

SCHOOLS RE-OPENING AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM OFFERINGS: A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCUSSION

Purpose

1. This short paper provides the Curriculum and Assessment Board with a framework for discussion in relation to schools re-opening and the development of curriculum offerings during the education recovery phase. The paper refers to practical arrangements; the effectiveness of related guidance; and how educators and schools are shaping their practice and curriculum in unique circumstances.

Current context

2. Scotland's schools and early learning and childcare settings welcomed back children and young people on a full time basis from Tuesday 18 August.

3. Overall, there has been a positive response to the full time reopening of schools and early learning and childcare (ELC) settings. The current situation is not without its practical challenges, but available evidence indicates that system leaders, educators, children, young people and families are working well together in difficult and uncertain circumstances.

Practical arrangements

4. Colleagues, children and young people are facing significant challenges in ensuring practical arrangements are in line with the relevant COVID-19 Education Recovery Group (ERG) guidance on the [reopening of schools](#) or [early learning and childcare settings](#). Nonetheless, schools and early learning and childcare settings are working creatively to plan and implement the operational changes required and ensure the safe return of all.

5. Local authorities and schools exercise their judgement when implementing this guidance to ensure the safety and wellbeing of their children, young people and staff, and of course, taking into account local circumstances.

Effectiveness of related guidance

6. The [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Curriculum for Excellence in the Recovery Phase Guidance](#), prepared by [Education Recovery Group](#) (ERG) partners, aims to support teachers and other professional practitioners in preparing their curriculum offer for, and during, the Recovery Phase. This guidance needs to be considered alongside a range of other guidance which is signposted in the relevant COVID-19 ERG guidance on the [reopening of schools](#) or [early learning and childcare settings](#).

7. The *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Curriculum for Excellence in the Recovery Phase Guidance* provides high level national guidance and clarity on the broad expectations for what Scotland's curriculum looks like during the Recovery Phase in the ELC and school sectors, including through Gaelic Medium Education. Key points include:

- Prioritisation of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing
- Importance of early focus on reconnection; talking openly about lockdown

- Initial prioritisation on learning across literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing, with increasing learning experiences across all four contexts of learning
- The need to make learning engaging, meaningful and relevant for children and young people; promoting the benefits of play, physical activity and outdoor learning
- Importance of promoting and developing skills that will increase children and young people's abilities to learn remotely
- The value of working with partners to enrich the curriculum
- Appropriate use of approaches to evidence children and young people's learning and achievements
- Importance of considering how best to provide additional and appropriate support to maximise engagement in learning for all; Recognising that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds may have faced multiple barriers to learning over the period of school closures
- Centrality of flexibility and need for adaptability; taking account of the local circumstances

8. All registered ELC services have been able to reopen from 15 July as part of Phase 3 of Scotland's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The revised re-opening and operating guidance for all parts of the sector came into effect on 10 August. Quality of care and improving outcomes for children remain central to the Recovery Phase; and, delivery of funded entitlement, with child development and wellbeing at the heart of the Scottish approach.

9. In preparing for and during the Recovery Phase, teachers and practitioners are also encouraged to use the [Refreshed Narrative for Curriculum for Excellence](#) as a practical tool to support a curriculum rationale for the BGE and Senior Phase. The [How We Do It](#) section of this resource sets out key considerations, activities and ways of working to support the process of curriculum making.

10. Overall, available evidence suggests that the associated guidance has been generally well received. There are a number of challenges, however. Schools report that the delivery of certain practical subjects can be difficult. Further national advice about the implementation of practical subjects has been requested. It has been reported, too, that the volume of guidance, including updates, which has been published recently, has been challenging for schools.

11. There is also a reported tension, at times, between the quality of the curriculum offer and the need to follow guidance and keep young people safe. This is particularly pertinent in the Senior Phase where a young person might attend different schools, colleges or work placements. Schools and partners are working flexibly and creatively to overcome such challenges, including supporting young people to access online Open University courses or online School College Partnership programmes.

Schools and ELC: Shaping the curriculum

12. While new national guidance 'Realising the Ambition: Being Me' (RtA), published in February 2020, has been well received, settings have not yet had the opportunity to implement it fully. COVID-19 recovery approaches for the sector have been aligned to this guidance. Implementation of RtA continues to generate demand for support from Education Scotland from both the ELC and Primary Sectors.

13. Schools continue to make necessary changes to their timetable or curriculum arrangements, depending on local circumstances. For example, some secondary schools report making changes in the practical delivery of certain subjects – in particular Physical Education (PE), Home Economics, Technology and the Sciences. Schools are likely to be focusing on the theoretical aspects of such subjects at this early stage of the session. As

previously mentioned, some secondary schools have concerns about consortia arrangements and the subsequent impact on the quality of their Senior Phase curriculum offer. Schools continue to explore solutions including to these challenges, including live streaming of classes.

14. The [How We Do It](#) section [Refreshed Narrative for Curriculum for Excellence](#) outlines the importance of *Knowing your own learning and support needs*, which includes:

- Committing to career-long professional learning based around high quality, rigorous professional standards
- Belonging to communities of practice and enquiry
- Developing collaborative practice locally, nationally and globally

15. Despite the continuing uncertainty and significant workload created by the pandemic, evidence suggests that Scotland's educators and system leaders continue to demonstrate a strong appetite for engaging in professional learning; belonging to communities of enquiry and to developing collaborative practice locally, regionally and nationally.

Points for discussion

The Curriculum and Assessment Board is invited to discuss:

- Intentionally, this is high level guidance. Is this what is required? Do we need/want anything more specific?
- In what ways have CAB members and their schools/ associations used this guidance locally? What impact has this had on practice and on the curriculum experienced by learners during the initial phase of school re-opening?
- Is further guidance required? If so, what?
- Do we have any sense, at this stage, of how effective this guidance is?
- Should we be reviewing the guidance in the future? If so, how and when?
- How do we ensure that we hear the views of practitioners, children and young people on this, and future, guidance?
- Are we doing everything possible to support schools and build confidence at a crucial point in time? Can we do more?