

**Education, Children and Young People Committee  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
Wednesday 6 October 2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Committee will take evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Shirley-Anne Somerville MSP on Wednesday 6 October 2021.

This paper provides members with a briefing which covers a wide range of areas across the Cabinet Secretary’s remit. Members may wish to select which areas they wish to focus on. Covering all of the areas in this paper in a single meeting would be challenging.

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## SCHOOLS: ASSESSMENT

### Alternative Certification Model 2021

Over the last month, the Committee has taken evidence on the 2021 Alternative Certification Model (ACM) developed by SQA following exam cancellations as a result of COVID-19. Further background information on is available in the SPICe briefings for the Committee's 15, [22](#) and [29](#) September meetings.

The ACM for 2021 was developed by the SQA working with the National Qualifications 2021 Group. It was a five-stage process, with assessments conducted within schools to gather evidence toward pupil grades. Moderation/quality assurance took place across schools, colleges and local authorities and was not determined by SQA as in 2020. The national lockdown from January to mid-April 2021 meant pupils were learning remotely for the first part of the year and therefore time to gather assessment evidence was limited on their return. SQA adapted assessment requirements, aimed to increase flexibility<sup>1</sup> and stated that while evidence should be gathered under controlled conditions schools did not have to replicate formal exams<sup>2</sup>, teaching unions raised concerns about the timescales and extent of adaptations in some subjects. The SQA also provided exam scripts and advice for teachers developing assessment materials and undertook quality control sampling from each exam centre to offer feedback on whether the national standard was being met. In evidence to the Committee on 29 September 2021, SQA stated the purpose of this was not to moderate individual pupil assessment, but to provide feedback. All centres were sampled in this way.

During evidence sessions with young people and education trade unions on the 2021 ACM, the Committee heard the lockdown at the start of 2021 led to pupils facing a high number of assessments over a short period of time and ACM planning had not considered the impact of such a lockdown. Young people told the Committee the process had a negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing. However, young people also told the Committee that while the volume of assessments had been too high in 2021, there was support for the introduction of a system of continuous assessment.

[Exam results were published on 10 August 2021](#)<sup>3</sup>, showing that while overall A-C attainment for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher (85.8%, 87.3% and 90.2% respectively) were down on 2020 but are higher than A-C attainment rates in each year in the period 2017 to 2019. [SQA has since published further analysis](#)<sup>4</sup> of the results, finding that the attainment gap between independent schools and state schools grew between 2020 and 2021 though remained lower than in pre-pandemic years<sup>5</sup>.

During the Committee's evidence sessions on the 2021 ACM, the quality assurance process was discussed with witnesses. The Association of Directors of Education (ADES)

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<sup>1</sup> [Education and Skills Committee, 3 March 2021](#)

<sup>2</sup> [SQA: National Qualifications 2021 Group update: Alternative Certification Model Stage 2, April 2021](#)

<sup>3</sup> [SQA Attainment Statistics. August 2021](#)

<sup>4</sup> [SQA Attainment Statistics September 2021](#)

<sup>5</sup> [SPICe paper for Education, Children and Young People Committee, 29 September 2021](#)

said that quality assurance processes were set up between schools, local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaborative areas to give support and provide a level of benchmarking. SQA told the Committee that SQA did not have a role in this, but did sample each centre to look at their application of national standards and provide feedback. The Committee heard varying accounts of the use of historical results data: SQA stated it was not used in SQA-produced guidance; ADES said it had been used to inform conversations and support professional judgement, rather than to moderate grades. SSTA said some of their members had reported pressure to downgrade results, while EIS said it had advised the small number of members reporting this to refuse to downgrade.

The Committee also discussed whether appeals for students facing exceptional circumstances should have been granted in 2021. ADES stated that one reason for the high volume of assessments had been in order to gather sufficient evidence for appeal. EIS were of the view that the appeals system should be evidence based, and to base appeals on teachers' views alone put them in a difficult place professionally.

[Exams are to take place in 2021/22](#)<sup>6</sup>, dependent on public health advice. SQA has put forward three potential scenarios: exam diet with modifications to take ongoing disruption into account; exam diet with modifications plus additional measures; and teachers and lecturers determining provisional results in the event in-person gatherings are limited. EIS and SSTA highlighted to the Committee the need to ensure clarity around what evidence SQA would need in the event of exam cancellations to avoid teachers preparing from multiple scenarios. During the [Committee's 29 September 2021 evidence session with SQA](#)<sup>7</sup>, Chief Executive Fiona Robertson said that the plans for 2021/22 should allow for some disruption:

“We have made modifications to assessments so that learning and teaching time can be maximised. Those modifications are in anticipation that there will be disruption to learning this year. We have taken that step up-front and we've reduced the assessment burden, so it should be more straightforward and should allow for a degree of disruption.” – [Education, Children and Young People Committee, 29 September 2021](#)

Responding to questions around gathering evidence in the event of exam cancellations, Beth Black, Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards at SQA told the Committee:

“...the instruction would be if exams had to be cancelled for public health reasons in the spring then the normal assessments that teachers rely upon in their normal working lives will form part of the support for the provisional grade that they would submit. In any year, teachers always submit estimates to SQA just before exams...should we find in March or April that large gatherings can't go ahead then that normal activity becomes repurposed to become provisional grades. The advantage of this is that teachers should not worry about undertaking additional

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<sup>6</sup> [Scottish Government news release: National Qualifications 2022](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Education, Children and Young People Committee, 29 September 2021](#)

assessment to keep in their back pocket and learners shouldn't worry about being dual-assessed."

SQA also told the Committee they anticipated a direct route of appeal for learners would be available in 2022, as it had been for the first time in 2021. Following criticism of the SQA's engagement with young people in 2021, SQA said the National Qualifications 2022 group will have an increased number of young people on it, and there were also plans to expand learners' panels.

### **The future of assessment**

The OECD report [Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland<sup>8</sup>](#) was published on 31 August 2021. This work, by Professor Gordon Stobart, was commissioned as part of the OECD's work on the Scottish education system. The report compares Scotland's approach to assessment in the senior phase of secondary school with systems used in nine other countries. A full summary of the report is available in the [SPICe briefing for the Committee's 9 September 2021 meeting](#).

The OECD sets out options for the future of assessment for Scotland to explore, including: Removal of National 5 examinations in S4 and move toward a school graduation certificate or diploma; developing a more resilient upper-secondary assessment system, with a qualifications system based on a combination of continuous assessment, school-based exams and external exams; better alignment of assessment with CfE through broadening forms of assessment, including interactive approaches such as computer-based exams, e-Portfolios and practical assessments used in countries such as Norway, New Zealand, Finland and Israel; increasing the role of teachers in school-based assessment and moving away from centralised moderation; ensuring students are a key stakeholder in development of assessments; and further developing the role of vocational qualifications.

EIS and SSTA told the Committee that the new system should be built on trust in teachers and their professional judgement. During the Committee's informal evidence with young people, many participants were supportive of continuous assessment and recognising pupils' efforts through the year. They also supported the assessment system that gives recognition to challenges faced by individuals and the impact this might have on their studies, for example for care experienced people and young carers.

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills is expected to update Parliament on how the Scottish Government intends to take the OECD's recommendations forward as part of wider work to implement the OECD recommendations following their review of CfE.

