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**SCOTLAND: EDUCATION, CURRICULUM AND LEARNING.
THE STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS
IN LIFELONG LEARNING**



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Photograph by M. Amadio. Caption: "Full-time Primary School" (Las Piedras, Canelones, Uruguay).

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**Scotland: Education, curriculum and learning.
The strengths, challenges and solutions
in lifelong learning**

by

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Introduction

This paper brings together the main strengths and challenges currently facing Scottish education and outlines approaches to the ways forward. Knowledge about how to improve education systems has grown rapidly over the last two decades. One clear message has emerged – in order to plan effectively for improving education systems, you first need to be clear about how well your education system is performing.

Issues and challenges relating to the overall education system, curriculum and learning will be familiar to those in many other countries. Globally, we share similar perspectives as we look to develop and improve to meet our education priorities. By identifying common underlying challenges, and sharing potential approaches and solutions, we can begin to determine creative initiatives that lead to effective changes for our own specific local circumstances.

One key challenge facing Scotland, and no doubt many other countries, is in ensuring a smooth ‘learner journey’ – from the earliest years through school and to further education, training or work. The learner journey requires effective curriculum frameworks across sectors and articulation with the needs of employers and the economy. It also needs to extend to adult learning, family learning including parenting, and encouraging those not in work to seek refreshed and new skills to help gain employment. Such a system requires careful planning and extensive, coordinated partnerships across delivery agencies. Complex – but the goals are worthy.

This paper provides brief, high level accounts of the strengths and challenges across this broad, lifelong learning agenda. It highlights national initiatives that set out solutions aimed at further improving Scottish education. The aspects of good practice and approaches to further innovation and improvement should aid and promote discussion.

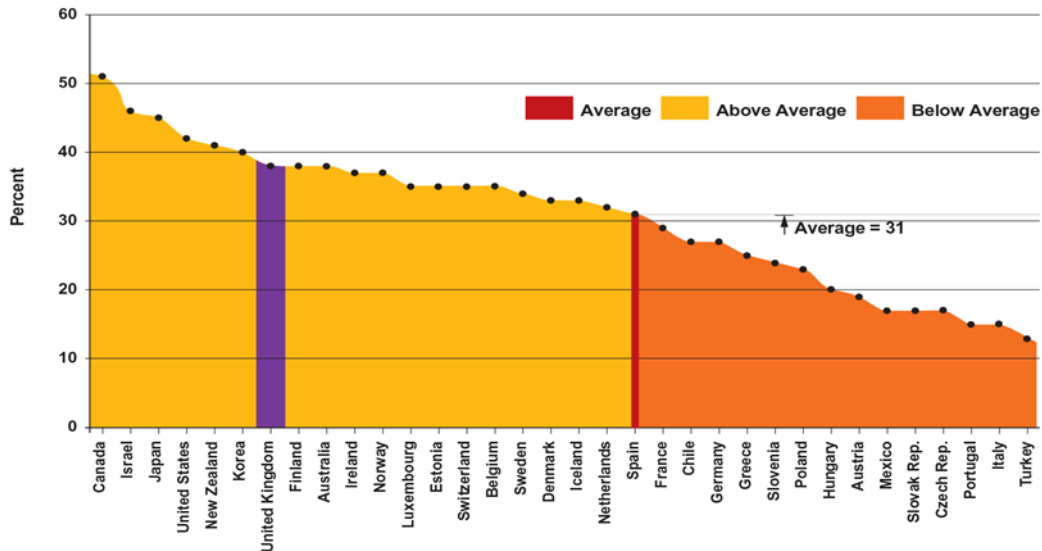
Education, curriculum and learning: The strengths and challenges

There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to generating educational improvement. Rather, decisions on the choice of the most appropriate methods to secure improvement in an education system depend on its starting point. The strategies appropriate for education systems that are trying to move from ‘poor’ to ‘fair’ are very different from the strategies appropriate for the education systems seeking to progress from ‘good’ to ‘great’.

Evidence from the current performance of Scotland’s education system suggests that we have a good education system, which is performing very strongly in a number of respects. However, we are not yet at the level of achieving consistently excellent levels of performance which would match the world-leading ambition of our vision.

