communicating with and listening to parents/carers was stressed. Improvements in the quantity and quality of communication were called for to ensure

parents and carers knew about their child's rights, learning, support, and progress, and to ensure that teachers and other staff knew more about the child and their family. The use of parents' councils, parents' evenings, in-person meetings, and online/digital communications were all proposed. We heard about the importance of holding local authorities to account for their responsibility to ensure parents and carers were aware of their rights and their child's rights, for example in decisions about school starting age.

8.10 Providing support to parents and families was also noted, for example parenting education workshops and supporting parents to know about their child's education and support for needs such as mental health. The role of parents and carers in their child's learning and development is important and requires support.

8.11 More broadly, respondents noted the importance of schools within their communities and developing community relationships. As well as schools contributing to their communities, drawing on community resources to support schools and their learners is also important.

8.12 Meaningfully and appropriately engaging with a wide range of people requires thoughtful attention in the design of communications, consultation, engagements, and other opportunities for people to contribute, add their voice, and be listened to. This is particularly the case for people and groups who are disadvantaged, marginalised, or less frequently heard. The need to build trust, to work with trusted intermediaries, to be culturally response, to use community languages, and to ensure accessibility for engaging were all highlighted. Addressing barriers to engagement and valuing all voices was stressed as essential.

"Don't be dismissive of parents, we need to be included as have knowledge and ideas about how to get the best from our children" (Lead Scotland, parents' group).

"Bringing together the different elements of the educational landscape that young people experience to work in partnership to deliver effective learning, choice, and support. This recognises education as a shared responsibility. Harness the skills and expertise of youth work, and indeed of employers, alongside that of schools in supporting young people's learning, ensuring that the outcomes and achievements that young people gain through their totality of learning experiences are captured and celebrated." (Awards Network)

"Create culturally-responsive approaches to engagement and involvement with those that have lived experience and expertise. Empower these groups with adequate mechanisms for their voices to be heard in future review and reform processes in Scottish Education" (Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education: Curriculum Reform Sub-Group)

"Enabling Deaf people involved in education in Scotland to have a say in future decisions and actions requires adherence to one central principle: 'Nothing about us without us'. In other words, decisions about the education of Deaf people simply cannot be considered legitimate unless Deaf people of all ages are able to bring their lived experiences and participate in making them." (British Deaf Association Scotland)

"It is essential that active steps are taken to ensure that Gaelic-medium Education (GME) is included in any developments and that appropriate consultation with the GME sector and national organisations supporting GME, is undertaken to ensure developments impact positively." (Comann nam Pàrant (Nàiseanta))

8.13 Vitally, human-centred educational improvement must also place the people who work in education, especially those such as teachers who are directly responsible for teaching and supporting children and young people, at the centre of informing and leading educational improvement. The people working on the frontlines of Scottish education know the reality of conditions, contexts, and needs. We heard a concern that education professionals should be involved in all educational decisions and that policy development and educational reform would be

inauthentic, inappropriate, and ineffective without the genuine and sustained involvement of education professionals. We heard that education professionals should not be viewed as merely the implementers of policies and curricular decided centrally, rather education professionals should be leading and informing the design and development of educational changes as well as using their professional judgement and expertise to support adaptation and implementation.

8.14 The use of expert and advisory groups with relevant professional expertise was also noted as important for informed educational improvement, although we also heard that such groups must not be comprised of the "usual suspects" and include a broad range of membership.

8.15 In addition to including professional expertise and engagement of all stakeholders involved, we also heard about the importance of future educational changes being research-informed. The need to research and evaluate the implementation and outcomes of policies and practices, including current and future reforms, was noted.

> "Listen to those delivering the curriculum as much/more than those in offices. Allow secondments for current teachers to write and create curriculum. For a new curriculum to work, teachers need to feel like they're at the helm and this isn't another change being done to them with no consultation. Those outwith the classroom are not best placed to make these decisions." (Teacher)
>
> "It is through their knowledge of the subjects and how they can be introduced to our pupils that teachers have authority. Any change to education must have teachers playing a central role, drawing on that authority. Anything else is unsound." (@MiracleUbik via Twitter)
>
> "We must have the lived experience of everyone involved in education taken into account. #TeacherWorkingConditionsArePupilLearningConditions" (@robfmac via Twitter)
>
> "The Scottish Government needs to grasp this opportunity to develop a genuinely collegiate approach going forwards, ensuring these reforms are not a cosmetic exercise and that the perspective of classroom teachers is placed at the heart of any reform." (NASWUT)
>
> "teacher voice should also be at the heart of decision making in the education system. In addition to making professional judgements about learning and teaching, shaping the curriculum and determining the appropriate forms of assessment, teachers should also influence decisions in relation to education reform." (EIS)
>
> "teachers are not merely policy implementers; they create, enact and leverage policy in their settings for their learners and communities. Teachers are curriculum makers. The potential of the profession to do this needs to be unlocked. The professional and social capital they bring to their work is integral to successful and effective teaching and learning and, through this, positive outcomes for learners." (GTCS)