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<sup>8</sup> [Upper-secondary education student assessment in Scotland, OECD, 2021](#)

## Senior phase and rurality and deprivation

The Committee asked SPICe to follow up on particular recommendations of the previous Committee's work on Subject Choices in 2019. One of the Session 5 Education and Skills Committee recommendations was—

“The Committee urges the Scottish Government and Education Scotland to investigate this educational disparity (that secondary schools in more deprived areas have a more restricted range of subjects available for study, and that the subjects that are available tend to be subjects perceived as being less academic and/or more vocational in nature) and to confirm where accountability at a national level for tackling this lies. The responsible body should then work with schools and local authorities to ensure that this inequity in choice is tackled effectively.  
(Paragraph 135)

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[Subject choices in schools \(azureedge.net\)](http://www.azureedge.net)

The Scottish Government's 2019 response to these recommendations stated—

“The review of the Senior Phase curriculum is currently being scoped, and we would expect this to look at the equity of the Senior Phase offer across the country, both in terms of geographically location and areas of deprivation”. (p.6)  
[20191121In Scottish Government Recommendation Specific Response.pdf \(parliament.scot\)](https://www.parliament.scot/20191121In_Scottish_Government_Recommendation_Specific_Response.pdf)

These questions were not explicitly addressed in the OECD's review. The Scottish Government's response stated “equity and equality continue to be fundamental considerations in all decision making around education, including the qualifications” and referred to the Muir review. The Scottish Government also stated—

“We will also draw on the OECDs comparative review of Upper-Secondary Education Student Assessment (by Professor Gordon Stobart) to ensure our future qualifications and assessment approaches better align with the earlier stages of our curriculum, and are accessible for all learners including those with additional support needs and those from more deprived backgrounds. Work is ongoing to consider how best to take this forward and we will take time to get any changes right, working with those at the heart of the system – learners and teachers.”  
(Personal Communication)

## OECD REVIEW

The [OECD review of CfE was published on 21 June 2021](#). Before the publication of the review, the SNP manifesto committed the SNP administration to “take forward the recommendations of the OECD review of the curriculum.” [The Scottish Government's response](#) accepted all of the headline recommendations very shortly after publication.

Much of the work in taking forward the recommendations will involve the Scottish Government working collaboratively with stakeholders, e.g. through the Scottish Education Council. There was, at the time, no mention of open consultations being planned.

The Committee took evidence from two of the authors of the review on [8 September 2021](#). In that session, the Committee explored a number of topics—

- The process and diversity of voices contributing to the OECD Review;
- The value of Scottish National Standardised Assessments and the Achievement of CfE Levels dataset;
- The extent to which narrative under the report’s recommendations constitute part of the recommendations;
- How to adequately measure progress against the totality of the aims of CfE;
- Challenges to implementation and lessons to be learned internationally;
- Structure of the senior phase, depth and breadth, and the potential impacts on children from deprived backgrounds;
- The articulation to further and higher education;
- The strengths of system;
- The structures of the national agencies and international parallels;
- Concept and place of knowledge in a balanced curriculum; and
- How the recommendations of the review should be taken forward.

The SPICe paper for the Committee’s meeting on [8 September 2021 can be found online](#), the recommendations of the . For the sake of brevity, the content of that paper is not repeated here. Broadly that paper sought to highlight three key themes—

- The OECD’s critique of the Scottish system;
- The space for interpretation of the report and its recommendations; and
- Consideration of the sequencing and implementation of the report’s recommendations.

Particularly in terms of the second and third bullets, these central matters for debate in relation to how the system may be reformed and, indeed, to what end. Dr Pont of the OECD told the Committee—

“It is up to Scotland to see how it wants to take on board our recommendations. We cannot tell Scotland what it should do.” ([col 16](#))



## *Muir review*

As part of the immediate response to the OECD review, The Scottish Government announced that it would remove HMIE from Education Scotland and establish a new specialist agency that will be responsible for curriculum and assessment. This would replace the SQA. The Scottish Government has appointed Professor Ken Muir to lead the work on how these new structures can be taken forward.

The Scottish Government has termed Professor Muir's role as the "Advisor to the Scottish Government on the reform of SQA and Education Scotland". The [final remit of this role was published in August](#). This stated—

"In his role as the Advisor, he will provide advice to the Scottish Government and the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on aspects of education reform. This will include designing the implementation of the OECD's recommendations for structural and functional change of SQA and Education Scotland. It will include the delivery of the national curriculum, assessment, qualification and inspection functions, and recognise and include the wider functions of both these bodies.

"The Advisor will consider the proposal and resultant implications of creating a new, specialist agency responsible for both curriculum and assessment. In addition, he will outline the rationale and purpose for reform as set out by Scottish Ministers and ensure that any reform is designed to achieve this. All aspects of the work will be undertaken with as much openness and transparency as is possible."

To support Prof Muir in this role an Expert Panel a Practitioner and Stakeholder Advisory Group. The former is expected to meet "at least monthly between August 2021 and January 2022" and the latter "at least twice between August and November 2021". The final remits for both groups were published on 30 September.

The remit of the Practitioner and Stakeholder Advisory Group includes—

"Members of the advisory group will provide input as necessary to the advisor and expert panel throughout the duration of the work. This will allow members to have the opportunity to support the advisor and expert panel by providing advice on issues, implications, feasibility, risks and dependencies relating to the reform of Education Scotland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority."

A public consultation was issued on behalf of Professor Muir on 30 September. Prof Muir's foreword noted that the consultation was not an attempt to survey all aspects of the OECD report. He said of the consultation—

"Its main focus is on the ownership of Curriculum for Excellence; how we address the issues around roles and responsibilities for curriculum and assessment; and how we address the "misalignment" between the Broad General Education and the Senior Phase identified by the OECD. It also gives you the opportunity to make suggestions from your particular perspective on the changes you think are necessary to enhance the experiences and outcomes of current and future learners."

The consultation seeks views on four areas—

- The vision for Curriculum for Excellence



- Curriculum and Assessment
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Replacing the Scottish Qualifications Authority and reforming Education Scotland

The questions under the first bullet are framed as “an introduction to the questions which follow” in the consultation. However, it addresses one of the key and first recommendations of the OECD review, namely (as expressed in short in the review’s executive summary)—

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

The [Scottish Government’s response to this recommendation](#) stated—

“We will work with Education Scotland, SQA, the teaching profession, learners, parents and other key partners to build on the work undertaken in 2019 to refresh Scotland’s curriculum narrative. This will include re-examining core elements of its vision to take account of 20 years of curriculum design and delivery, and wider educational developments.

“We will work with stakeholders to ensure the role of knowledge, skills and attitudes are more explicit and better integrated in the capabilities and attributes of the four capacities, to help understand learners progress.”

The consultation asks questions around autonomy of schools and the “coherent progression in the journey of learners (3-18 and beyond) that gives them the best possible educational experience and enables them to realise their ambitions” (q2.1) Again, this appears to be treading on wider questions about the future of certification in the senior phase.