A range of evidence confirms this broadly positive performance. We have a relatively high proportion of graduates in the population compared to other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and most parts of the United Kingdom (OECD 2012).

Figure 1: Proportion of population aged 25-64 that are graduates, 2010

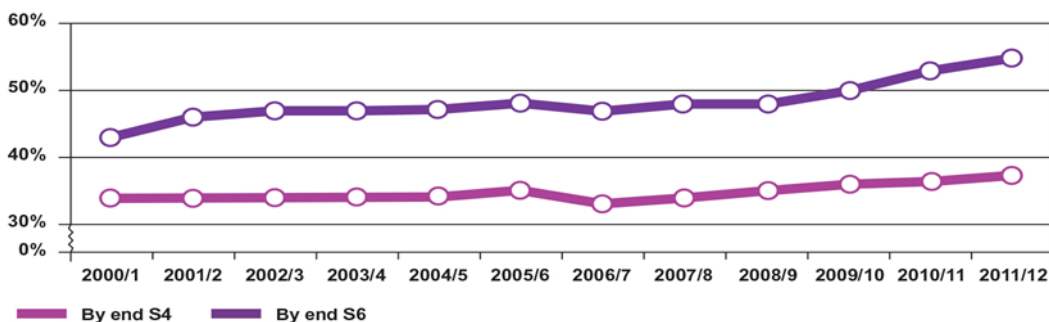


Source: OECD 2012.

Scotland outperforms the rest of the United Kingdom in relation to number of graduates aged 25-64. In the 2010 Annual Population Survey (Office for National Statistics), Scotland's graduate figure was around 4 percentage points higher than the rest of the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics 2012).

Young people's performance in National Qualifications at secondary school has gradually improved over the last decade (Scottish Government 2012b).

Figure 2: Young people gaining 5 or more awards at SCQF level 5 or above by the end of the S4 and S6 2000/2001 to 2011/2012

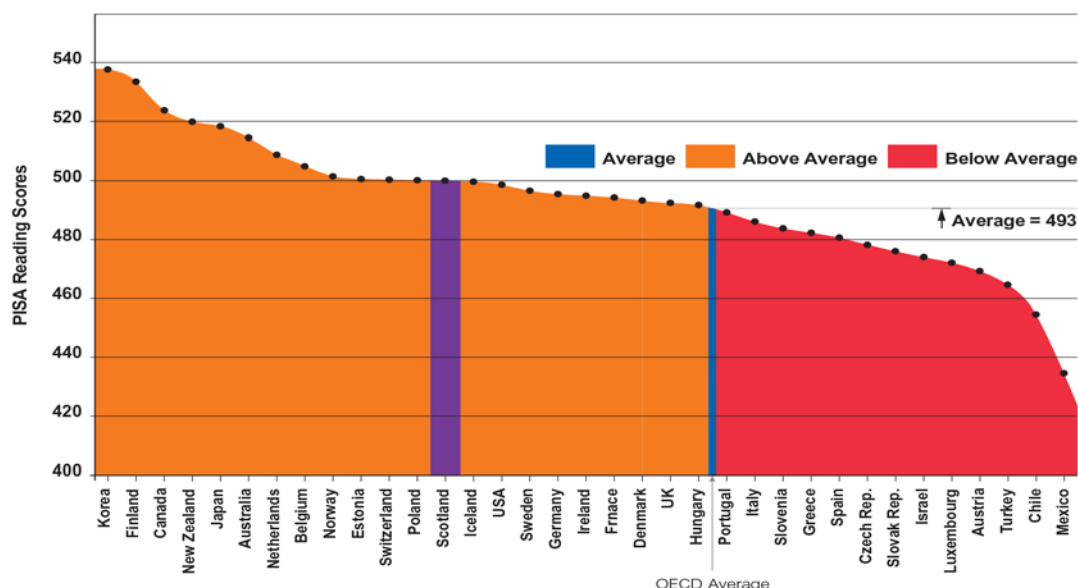


Source: Scottish Government 2012b.