8.16 The Muir Review proposed major structural and culture changes for Scottish education, including three new national agencies. We heard few comments specifically about structural change, but there was a recognition that roles and responsibilities throughout the education system needed consideration, including in taking forward the National Discussion. There was a general view that while national

direction, strategy and resources are necessary, top-down change being driven onto the education profession is inappropriate and there needs to be a genuine move to let the education profession lead the way forward, in collaboration with all staff, learners, parents, and families. The concept of subsidiarity where powers and responsibilities are devolved to the most relevant people and place was suggested – this must not be devolving mandated changes but enabling professional agency and judgement. While Scotland has committed to empowering the education workforce, we heard from teachers and school leaders that they did not feel this had been achieved in reality. Headteachers, teachers, early years practitioners, and other staff wanted more involvement in educational decisions that affected their day-to-day work. The importance of local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICS) in leading educational improvement, supporting the education profession and developing educational provision appropriate to their context and communities was also discussed.

8.17 It was suggested that engagement approaches such as the National Discussion demonstrated the importance to listening to and valuing all voices, including the education profession, and this must continue to be a hallmark of the way of working in Scottish education.  We heard from participants that they had appreciated the opportunity to engage in discussions in-person and online across Scotland as part of the National Discussion. They wanted this to be a continued feature of Scottish education where collaboration and networks would be facilitated to share ideas, expertise and practices beyond schools and local authorities, for example teacher-research networks. With the pace of change in the world and the urgency of needs for learners, we heard that the future Scottish education system needs to be proactive and dynamic requiring professional agency and local flexibility.

8.18 The new national agencies require careful consideration and design within this context – there are structural considerations of not centralising control and resources but rather working collaboratively with professionals throughout the education system who have responsibility and expertise for leading educational improvement. However, these are not simply structural issues, this requires unleashing deep

cultural change and leadership for human-centred educational improvement placing learners at the heart, valuing professional expertise and judgement, and engaging parents/carers, families, communities, employers, and all relevant partners and stakeholders.

8.19 Our future education requires human-centred educational improvement that cares deeply and profoundly for all children and young people in Scotland, and for the adults who care for, work with, and support them. The future education system needs to be courageous and compassionate.

8.20 In summary, the features of human-centred educational improvement valuing and listing to people involved in the Scottish education system needs to a central feature of all decisions and actions.

**Human-Centred Educational Improvement – Call to Action:**
Human-centred educational improvement requires listening to children and young people's views and putting their needs at the heart of the Scottish education system, engaging parents/carers, families, and communities, and the education profession leading the way forward with professional expertise and judgement informing decisions and actions.

## 9.0 Coda

9.1 This report outlines the Vision, Values, and Call to Action that as independent facilitators, of the National Discussion in Scotland, we were asked to produce. The contents of this report are based *solely* on the responses received and heard as part of the National Discussion.

9.2 As noted earlier, the scale of response is unprecedented in the history of national engagements about Scottish education. We have listened to the voices of people across Scotland, including children and young people and the adults who parent, care for, and work with them. We have attempted to represent their views in this report honestly and faithfully.

9.3 We heard many concerns about whether the National Discussion would lead to genuine action and significant change. There is always a risk that reports, such as this, will be duly acknowledged and even celebrated but then not acted upon. We heard frustrations, cynicism, and anger, in some cases, about whether transformational educational reform, as recommended by the Muir Review, would be implemented in Scotland. We heard concerns about whether there would be a tendency to continue the status quo rather than embracing an opportunity for the entire system to do things differently to meet current and future needs for children and young people.

9.3 One thing is clear, and we cannot emphasise this enough, there is an overwhelming appetite for change - albeit the "right change" at the right pace with the right supports. There is an enthusiasm for ongoing engagement in discussions and action that make that change in Scottish Education a reality. It would be a huge, lost opportunity for Scottish education, therefore, if this groundswell of current support for educational improvement was lost, ignored, or side-lined. While we recognise that not every organisation, group, or individual will get the exact change that they want or desire, there are many areas of consensus and a genuine momentum within the

Scottish education system to work towards a better future for every learner in Scotland.