Under the fourth section of the consultation, the preamble to questions states—

“While it is expected to take some time to establish new or revised national agencies, it is anticipated that they will have a key role in taking forward delivery of wider OECD recommendations. This would include embedding a refreshed vision for Curriculum for Excellence, defining indicators to understand progress across the four capacities, building curricular capacity, implementing new pedagogical and assessment practices, implementing approaches for internal assessment in determining qualifications, ensuring appropriate breadth and depth of learning through the Broad General Education and in respect of the Senior Phase, embedding a structured and long-term approach to implementation, effective stakeholder engagement and coherent communications.”

The OECD’s review suggested that “Scotland reviews [its] recommendations through an actionable lens” and set out a suggested plan. Reviewing and re-assessing the vision of CfE was the first item; revising the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in CfE was later, at item 3. The suggested Action Plan is reproduced on [p8 of the SPICe paper for the meeting on 8 September](#).

The consultation sets out the current roles of both Education Scotland and the SQA. Members will be aware that the SQA's role is wider than an awarding body for school education. It is an accreditation body and an awarding body and works across schools, colleges, training providers and employers, up to and including HNDs.

One notable absence from the remits of the advisor and supporting groups is cost. It is also seldom mentioned in the consultation.

The deadline to responses to the consultation is 26 November 2021. SPICe sought more clarity from the Scottish Government on how the process would proceed from the review. The Scottish Government stated—

“Prof Muir is expected to be report to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills by 31 January, setting out clear recommendations on taking this work forward - there are no plans to consult on Prof. Muir's report/recommendations. It is too early in the process to predict any further requirements for consultation.”

## **SCHOOLS: COVID RECOVERY**

### **Return to school**

Schools have returned after the summer break. The majority of mitigations in place to reduce the risks in schools prior to the summer break remained in place when schools returned. These were reassessed in September. On 15 September some minor changes were made to guidance on contact tracing in schools, vaccinations and LFD testing. On 30 September, rules were relaxed around school visitors, including for spectators at schools sports, parental visits, parent councils, and use of community facilities.

Decision-making on the guidance is informed by the [Coronavirus \(COVID 19\): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children's Issues](#).

A key change since before the summer has been the NHS guidance on self-isolation for close contacts. The previous blanket requirement for close contacts aged 0-17 years old to self-isolate for 10 days has been removed. Since 9 August, if a young person (under 18) is identified as a close contact, they may cease to self-isolate if they have a negative PCR test and the child or young person remains without symptoms, they may end self-isolation and return to school. Similar provisions are in place for adults who are fully vaccinated. Members should note that the [guidance](#) is more complicated that set out here, particularly for 18 year-olds, but again there is [a flow chart](#). Asymptomatic LFD testing will continue to be promoted.

From 9 August, schools and ELC settings were no longer intended to be as extensively involved in supporting contact tracing and the approach of requiring whole classes or groupings of pupils to self-isolate as close contacts will no longer be followed in normal circumstances.

These rules on contact tracing and self-isolation should allow for fewer pupils to miss school. The Scottish Government has been promptly reporting on attendance in schools based on SEEMis data. Consistently, the number of pupils off self-isolating have been multiples of those reported as being off due a covid related sickness. The most recent data shows that in September there was increase of covid related absences up to 7 September, when around 41,000 pupils were off. Of these around 10,000 were reported to be sick with covid. The most recent data for 28 September shows that there were around 17,000

pupils absent and 4,500 were sick. The data from 25 June, before summer, shows that 709 pupils were off due to being sick with Covid and 18,530 were off due to self-isolation – in addition a high number were kept off by their parents in that final week. While there are higher numbers of pupils marked as sick than before summer, there are fewer absences overall.

Children and young people can now engage in all drama, music, PE and dance activity in schools, indoors and outdoors. This may mean that, for example, music ensembles will restart.

Other mitigations such as ventilation, physical distancing by adults in secondary schools, and extra hygiene measures remain in place.

The National eLearning Offer remains in place for session 2021/2022 which is intended to allow flexibility where there are absences due to covid. This includes a range of live, recorded and supported learning materials to support schools.

## **Support**

Over the past 18 months, the Scottish Government has provided significant in-year funding to local authorities. The Scottish Government has committed nearly £0.5bn in this regard; the biggest portion of which has been support to recruit additional teachers and staff. The latest announcement was on [9 August of £50m](#) to recruit 1,000 new teachers and 500 pupil support assistants in the next academic year. The Scottish Government also announced its intention to provide £65.5m permanent funding to councils from 2022-23 to allow local authorities to employ additional staff on permanent contracts.

This recruitment reflects perhaps the first stage of meeting the SNP's manifesto commitment to “recruit at least 3,500 additional teachers and classroom assistants and reduce teachers' daily contact time by an hour and a half per week to give them the time they need to lift standards.”

## **Recovery**

Research into the first period of remote learning suggested that it had a significant impact on pupils' education. A particular concern was how this impacted some pupils more than others, e.g. children from deprived households or those with additional support needs.

While the range of impacts are well-known the scale or longevity of the impact of the pandemic is not. The Scottish Government sees the recovery from the pandemic as requiring a deeper commitment to pre-existing education strategic aims and policies. The Scottish Government's [equity audit](#) into the school closures in 2020 concluded—

“Closing the poverty-related attainment gap remains a key focus of the Scottish Government. Education remains, by far, the most effective means we have to improve the life chances of all of our young people. That has not changed. If anything, the disproportionate impact that closing our schools had on the most socio-economically disadvantaged in our society has demonstrated even more clearly the vital role that they play.”

The OECD, along with UNESCO, UNICEF, and the World Bank has regularly surveyed ministries of education to understand how governments have responded to the pandemic. The resulting June 2021 report, [What's Next, Lessons on Education Recovery](#), made a

number of conclusions which tally with the Scottish Government's approach, for example, the need to adjust assessment practices, building capacity for remote learning, and injecting additional resources. The report also highlighted the importance of quantifying the impact on learners; it said—

“As schools re-open for in-person instruction, it will be important to understand the differences in the levels of knowledge and skills their students have, against expected learning levels. To this end, measuring learning loss is a critical component of the provision of adequate education, especially for those students who fell behind during school closures.”

The language of “catch up” is challenged in the Scottish education system. Minutes of the [Covid-19 Education Recovery Group meeting in March 2021](#) stated—

“All [of the group] were keen to turn the narrative from the more negative “lost learning” towards positivity and aspiration. This includes not necessarily talking about ‘catching up’ or focusing on classroom-based learning but focusing more on what young people feel they need to support their wellbeing and reconnect with peers and with education in general.”