Note: The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) uses 12 SCQF Levels to provide an indication of the complexity of qualifications and learning programmes. SCQF Level 1 is the least demanding and SCQF Level 12 is the most demanding.

Scotland's performance in international benchmarking tests is relatively strong although we are not one of the top performers (OECD 2010).

Figure 3: 2009 PISA reading score for OECD countries



Source: OECD 2010.

There are also other indicators of good performance in Scotland's education system. The nationally-commissioned *Growing up in Scotland* (GUS) study indicates that in the early years of their lives, most children in Scotland have positive experiences and few experience development difficulties (The Improvement Service 2012). The same study also indicates that almost all children in Scotland make the transition from pre-school to primary school well. In primary schools, evidence from the same study shows that, for most children and their parents, early school experiences are positive.

Baseline evidence from inspections of pre-school centres and schools, between 2008 and 2011, shows that almost all are working at a satisfactory level or better in providing children with effective experiences and improving their performance (Education Scotland 2012).

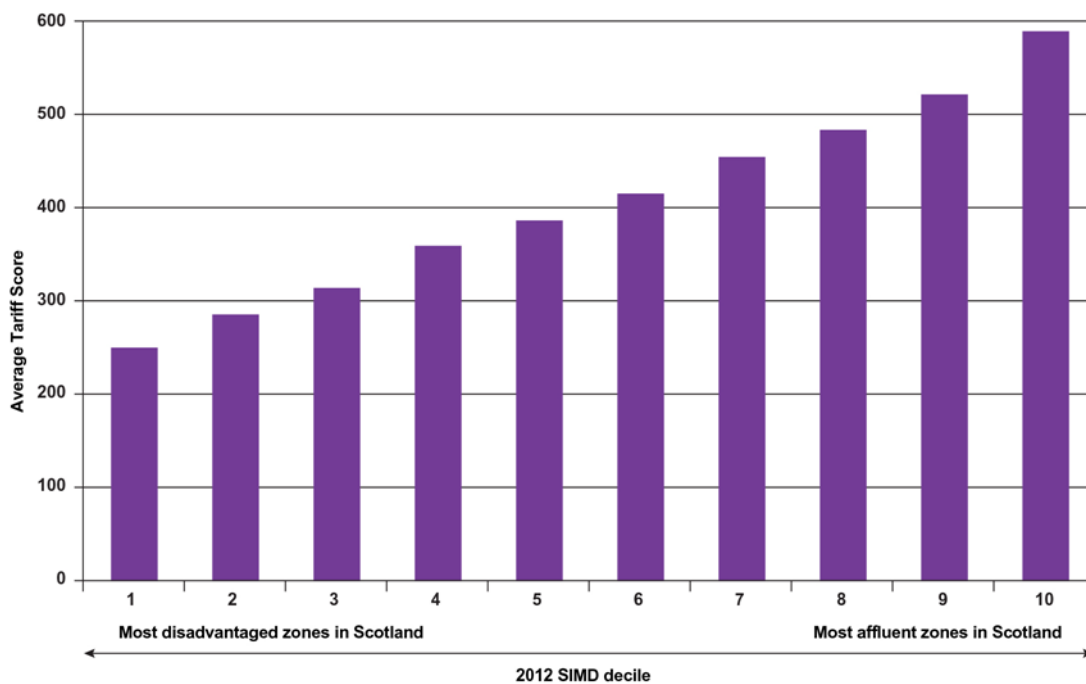
Evidence from inspections also shows that the quality of learning continues to be good in almost all secondary schools, with examples of very good and outstanding teaching. Most leavers from publically funded secondary schools are in positive destinations approximately nine months after leaving school and this is increasing (Scottish Government 2010). And since 2001 there has been a steady decrease in the percentage of adults with low or no qualifications (Scottish Government 2012a).

Despite this progress, there remains some room for improvement in aspects of Scottish education. We need to raise our performance in some key areas if we

are to achieve the consistently excellent levels of performance we aspire to, and which could place Scotland amongst the best performing countries in the world. One key issue is the strong link between social background and educational outcomes, a link which is strongly embedded in Scotland's education system. Differences in educational outcomes linked to social inequalities become strongly evident before the start of formal education and then persist through schooling and into adult life. GUS evidence shows that children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds typically start school developmentally between 13 and 18 months behind their peers, depending on the exact measure used. Furthermore, analyses of data from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) indicate that social background plays a relatively strong role in influencing educational outcomes in Scotland, relative to other countries.