9.4 The people of Scotland have spoken, and we have listened. So now it is time for action, most critically is time for the right action. We are not proposing that an avalanche of changes is imposed on the education system but rather that the National Discussion is viewed as a mandate for desired change that informs short-term, medium-term, and long-term actions. Change for change's sake serves no-one and inevitably generates instability and confusion within the system. We are very aware that the education system and the professionals working in it are stretched with current demands and resource constraints and we understand concerns about exhaustion, burnout, workload, work intensification, and working conditions. Hence, we are proposing that the pace of change needs to be realistic for quality implementation and sustainable improvement. This means changes cannot be frenetic but change also cannot be invisible or non-existent over the coming months and years. We heard about overdue and urgent changes needed. It is important to put in place carefully sequenced and adequately resourced improvements with time for consolidation over the short, medium, and long-term based on what we have outlined in the Call to Action.

9.5 It will be as important to build upon what is working in Scottish education and consolidating those aspects. In the National Discussion, we heard calls for follow through and implementation of changes already proposed and agreed in previous reviews or other educational decisions. There are potential quick wins with moving forward with these already agreed changes and improvements. In addition, it will be necessary to stop those activities that are clearly not having the expected return on investment and to deploy that resource productively elsewhere. Attention to removing activities that are time consuming but not beneficial is needed.

9.5 To be a true learning system means that every part of the system must be collectively responsible for innovation and improvement and accountable for every

child.  A learning system in Scotland will require all parts of the system to be actively engaged, committed, and included in deciding upon, designing, and implementing a future pathway of reforms for educational improvement. To be a learning system requires an openness, a transparency, and the skill of engaging all people involved in moving genuine improvement forward.

9.6 Ultimately, as we heard clearly in the National Discussion, the education system is fundamentally about people and relationships. Human-centred educational improvement requires an approach which values and includes all involved and affected – children and young people at the centre, education professionals and related staff leading they way with their expertise and judgement and supported in a culture and conditions that value their work, and parents/carers and communities actively engaged in educational improvements to achieve an ambitious, inclusive, and supportive future Scottish education system. This will require synergies between central and local government, more collaborative engagements, a willingness to actively hear and respond to alternative views, positions, and ideas, and the use of research and evidence as well as professional expertise to inform and evaluate changes.

9.7 We remain hugely impressed by the scale, scope, and impact of this National Discussion. It has been the privilege of our lives to be part of it and we feel very fortunate to have had such an opportunity.

9.8 We submit this report to Scottish Government and COSLA and ask that they take forward the Vision, Values, and Call to Action based on what we heard from the children, young people, adults, and organisations right across the Scottish education system and from related services and communities. In this report, we uphold the voices of all participants in the National Discussion and offer these voices as a mandate for the future vision, values, and actions for improvements within Scottish education. We will be watching with great interest and hoping that the changes that

will unfold across the Scottish system will ensure, both now and in the future, that 'All Learners in Scotland Matter'.

## Appendix 1 – National Discussion Survey Questions

1. What kind of education will be needed by children and young people in Scotland in the future?

2. How do we make that a reality?

3. How can every child and young person's individual needs be supported and addressed in the future?

4. What is one thing that needs to stay and why?

5. What are the most important priorities for a future Scottish education system?

6. How can we ensure that everyone involved in education in Scotland has a say in future decisions and actions?

7. How can children and young people be cared for and supported in the future? (i.e. physical and mental wellbeing)

8. How can the right of every child and young person to have opportunities to develop their full potential be achieved in future?

9. How can children and young people be helped to learn about our changing world, so they feel able to positively contribute?

10. Do you have any other comments that you would like to provide about a vision for the future of Scottish Education?

## Appendix 2 – National Discussion Engagement Infographic

**Let's Talk Scottish Education**

### We came to you

Events and discussions took place in every part of Scotland, from Shetland to the Borders, led by schools, community groups and third sector organisations – reaching more than

**38,000 people.**

### You shared

We received feedback in a host of different ways – including **drawings, mindmaps and videos**

### You answered

**+5600 responses**

### You got together

**Over 200 group responses** were submitted

### You joined

**26,000 pupils and students** attended online assembles

### You gave us your time

More than **80 people** attended a series of online public events

### You joined the discussions on socials

More than **6,000 posts** on Twitter about the National Discussion using the hashtag #TalkScottishEducation

More than **10 million social media users** have seen the hashtag

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

This publication is available at **www.gov.scot**

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