The Scottish Government has not produced a separate roadmap or strategy for education recovery. Audit Scotland's March report, [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#), recommended the Scottish Government should—

“continue to lead the development of priorities for education recovery and improvement, building on the actions set out in the National Improvement Framework (NIF) for 2021, the Equity Audit and the forthcoming OECD review, being clear about anticipated outcomes and milestones”

[Education Scotland has produced some work in relation to the Scottish Attainment Challenge](#) which identified “6 broad principles which can be used to help schools and local authorities consider their use of Scottish Attainment Challenge funding and supports to recalibrate equity and help learners to bounce forward after COVID-19 lockdowns and school closures”. These were—

- Understanding the negative impact of COVID-19
- Prioritise re-engagement
- Identify those learners most impacted by poverty and COVID-19
- Intensify support in the short-term for learners identified
- High quality universal and targeted provision is vital
- Long-term strategic vision to close the poverty related attainment gap still required

In keeping with the Scottish Government's broad approach to education where significant power sits with local authorities and schools, the specifics of the actions to support education recovery will be left to local decision-makers. Shirley Ann Somerville [told Parliament on 3 June](#)—

“It is right that local authorities, schools and headteachers, who know their pupils best, decide what the package looks like, instead of a diktat from here that assumes

one size fits all. That would be the wrong way to go about it. Surely, we should empower schools.” (Col 33)

The Covid-19 Education Recovery Group comprises of key stakeholders from across the education system in Scotland. It is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary and co-chaired by COSLA’s Children and Young People spokesperson, Cllr Stephen McCabe. The [minutes available](#) from the meeting on 17 June indicate that an Education Recovery Strategy Group was being formed, although there is little information available on this sub-group’s work.

## **SCHOOLS: STRATEGY**

The Scottish Government has bold ambitions in school education. Its vision is set out in the [National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan](#) (NIF).

“Our vision for education in Scotland Excellence through raising attainment: ensuring that every child achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, as well as the knowledge and skills necessary to shape their future as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors; achieving equity: ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.”

Under this vision are four priorities:

- improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
- improvement in children and young people’s health and wellbeing
- improvement in employability skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people.

The Scottish Government’s approach to policy making and development is through partnership with, largely, local government, national agencies and bodies and teacher representative organisations. Discussions on policy implementation and development take place in a range of committees or councils convened by the Scottish Government. The Cabinet Secretary [announced in June](#) that she would establish a children and young people’s education council, which would ‘sit alongside the Scottish education council’.

The Scottish Government also seeks expert advice. This includes the standing [International Council of Education Advisers](#) and commissioning reviews. Notable recent reviews include [on how children’s additional support needs](#) are met as well as the OECD review of the Curriculum for Excellence. Primary legislation and Scottish Government public consultations on school education policy are relatively infrequent.

One of the key policies in the last session were the Scottish Attainment Challenge which sought to close the deprivation related attainment gap. The SAC included funding to individual schools and local authorities to fund programmes or initiatives which support this aim. The SAC is continuing in the current session and funding is being increased.

Another key reform pursued by the Scottish Government in the past session was its empowerment agenda. The aim here was to encourage more decision-making at the school-level and collaboration across the system – between local authorities, schools, teachers, parents/carers etc. Some parts of this appear to be fairly well bedded in, such as the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (regional local authority and Education Scotland partnerships). Other aspects remain in progress, for example, the Headteachers’ Charter (and other [guidance on an Empowered System](#)) remains in draft and work on the national plan for parental involvement and engagement remains ongoing.

A key policy question over the current Parliamentary session for the Scottish Government will be taking forward the recovery from the pandemic, further embedding the work on its empowerment agenda, and taking forward the recommendations of the OECD’s report on CfE.

## **SCHOOLS: OTHER SELECTED POLICIES**

### **Additional Support Needs**

The Scottish Government’s response to the review of how ASN are met in practice indicates that there will be an update on progress against the recommendations in October 2021. On 30 September, the Scottish Government published a [‘newsletter’](#) from the Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group.

The SNP’s manifesto also committed to “introduce a National Transitions to Adulthood Strategy to ensure there is a joined-up approach to supporting our disabled young people and improve guidance to all those providing support.”

### **Out of School Care**

The SNP 2021 manifesto stated that an SNP administration would—

“Build a wraparound childcare system, providing care before and after school, all year round, where the least well-off families will pay nothing.”

This policy was mentioned in the First Minister’s [Priorities of Government statement on 26 May 2021](#). There are few details on this policy.

### **Food**

The Scottish Government’s plan to expand universal free school meals to cover all primary pupils, with the extension to all P4 pupils happening this term and P5 from January. Shirley Anne Somerville told Parliament on 3 June—

“In the first 100 days, we will make free lunches available to all primary 4 children in Scotland as the next step towards extending them to all primary school children all year round. That will extend to primary 5 children in January 2022 and will include the provision of free school meal approaches to all eligible children and young people in primary and secondary through all the school holidays. We are providing over £49 million in funding to our local authorities to support the implementation of those approaches in 2021-22, which represents a significant investment in the health and wellbeing of our children and young people.” ([OR 3 June](#), Col 26)



[A news release on 5 June](#) confirmed that an agreement to this effect has been made with COSLA. The Programme for Government indicated that

The Programme for Government provided an update on this work. It said—

“We will now roll this out even further – from August 2022 we will fund free lunches for all primary school pupils. In the next year, we will develop plans to deliver free breakfasts to all primary and special school children and start to pilot provision. We will also commence the phased roll-out of a food offer during the school holidays, starting with those who will benefit the most.”

### **Music tuition and core curriculum fees**

Another manifesto pledge was to work with local government to remove fees for “core curriculum” activities and music tuition. The Scottish Government confirmed on [14 July 2021](#). In the current financial year, the Government announced an additional £7m for local authorities to support the music tuition pledge and an additional £6m “to waive core curriculum charges which can be levied on families for things including materials for home economics or theatre trips associated with drama qualifications.”

Core curriculum is not language that has up to now been found within the Curriculum for Excellence. The news release stated—

“The definition of ‘core curriculum’ is classroom-based activity within the eight core curriculum areas in the broad general education in primary and secondary school plus activity associated with preparation for SQA qualifications in the senior phase.”

The agreement with COSLA is a one-year funding agreement.

### **Audit Scotland report**

Audit Scotland produced a report on [Improving outcomes for young people through school education](#), just prior to Parliament entering the pre-election recess on 23 March 2021. The report had 6 key messages. These are set out in Annexe A of this paper.

The [Public Audit Committee took evidence on the report on 9 September 2021](#). The Scottish Government will be giving evidence to the Public Audit Committee in due course.

### **FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION: COVID-19**

[When students returned to campus at the start of academic year 2020/21, there were outbreaks of COVID-19 in student halls of residence](#)<sup>9</sup>. However, it appears the same trend has not been repeated for academic year 2021/22. In a [statement updating Parliament on COVID-19 on 28 September 2022](#)<sup>10</sup>, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP said:

“So far this year – although it is still early in the new term – there has not been an increase in cases coinciding with the return of universities...I also know how much effort has gone into making student campuses and accommodation as safe as

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<sup>9</sup> [SPICe blog: COVID-19: Guidance for students in Scotland](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Official Report, 28 September 2021](#)



possible – and I am deeply grateful for all those efforts.” – [Official Report, 28 September 2021](#)

The Scottish Government published [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): universities, colleges and community learning and development providers](#)<sup>11</sup> in July 2021, setting out guidance for operating in academic year 2021/22. This guidance aims to shift the focus from national rules toward reduction and management of risk. While there is no legal requirement to physically distance, institutions are expected to continue with measures around hand hygiene, surface cleaning, good ventilation, face coverings in certain settings, compliance with Test and Protect, outbreak management capability and encouragement of working from home where possible. Key points of [the guidance](#) include:

- In-person learning, and research can resume on college and university campuses. Measures such as good ventilation, use of face coverings, surface cleaning and hand hygiene should be in place.
- Students should take a PCR test before moving to their student accommodation and continue to use lateral flow tests twice a week thereafter. Accommodation managed by institutions should encourage behaviours to mitigate risk.
- Student vaccination planning is being taken forward by institutions with a single point of contact at the relevant health board. While data on the number of students vaccinated is not available, [Public Health Scotland vaccination data by age group](#)<sup>12</sup> shows that, as at 26 September 2021, 76.4% of 18-29 year olds have had one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine while 62.9% have had both doses.
- International students must follow guidance on quarantining on arrival in Scotland, and colleges and universities should provide tailored support for them. [NUS Scotland recently raised concerns about hotel quarantine costs for international students](#)<sup>13</sup>, which were raised to over £200 per night, increasing the cost of staying in a managed quarantine facility from £1,750 to £2,285. Some institutions and students’ associations are helping international students meet the costs of these charges – further information is available on the [NUS Scotland website](#)<sup>14</sup>.