The strong link between social background and educational outcomes in Scotland is clearly shown in the figure below demonstrating the cumulative achievement of school attainment levels mapped against the social characteristics of their home address.

Figure 4: Average tariff score of leavers 2011/2012 by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile.



Source: Scottish Government 2013.

The acronym SIMD stands for the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation factors. As the name suggests a number of indicators are used to calculate 'deprivation'. Each data zone in Scotland (which is a small area of land – normally a few streets) is divided into ten deciles corresponding to the level of social disadvantage. Decile 1, the left hand side of the figure above, is the 10% most disadvantaged zones in Scotland, while decile 10, right hand side of the figure, is

the 10% most affluent and privileged zones in Scotland. Each qualification from the Scottish Qualifications Authority has a number of points attributed to it (e.g. average tariff score). As learners move through S4-S6¹ more and higher level of qualifications, they accumulate more points. Learners with a lower number of qualifications and fewer quality passes are at the bottom (fewer points) and those with a higher number of qualifications and a higher quality if pass (e.g. a grade A) are at the top (more points).

Raising the bar to the left of the figure above is one of the key challenges faced by Scotland's education system.

Concerning adult literacy issues, the Scottish Survey of Adult Literacies (SSAL) carried out in 2009 indicates that around one quarter of the Scottish population (26.7%) may face occasional challenges and constrained opportunities due to their skills but will generally cope with their day-to-day lives. Within this quarter of the population, 3.6% (one person in 28) faces serious challenges in their literacy practices. The SSAL also shows that there are strong links between measured literacy scores and educational qualifications, being employed, and the skill level of that employment (St. Clair, Tett and Maclachlan 2010). In prisons approximately 81% of prisoners screened were assessed as lacking fundamental literacy and 71% as lacking in functional numeracy. The 2012 Scottish Literacy Action Plan shows that there is good work currently being done to improve literacy levels from the early years through to adult literacy. However, even more concentrated and joined up action is needed, by all partners.

Scotland needs and has the potential to secure a highly educated, skilled and well-motivated young workforce able to compete with any in Europe and ensure Scottish business and industry grows in stature at home and abroad. All countries need to ensure they produce better qualified, work ready and motivated young people with skills relevant to modern employment opportunities both as the employees and entrepreneurs of the future. This is another challenge to the Scottish education system, and to business and industry who must become much more actively engaged in youth employment and education and provide quality employment opportunities to a lot more young people.

The economic outlook is starting to look more positive and, as Scotland emerges from recession, the type of jobs available to drive economic growth will be in sectors that demand a higher level of skills. This changing labour market will see low growth in the areas of lower skilled work with the majority of jobs created between now and 2020 being highly skilled roles (UKCES 2012b). The current 77,000 unemployed 16-24 year olds (Office for National Statistics 2013) is showing an improving trend in Scotland, but it represents an unemployment rate of 19.1% among young people against 7.2% in the working age population. This anomaly is consistent with the fact that only one in four Scottish businesses employ people directly from education (UKCES 2012a).

There are a small number of countries in Europe where this situation is significantly better and these countries have two things in common: (i) a well-

¹ Senior phase of secondary education.

developed, highly valued vocational education and training system which starts in the secondary school, offers clear progression routes beyond school and plays a central part in the overall education system; and (ii) significant and widespread employer commitment to vocational education and youth employment as part of the development of quality jobs across the economy.

While Modern Apprenticeships have many strengths, they face issues related to the length of some apprenticeships, age related funding and a large number of incumbent workers among apprentices. In comparison with other countries, where apprenticeship typically lasts at least two years with the typical duration being three or four years, a Scottish Level 2 apprenticeship can be achieved in a relatively short time.