The level of in person teaching each student receives is likely to vary by institution and course. Scotland’s Commissioner for Fair Access, [Professor Sir Peter Scott, has raised concerns](#)<sup>15</sup> about students from less affluent backgrounds being less likely to benefit from in-person teaching. Speaking to the UCU Conference in September 2021, he said:

“There is a real risk that students from more deprived social backgrounds will find themselves in the institutions that are either forced to adopt for economic reasons, or are most enthusiastic for managerial reasons, more online

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<sup>11</sup> [Scottish Government: Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): universities, colleges and community learning and development providers](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Public Health Scotland vaccine data](#)

<sup>13</sup> [NUS Scotland SG must intervene on hotel quarantine](#)

<sup>14</sup> [NUS Scotland Paying for hotel quarantine](#)

<sup>15</sup> [The Herald: Covid: Poor university students 'risk getting less in-person learning than rich peers'](#)

delivery, while more socially advantaged students will continue to enjoy the full package with much more face-to-face contact.”

Sir Peter raised concerns that students from less affluent backgrounds could miss out on opportunities to build “cultural capital”, stating that online support was not a substitute for this.

The [latest HESA statistics show](#)<sup>16</sup> that Scottish universities met the Commission on Widening Access (COWA) 2021 interim target of at least 16% of first year, first degree entrants being from the 20% most deprived areas (SIMD20) a year early. However, in his [annual report for 2021](#)<sup>17</sup>, the Commissioner called on the Scottish Government to reaffirm its commitment to fair access in light of the pandemic.

## **FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION: AVERAGE EXPENDITURE PER STUDENT**

In July 2021, the [Scottish Government provided a written answer](#) to a question from Michael Marra MSP on average expenditure per student at all levels of education. The figures, spanning 11 years, were provided in cash terms and real terms. Tables containing the full set of figures in cash terms and real terms can be found at **Annexe B** of this briefing.

The figures show that, for colleges:

- Average expenditure per student has increased in **cash terms** from £3,803 in 2010/11 to £4,284 in 2020/21. This is an increase of 12.6%.
- Looking at these figures in **real terms** at 2020/21 prices, there is a decrease in average spend per student of just under 10%, from £4,754 per student in 2010/11 to £4,282 in 2020/21.

For universities:

- Average expenditure per student has increased in **cash terms** from £5,219 in 2010/11 to £5,703 in 2020/21.
- Looking at these figures in **real terms** at 2020/21 prices, there has been a decrease in average spend per student of 12.6%, from £6,525 in 2010/11 to £5,703 in 2020/21.

[Colleges Scotland published a blog in response to the figures](#). This mainly focused on the real terms spend comparisons, stating it was:

“...difficult to understand why further and higher education spend levels aren’t at least matching investment from almost a decade ago...Hundreds of millions of

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<sup>16</sup> [HESA statistics 2019/20](#)

<sup>17</sup> Commissioner for Fair Access [Higher education - re-committing to Fair Access - a plan for recovery: annual report 2021](#)

pounds have been invested by Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council into college provision, which has been needed and welcome, but our students deserve at the very least parity of funding with other educational settings.”

[National Union of Students \(NUS\) Scotland President Matt Crilly posted a Twitter thread](#) in response to the figures, stating that:

“The underfunding of college & university education in Scotland is striking... Such a shame, as Scotland has historically prided itself on our education system. It also often means students end up paying more... we’re charged fees & hidden course costs. We take on more and more debt. There’s less, more stressed out staff teaching bigger classes.”

## **FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION: SFC REVIEW**

In June 2020, the Scottish Government asked SFC to carry out a review of the college and university landscape in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The resulting [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#) was carried out in three phases. [Initial phase one considerations were published in October 2020](#); [a phase two progress update was published in March 2021](#); and [phase three recommendations were published in June 2021](#). [For further detail about Phase 1 and 2 of the SFC Review, please see the SPICe Key Issues briefing on this topic.](#)

SFC recommendations resulting from [Phase 3 of the review](#)<sup>18</sup>, published in June 2021, include:

- A call for the government to set out its overall strategic intent for further and higher education and research, along with a national vision and strategy for the college and university estate.
- A call for multi-year funding assumptions, enabling SFC to give more certainty to institutions on continuation of project funding.
- The creation of a National Impact Framework linked to [Scotland’s National Performance Framework](#). SFC will also work with the sector to revise its approach to Outcome Agreements.
- A call for the government to continue funding for additional places for Scottish domiciled students (see page 13) resulting from exam disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic into 2022-23.
- The development of a pilot framework for short ‘micro-credential’ courses to support skills needs across the economy and identifying ways to support lifelong learning.
- Improved engagement with employers to determine and respond to skills need.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Review/coherence-and-sustainability.pdf>

- Increased collaboration between institutions across the HEI and college sectors, including consideration of shared support services and with industry. This should be supported by the government.
- A call for the government to work with SFC to build on progress made to widen access to university.
- The development of a single quality assurance and enhancement framework for colleges and universities.

The Scottish Government has not yet set out its response to the review.

## CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORK

### National Care Service consultation

On 9 August 2021, the Scottish Government launched a [consultation on a proposed National Care Service \(NCS\) for Scotland](#)<sup>19</sup>. This followed the publication of the [Independent Review of Adult Social Care \(IRASC\) recommendations in February 2021](#)<sup>20</sup>, which recommended the establishment of an NCS. While the IRASC focused on adult social care and did not consider children's social work and social care, they are included in the NCS consultation. The [consultation document states](#) that not including them within the NCS:

“...risks fragmenting the current system of care and assessment and further adding to complexity for services users”. (p6)

Local authorities currently have responsibility for delivery of most children's social work and social care services. The NCS consultation proposes children's social care services should be located within the NCS in order to aid integration of health, social work and social care. It does not provide detail on how this might be done. It asks respondents: whether they support this proposal; whether it will reduce complexity for children and their parents accessing services; whether it will approve alignment with community child health services; and whether there are any risks involved. The [consultation document](#) describes the overall package of proposals as having:

“...the potential to be the biggest public sector reform in Scotland for decades”. (p2)

The Promise, the organisation set up in 2020 to oversee implementation of the findings of the Independent Care Review, is currently assessing the implications of the proposed National Care Service. As The Promise's first implementation [Plan for 2021-2024](#)<sup>21</sup> is already underway, the organisation is also assessing the impact the proposed NCS will

<sup>19</sup> [A National Care Service for Scotland: consultation](#), Scottish Government

<sup>20</sup> [Adult social care: independent review](#), Scottish Government

<sup>21</sup> [The Promise Plan 21-24](#)

have on this work<sup>22</sup>. The inclusion of children’s services was not anticipated when The Promise’s work plans were in development. [The Promise Chair Fiona Duncan wrote when the NCS consultation was first launched](#)<sup>23</sup> that if the outcome resulted in the creation of one single care service, this would have: “huge implications for how the promise, made last February to children and families, is kept.”