Finally, while workplace training is built into some post-secondary programmes, including apprenticeships, its use is highly variable. Provision of workplace training depends on the programme and individual provider. Not all vocational qualifications include a real work environment. The focus on vocational education and training in quality assurance could be reinforced. Data on labour market outcomes of post-secondary graduates in vocational education and training are limited, in particular on labour market outcomes of college graduates.

Education, curriculum and learning: Towards solutions

Early years (age 0–3)

Scotland recognises the importance of the earliest education and life experiences for children. An *Early Years Collaborative* is improving children's learning to give them the best start in life through. This is a coalition of local Community Planning Partners, including social services, health, education, police and third sector professionals with three ambitious aims: (i) by end 2015, reduce the rate of stillbirths and infant mortality by 15 per cent; (ii) by end 2016, ensure that 85 per cent of all children in each Community Planning Partnership meet all expected developmental milestones at the child's 27-30 month child health review; and (iii) by end 2017, ensure that 90 per cent of all children in each Community Planning Partnership have reached all expected developmental milestones by the time the child starts primary school.

The *Early Years Collaborative* will focus on pre-birth to one month; one month to 3 years and 3 to 5 years in order to: deliver tangible improvement in outcomes and reduce inequalities for vulnerable children; shift the balance of public services towards early intervention and prevention; and sustain this change.

Curriculum for Excellence (age 3–18)

Curriculum for Excellence is bringing learning to life in the way education is delivered for all 3-18 year olds – in nursery, primary, secondary, at college, workplace or community learning. It takes a fresh approach to what, how and where young people learn. It aims to raise standards, improve knowledge and develop

skills, closing the gap between the lowest and highest performers. Ultimately it aims to nurture young people as successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens. All teachers and other practitioners working with children and young people have responsibility for developing learners life skills in literacy, numeracy, and health and wellbeing.

The world is changing fast. Today's young person may have 10 to 14 jobs by the time they are aged 38. We need to prepare learners for jobs that do not yet exist, using technology that has not been invented to solve problems we cannot yet imagine. We aim to equip young people with knowledge, confidence and skills, giving them a competitive edge in a global job market.

Through *Curriculum for Excellence*, children and young people will develop skills for learning, life and work. What will be different or better? Learners will experience a broad, deep, general education to S3 (age 15), with options in the senior phase to specialise, go on to further study, improve skills and get work experience. The 'learner journey' will be joined up from age 3-18 to avoid gaps and overlaps in learning and to make the most of achievements outside the school. Learners will work at a place that suits, with enough challenge and support to stretch them. Lessons will be more engaging, inspiring and relevant to everyday life. Teachers will make connections between subjects, helping children make sense of the world. Children will learn *how* to learn and *how to use* their learning, not just memorise information to pass tests. This will help them adapt in an uncertain future with the ability to think for themselves, make sound judgements, challenge, enquire and find solutions. There is more focus on knowledge *and* skills – including vital skills: literacy and numeracy, which underpin all learning and are critical in life. There are changes to assessment and how progress is reported to give learners, parents and employers better information on potential and achievement. Finally, there are new qualifications from 2013 and more flexibility in how young people take qualifications.

Within *Curriculum for Excellence* each curriculum area is broken down to a set of experiences and outcomes. 'Experience' describes the learning while 'outcome' indicates what the learning will achieve. This is often explained, from the pupils' perspective, as an 'I can' statement. The curriculum levels are national levels to describe different stages of learning and progress. For most children², the expectation is organized as follows:

- ✓ Early Level: preschool to the end of P1³ (age 5);
- ✓ First Level: to the end of P4 (age 8);
- ✓ Second Level: to the end of P7 (age 11);
- ✓ Third and Fourth Levels: S1 to S3 (age 12-15), with the fourth level broadly equivalent to SCQF level 4;
- ✓ Senior Phase: S4 to S6 (age 16-18), and equivalents in other settings, where learners can continue to develop the four capacities (e.g. to be successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens) and achieve qualifications.

² It can also be earlier or later where applicable, depending upon individual needs and aptitudes.

³ First year of primary education.

Teacher education

Curriculum for Excellence is based on a model of change which allows teachers greater scope and space for professional decision making about how they develop and deliver learning. It provides challenges and opportunities for teachers, schools and the wider education system. In future teachers will need to have greater professional flexibility; they must take responsibility for their own professional development and they need to be supported and challenged to identify and address any areas in which they may have future needs.

Ensuring that educators, principally the teachers in Scotland's schools, have the skills and knowledge to successfully teach, engage with, and impact upon the wider children's services agenda, is a crucial policy challenge that was addressed by Professor Graham Donaldson in the report, *Teaching Scotland's Future* (2010). The quality of teaching and educational leadership is a crucial factor in creating successful education systems. As Prof. Donaldson states: "the foundations of successful education lie in the quality of teachers and their leadership. High quality people achieve high quality outcomes for children."

Scotland has embarked on a major programme of improvements to teacher education, throughout their careers. For example, the General teaching Council for Scotland has developed a suite of professional standards for registration, career-long professional learning, and leadership and management. Improvements are being made to professional review and development systems. A new Scottish College for Educational Leadership is being established and new qualifications for headship are being introduced. The new concept of 'career-long professional learning' is being promoted to ensure learning through a teacher's career, and more professional learning opportunities will be at master's level (a Scottish master's framework will be introduced).

Vocational education and training

One of the objectives of *Curriculum for Excellence* is to bring young people through the school system in a way which will increase their ability to maximise their opportunities in the world of work. All children and young people are entitled to opportunities, through *Curriculum for Excellence*, to develop skills for learning, life and work at all stages of their learning from ages 3 to 18.

Scotland has recently moved to larger 'Regional Colleges' with more focus on regional labour markets and a greater emphasis on employment outcomes. We have much greater focus on the value of employed Modern Apprenticeships in meeting the industrial challenges of the 21st century with more and more employers seeing it as a way to respond to the skills demands of the modern economy. Modern Apprenticeships Frameworks are designed by industry. In addition an 'Opportunities for All' commitment offers a place in learning for all 16-19 year olds not in employment, education or training.

Scotland has also embarked on a programme of reform in post-16 education and training. The aims of reform are to improve the life chances for young people, support economic growth and increase the number of jobs. Colleges play a critical

role in business growth – they help people get a job, get a better job and develop their career. The new Post-16 Education (Scotland) Bill provides legislative underpinning for proposed changes to post-16 education. The Bill received Royal Assent in August 2013, officially enshrining it in law. The Bill is now an Act, the first new piece of primary legislation focused on post-16 education since 2005. The Act will introduce significant changes to the way colleges are governed to improve public accountability.

Although there is recognition of the great strides made in developing Scotland's education and skills system, the Scottish Government set up a Commission in early 2013. The Commission is intended to build upon the Government Economic Strategy, *Curriculum for Excellence* and the Reform of Post-16 Education. Its task is to develop proposals which will realise the following objectives:

- ✓ enable young people to make the best transition from a broad general education under *Curriculum for Excellence* into a comprehensive range of opportunities for vocational & further education and training;
- ✓ stimulate work awareness and work readiness, and make best use of work experience in the compulsory phase of schooling and thereafter;
- ✓ achieve a system of vocational and further education and training which meets the needs of the changing economy as set out in the Economic Strategy, and delivers the qualifications and skills which employers need;
- ✓ identify improvements in the methods of schools, further education and modern apprenticeships, and their integration with advanced tertiary education, as required by the above considerations;
- ✓ improve the way in which schools and tertiary education providers work together to change the extent and nature of vocational education;
- ✓ promote improved access and a genuine equality of opportunity, broadening the prospects of occupational choice in the years ahead; and
- ✓ make this a genuine national endeavour, with stronger employer commitment and investment.

The new Regional Colleges are expected to respond to the labour market. The Scottish Government has committed to maintain the volume of student places in college. Priorities for college provision focus on: continued delivery of 'Opportunities for All' (age 16-19); ensuring improved progression in access level provision; and industry linked vocational provision with a focus on employment.

The Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce is investigating how to encourage employers to develop more partnerships with schools and colleges to achieve our vision of an ambitious and motivated, highly skilled, well qualified, work ready, young workforce for Scotland.