[Writing in September 2021](#)<sup>24</sup>, Fiona Duncan said that while the NCS consultation may present some opportunities for positive change, there is a need to fully understand the issues and impact such changes could have:

“There is so much complexity to grasp and weigh up and intended – and unintended – consequences to be carefully considered. And before embarking on such a shift in how social care is provided in Scotland, we must completely understand what the impact will be on every child, adult, family and community.” – [The Promise blog, September 2021](#)

## **SCOTLAND’S SKILLS PLANNING SYSTEM**

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national body with the main responsibility for delivering skills policy and conducting skills planning – which is anticipating the future needs the economy. This planning is undertaken through several mechanisms: [Skills Investment Plans](#) focus on particular sectors, and have recently expanded this approach to include Regional Skills Investment plans. So far, regional plans have been produced for Edinburgh and South East Scotland, Highlands and Islands, and Aberdeen City and Shire. [Regional Skills Assessments](#) (RSAs) aim to provide an evidence base on which to base future investment in skills, built up from existing datasets. RSAs focus mainly on demand side evidence, highlighting economic and labour market data, and trends/ forecasts at both regional and local authority level. RSAs are developed by SDS and its partners including: Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Funding Council and the Scottish Local Authorities Economic Development Group. A core part of SDS role is using the [Skills Planning Model](#), which sets out how SDS aims to improve the responses of education, training and careers services to the needs of industry. The model sets out how SDS will use data it gathers to better understand employers and employees in Scotland and their needs, and link this to education and training providers to ensure that the skills system in Scotland is responsive to trends in industry.

Data on skills gaps by sector is collected as part of the [Scottish Employer Skills Survey](#) (SESS). Looking at the 2017 and 2020 publications, the percentage of vacancies which cannot be filled due to skills gaps rose from 0% to 9% of vacancies in education, from 1% to 6% in health and social work, and to 10% in public administration (the number of hard to fill vacancies due to skills gaps was not published in 2017 as it was too small). Over the same period, vacancies which could not be filled due to skills gaps in manufacturing reduced from

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<sup>22</sup> [Fiona Duncan: One question and one question only series: What are the opportunities offered by a National Care Service?](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Fiona Duncan: One Question and One Question Only - will it #KeepThePromise?](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Fiona Duncan: One question and one question only series: What are the opportunities offered by a National Care Service?](#)

8% to 5%. The 2020 results were heavily impacted by COVID-19 – the field work for this survey was conducted in late autumn 2020 at a point where the number of vacancies was extremely low by pre-pandemic standards. The survey collection was also moved from its usual summer spot due to pandemic, and so there might be a seasonal pattern which explains some of the differences.

The Scottish Government evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee mentions long standing shortages of skills in the digital sector which has been restricting growth. Data in the SESS survey shows that vacancies which could not be filled due to digital skills shortages increased from 29% of all vacancies which could not be filled due to a skill shortage in 2017, to 35% in 2020.

SDS administer Scottish apprenticeships (all three levels, Foundation, Modern and Graduate). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Scottish Government had set a target to increase the number of apprenticeship starts to 30,000 per year by 2020/21 (this includes both Modern and Graduate apprenticeships, but not Foundation). This target was not met as apprenticeship numbers fell significantly in during 2020, but prior to the pandemic interim targets had been met 8 years in a row. The OECD [recently reviewed the apprenticeship system in Scotland](#), and highlighted four key areas of improvement; funding should be more responsive to the needs of the labour market and more consistent with higher education funding, standards should be established for minimum programme lengths and off-the-job training requirements, skilled adults should be offered direct access to assessments which would lead to qualifications equivalent to those gained by apprentices, and master craftperson qualifications should be promoted as an effective route to upskill qualified apprentices (akin to the German model).

At the Committee's business planning day on 31 August, members heard from Nora Senior from the Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board, and Mhairi Spowage from the Fraser of Allander Institute. Key themes emerging from this session included:

- £2 billion is spent annually on post school training education – an assessment is needed to ensure that this represents value for money, and to better understand the outcomes from different routes to gaining skills. The Enterprise and Skills Strategic Board are currently preparing to undertake this analysis.
- Scotland's record on entrepreneurship is strong at primary school, but weakens at secondary and Scotland performs poorly compared to international peers.
- A mismatch between skills supply and demand contributing to slow productivity growth since 2007/08
- Scotland's skills system needs to deliver in the context of long terms challenges – demographic change and the changing nature of work through technological change. The demographic change could be exacerbated by Brexit and reduced migration, while the pandemic could accelerate changing trends in work.
- There are some persistent skills gaps – in particular digital skills but also some transient skills which are addressed through on the job training. However, recent surveys have found that on the job training opportunities have been reducing in Scotland.



- Young people entering labour market in last 18 months – what will the impact of the pandemic, furlough, and fewer opportunities be? Could there be longer term scarring effects associated with youth unemployment, and could there be an impact on the development of personal skills which are a key part of individuals first jobs?

## EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE

### Delivery of expansion

August 2021 marked the introduction of the statutory duty on local authorities to secure 1,140 annualised hours of ELC for all 3 and 4 year-olds and eligible 2 year olds. The introduction of the statutory duty was delayed by 12 months due to the pandemic.

The Improvement Service has published regular delivery progress reports on the phased delivery of the expansion of funded ELC provision. The [latest IS report was published in May 2021](#) based on data collection in April. At that time 72% of children were reported to be accessing places with the expanded hours. In terms of delivering the policy, the key issues were the number of staff and the physical capacity. As of April 2021, the report stated—

“At a national level, over 94% of the workforce expected to be in place in August 2021 is reported to already be in place [in April 2021], an increase from 90% reported in August 2020. Collectively, local authorities reported that an additional 1,002 FTE will be in place August 2021 compared to April 2021.”

In terms of capital investment and projects, the report stated—

“As of April 2021, there were 918 projects in the capital programme which will deliver c.22,000 additional spaces. 69% of all capital projects are now complete, delivering 60% of the total planned additional space. ... Not all capital projects are required to deliver 1140 hours from August. 595 of the 918 capital projects are forecast to be required to deliver 1140 from August; the remaining projects being linked to increased flexibility, forecast growth and longer-term learning estate development projects.”

The delivery of the expansion is underpinned by the “Funding Follows the Child” approach and the “National Standard”. The Funding Follows the Child approach will be “provider neutral”. Families will be able to choose their preferred ELC setting, subject to availability and that setting meeting the National Standard and agreeing the rate with the local authority. The National Standard is intended to ensure that the ELC provided in any setting is of a high quality, with suitably trained staff and that staff are paid at least a real living wage. [Operating guidance for the Funding Follows the Child approach states:](#)

“The Funding Follows the Child approach places choice in parents' and carers' hands allowing them to access their child's funded entitlement from any setting – in the public, private or third sector, including from a childminder – who meets the National Standard, has a place available and is willing to enter into a contract with their local authority.”

Due to the impact of the pandemic, the [Scottish Government has produced interim guidance](#) which notes that some elements of the Funding Follows the Child approach and the National Standard will be delayed.



The next full data collection from local authorities, which will provide detailed information on delivery of the expansion, will take place in August and is expected to be published imminently. The Scottish Government has reported that all local authorities have confirmed that all children who applied have been offered an 1140 place, and that these places have been delivered.<sup>25</sup>

The Improvement Service reported that in February 2021 “30% of provision was being accessed in private settings, compared to 69% in local authority settings, with the remainder being accessed with childminders.” PVI settings will therefore be crucial to delivery of the expanded hours and in ensuring flexibility and choice. A longstanding concern from the PVI sector has been that the rate set by individual local authorities for contracting PVI providers needs to be sustainable. [The Scottish Government has produced guidance](#) to support local authorities to set sustainable rates for providers. This guidance is on how a local authority should approach setting rates but does not suggest minimum or maximum rates.

There have been a number of [financial support programmes for PVI providers through the pandemic](#). The [Scottish Government has identified](#) a number of additional financial pressures on the PVI sector:

- higher costs of delivery meeting public health guidance requirements
- lower income from private sources
- support schemes winding down (e.g. the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme), and repayments for any support provided through loans (e.g. the Bounce Back Loan Scheme).

The Scottish Government has undertaken a Financial Sustainability Health Check to gather detailed evidence on the sustainability of all types of childcare services and, in particular, what the impact of the pandemic has been on the financial health of the sector. The results of the Financial Sustainability Health Check is expected to be published in August and will focus on what further action the Scottish Government will take on the back of these findings to work closely with partners to put the sector on a sustainable footing long-term.

## **Childminding**

Childminders are another important but smaller part of the market for funded childcare. The Improvement Service’s May report noted that around 1% of the funded provision is through childminders.

The Scottish Government recently [published research](#) on the perceptions of the impact of childminding services on child, parent and family outcomes. It found that there was a positive view of childminding particularly the “flexible hours, the one-to-one attention and the nurturing, home-from-home setting.” One of the conclusions of the research was—

“An increase in the uptake of childminding would support delivery of the planned expansion of ELC to 1,140 hours. Childminders and parents agreed that there was a lack of awareness of childminding as an option and of what childminders can offer – and therefore a need for greater promotion of it.”

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<sup>25</sup> Personal communication with the Scottish Government.

## Evaluation

The Scottish Government states that the main aims of the expansion are to:

- improve children’s outcomes and help close the poverty-related attainment gap
- increase family resilience through improved health and wellbeing of children and parents
- support parents into work, study or training.

In 2017, the [NHS published a rapid evidence review](#) on childcare quality and children's outcomes. This found—

“ELC has the potential to impact positively on all children’s social, emotional and cognitive outcomes. However, this is dependent on high-quality provision, with greatest impact for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.”

The NHS research noted that the Effective Provision of Pre-School Education study which examined the SureStart programme in England found that duration of childcare had a positive effect. Duration in this context is the number of months/weeks the child attended childcare provision, not necessarily the number of hours in a week, which the EPPE study found had no effect.<sup>26</sup>

Given the high level of public investment in the expansion of ELC hours, tracking the outcomes of the expansion the value for money of the programme is likely to be a priority for the Scottish Government in the coming years. The Scottish Government has commissioned a study, the Scottish Study of Early Learning and Childcare (SSELC), to provide information on funded ELC and the associated outcomes. The SSELC will measure the impact of the policy on long-term outcomes for children and parents by comparing two groups of children: baseline samples of children receiving 600 hours of funded ELC and children receiving 1,140 hours of funded ELC in 2022-23. A [report of the SSELC published in December 2020](#) was intended to set out a baseline for assessing the impact of expanded ELC provision.

## Covid guidance for ELC settings

Detailed [online guidance for ELC settings](#) is regularly updated. [A summary of mitigations has also been published](#). These mitigations include—

- At least 1 metre physical distancing between adults. Children are not required to physically distance from each other, or from adults.
- Staff and settings are encouraged to participate in non-symptomatic testing and to report their results.
- Face coverings must be worn by adults wherever they cannot maintain the appropriate physical distance from other adults (e.g. in corridor and communal areas). Face coverings should be strongly encouraged when parents/carers are

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<sup>26</sup> The 2004 [Effective Provision of Pre-School Education](#) study referred to by the NHS literature review found that “full time attendance led to no better gains for children than part-time provision.” (page ii)

drop-off and pick-up their children. Face coverings are not required when working directly with children.

- Enhanced cleaning.
- Children should be discouraged from bringing toys from home to the setting. However, settings can share resources (such as story bags) between setting and home – unless there is a positive case in the home or an outbreak in the setting.
- All settings must ensure the opening of doors and windows to increase natural ventilation where it is practical, safe and secure to do so, while maintaining appropriate internal temperatures.

A flowchart for what to do should a positive case be identified has also been produced and can be [found on line](#). As with schools (see below) the definition of a close contact is tighter than before the summer holidays.

### **Further expansion of funded childcare**

The Programme for Government stated--

“We have now set out our ambition to provide funded early learning to all one- and two-year-olds, starting in the course of this Parliament with children from low-income households. This year we will begin engagement with families, the early learning sector and academic experts to design how the new offer will work in practice.”

### **BUDGET PROCESS AND A SPENDING REVIEW**

The UK Government confirmed on [7 September](#) that a UK Spending Review and UK Autumn Budget will be announced on 27 October. In a [letter](#) the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy to the Finance and Public Administration Committee dated 30 August, Ms Forbes indicated that she was amenable to publishing the Scottish Budget 2022-23 during this calendar year. In further from that Committee to the Cabinet Secretary, the Committee drew attention to an agreed process of scrutiny for when the Scottish Government undertook spending reviews. [It said](#)—

“Your letter refers to the UK Government having indicated that work supporting a multi-year spending review is ongoing and set to conclude in the autumn. As set out in the Written Agreement between this Committee and the Scottish Government, there is a presumption that the Scottish Government will carry out a Spending Review, linked to the equivalent UK Spending Review. There is also a requirement on the Scottish Government to publish a framework document setting out the economic and political context, the criteria which will govern the assessment of budgets and the process and timetable for review. The Committee is mindful that the Written Agreement envisages time for the Parliament’s committees to undertake ‘constructive dialogue with Ministers, public bodies, and stakeholders once the Framework is published in order to influence the outcome of the Spending Review’. We would therefore welcome an indication of when you might expect to publish the Spending Review and preceding framework document.”

The desire for greater stability of funding is common across portfolios. The 2017 [Budget Review Group’s report](#) stated—

“The absence of multi-year budgets for devolved public services in recent years has been a key concern highlighted in evidence to the Group. A wide range of stakeholders suggested that single-year budgets make it more difficult for devolved public services to adopt medium-term priorities and develop plans to address future challenges. ... Spending reviews are intended to provide a means via which overall expenditure can be prioritised and inform proposals for multi-year budgets.” (p5)

There has not been a spending review undertaken by the Scottish Government since 2011. Any consultative work on a Scottish Government spending review following the Scottish Government setting out its framework would be an opportunity for the sectors to feed in to a multi-year funding approach that is linked to strategic aims.

The most recent [correspondence, dated 21 September](#), from the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy to the Finance and Public Administration Committee announced “9 December 2021 as the date for Scottish Budget 2022-23 and the Medium Term Financial Strategy”. She also said in relation to the spending review—

“I also welcome your interest in our plans and timetable for consulting on a resource spending review framework ahead of publishing multi-year spending plans, and will revert to you shortly with further detail.”

**Lynne Currie, Ned Sharratt and Andrew Feeney-Seale**  
**SPICe Research**  
**September 2021**

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP [www.parliament.scot](http://www.parliament.scot)

**Key Messages from Audit Scotland's *Improving outcomes for young people through school education* report.**

1 School education is not just about exam results. It also aims to improve children's and young people's health and wellbeing and support wider outcomes such as vocational qualifications. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected children and young people in many ways, including their learning, wellbeing and economic circumstances. Pupils living in the most challenging circumstances have been most affected by school closures.

2 Those involved in planning, delivering and supporting school education were working well together prior to the pandemic. This strong foundation helped them to collaborate to deliver a rapid response to Covid-19 in exceptionally challenging circumstances. The pandemic has reinforced the importance of school education and other sectors working together to tackle issues which affect young people's life chances and outcomes, such as child poverty and health and wellbeing.

3 Both national education policy and the curriculum reflect the importance for pupils of different pathways and opportunities, and outcomes beyond exam results. There has been an increase in the types of opportunities, awards and qualifications available to children and young people and an increase in the number awarded. However, better data is needed to understand if other outcomes, like wellbeing and confidence, are improving.

4 There is wide variation in education performance across councils, with evidence of worsening performance on some indicators in some councils. At the national level, exam performance and other attainment measures have improved. But the rate of improvement up until 2018–19 has been inconsistent across different measures. Measuring progress has been hampered by the cancellation of exams and other data gaps caused by Covid-19. This could create risks around accountability.

5 The poverty-related attainment gap remains wide and inequalities have been exacerbated by Covid-19. Progress on closing the gap has been limited and falls short of the Scottish Government's aims. Improvement needs to happen more quickly and there needs to be greater consistency across the country. The government and councils recognise that addressing inequalities must be at the heart of the response to Covid-19, longer-term recovery and improving education.

6 Council spending on primary and secondary school education across Scotland increased by 5.1 per cent in real terms between 2013/14 and 2018/19, from £4.1 billion to £4.3 billion. Most of the real-terms increase in spend can be attributed to the Attainment Scotland Fund, which the Scottish Government set up in 2015/16 to close the poverty-related attainment gap. When this is excluded, real-terms spending increased by 0.7 per cent during the period, to just over £4.1 billion. The Scottish Government had put over £200 million of extra money into Covid-19 mitigation measures and education recovery by early January 2021.

The full report can be read here: <https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/improving-outcomes-for-young-people-through-school-education>

## Average Expenditure Per Student

The below tables contain the full set of figures for average expenditure per student at all levels of education in cash terms and real terms. These were provided in a [written answer from the Scottish Government in July 2021](#).

**Table 1** below sets out the cash terms figures and **Table 2** sets out the real terms figures in 2020-21 prices.

<b>Table 1: Average expenditure per place for each education level in cash terms</b>											
<b>Education level</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>
<b>Pre-school</b>	£3,456	£3,193	£3,194	£3,102	£3,411	£3,957	£4,344	£4,561	£5,190	£6,958	
<b>Primary school</b>	£5,001	£4,935	£4,899	£4,880	£4,819	£4,877	£4,980	£5,169	£5,444	£5,779	-
<b>Secondary school</b>	£6,598	£6,495	£6,629	£6,714	£6,795	£6,920	£7,046	£7,127	£7,454	£7,787	-
<b>College</b>	£3,803	£3,601	£3,496	£3,317	£3,317	£3,421	£3,527	£3,615	£3,972	£4,064	£4,284
<b>University</b>	£5,219	£5,115	£5,379	£5,514	£5,620	£5,655	£5,435	£5,437	£5,560	£5,563	£5,703

<b>Table 2: Average expenditure per place for each education level in real terms (2020-21=100)</b>											
<b>Education level</b>	<b>2010-11</b>	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>	<b>2014-15</b>	<b>2015-16</b>	<b>2016-17</b>	<b>2017-18</b>	<b>2018-19</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	<b>2020-21</b>
<b>Pre-school</b>	£4,321	£3,933	£3,854	£3,678	£3,989	£4,589	£4,917	£5,073	£5,641	£7,397	-
<b>Primary school</b>	£6,252	£6,078	£5,912	£5,785	£5,635	£5,657	£5,636	£5,749	£5,917	£6,143	-
<b>Secondary school</b>	£8,249	£7,999	£8,000	£7,959	£7,946	£8,026	£7,975	£7,927	£8,102	£8,278	-
<b>College</b>	£4,754	£4,435	£4,219	£3,932	£3,879	£3,968	£3,992	£4,021	£4,318	£4,321	£4,284
<b>University</b>	£6,525	£6,299	£6,492	£6,537	£6,572	£6,559	£6,152	£6,047	£6,044	£5,913	£5,703

In its answer, the Scottish Government explains how these figures were arrived at for each education level:

- For pre-school education, total expenditure on pre-school education adjusted by local authority is divided by the number of early learning and childcare registrations in the reported in the Scottish Government's Early Learning and Childcare statistics.
- Average gross revenue expenditure per pupil in primary and secondary education respectively is arrived at by taking the total gross revenue expenditure adjusted for inter-authority transfers, reported by local authorities on primary and secondary education to the local financial return, divided by the number of pupils in primary and secondary education as per the most recent statistics reported in the pupil census.
- To ensure comparability with the 2019-20 figures, the earlier figures provided here for pre-primary, primary and secondary education expenditure have been recalculated on a consistent basis and have been updated to take into account any methodological changes and revisions to the calculation of expenditure figures from the Local Government Financial returns.
- The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) supplied detail of the cost of a College place (expenditure per full-time equivalent (FTE)). This is calculated by taking funding provided to Colleges for core teaching and fee waiver grant divided by the weighted SUMs (relative cost to a college of delivering different subjects). Expenditure excludes tuition fees not paid by SFC (mainly the Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS)) and student support funding or funding from the European Social Fund.
- The cost of a University place, also provided by the SFC, is estimated by taking the total teaching grant awarded to Universities divided by the total number of SFC funded places for Scottish and EU domiciled FTEs. Expenditure figures exclude funding for student support, SFC's research and strategic funds, and tuition fees that SAAS pay. Total FTE figures are SFC/SG funded places and do not include fees only and international places.
- Some figures have been recalculated since previous publication and therefore may differ from previous written answers.
- The Scottish Government's response also mentions that in 2016/17 there was a 2.9% reduction in HEI gross teaching prices, but no further information on this is provided.