Community-based adult learning

Scotland is looking to promote greater involvement in 'community-based adult learning', an umbrella term describing a broad range of learning that brings together adults, to pursue an interest, address a need, acquire a new skill, become healthier or learn how to support their children. There is a key focus on improving literacy and

numeracy. This kind of learning, often unaccredited, is an important part of the wider learning continuum and is often delivered in community settings. It can be undertaken for its own sake but is often a step towards other learning/training. It can be delivered by providers in the public, voluntary or private sector. It can also be organised by people for themselves through the many groups, clubs and societies where people get together to learn.

Maintaining the involvement of adults in their learning promotes the benefits to personal life, families and skills development. Recent figures indicate the priority required in supporting adults through their continuous learning journey. For example, as shown in the table below current learners are 80% likely to return to learning – once they leave learning, they are much less likely to return.

Table 1: Participation in learning by age of leaving full-time education and future intentions to take up learning

<i>Participation in learning by age of leaving full-time education:</i>	
Up to age 16	23% in last 3 years / 49% not at all
Age 17-18	39% in last 3 years / 32% not at all
Age 21+	49% in last 3 years / 23% not at all
<i>Future intentions to take up learning:</i>	
Current learners	80% likely / 17% unlikely
Recent learners	64% likely / 34% unlikely
Not since full-time education	17% likely / 79% unlikely

Source: NIACE 2012.

Community Learning and Development (CLD) in Scotland aims to empower people, individually and collectively, to make positive changes in their lives and their communities, through learning. The principles that underpin CLD practice are the following:

- ✓ *empowerment*: increasing the ability of individuals and groups to influence matters affecting them and their communities;
- ✓ *participation*: supporting people to take part in decision-making;
- ✓ *inclusion, equality of opportunity and anti-discrimination*: recognising some people need additional support to overcome the barriers they face;
- ✓ *self-determination*: supporting the right of people to make their own choices; and
- ✓ *partnership*: ensuring resources, varied skills and capabilities are used effectively.

The specific focus of CLD is on: improved life chances for people of all ages through learning, personal development and active citizenship; and stronger, more resilient, supportive, influential and inclusive communities. CLD is delivered through wide ranging partnerships across local authorities and government bodies, the voluntary sector in settings such as community health and housing, public sector organisations such as schools and colleges, and local communities for interest.

CLD outcomes are delivered through: (i) community development (building the capacity of communities to meet their own needs, engaging with and influencing decision makers); (ii) youth work, family learning and other early intervention work with children, young people and families; (iii) community-based adult learning, including adult literacies and English for speakers of other languages; (iv) volunteer development; (v) learning for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community, for example, people with disabilities, care leavers or offenders; and (vi) learning support and guidance in the community.

The Scottish Government published Strategic Guidance for CLD in Scotland in 2012 (Scottish Government 2012c). This has been followed by new CLD legislation to strengthen the significant contribution that CLD can make to improve the skills, confidence and life chances of youths, adults and families.

Concluding remarks

Scotland has identified the main strengths and challenges in its education system. Our improvement agenda is far-reaching, forward looking and ambitious. The policies, strategies and initiatives set out in this paper form a comprehensive and coherent framework of support and challenge within which learning, from the youngest years until late into retirement, can be nurtured, improve and grow. Lifelong learning is a core value in Scotland and well-structured, focused and high quality learning opportunities for learners of all ages is the key goal.

Active and empowered learners are the keystone of our civic society. Coordinated and effective learning experiences within and beyond the 'formal' education contribute to improvements in learners' personal and family lives, and the health and wellbeing, skills and confidence they need to make positive life choices. Engaging in learning throughout life will help people to develop social capital and knowledge, look outward locally and globally, support economic growth, participate in their local communities and take social action in improving society.

All practitioners involved in helping learners to learn can draw on the lifelong learning framework in reviewing and improving their work. They must select the most appropriate range of policy advice, strategies and initiatives in supporting their learners – they are best placed to work with learners to determine what they should learn, how and what should happen next. This requires improved leadership by practitioners themselves, greater leadership at local and regional levels, and clear, strong strategic leadership at national level from agencies and policy leads. Effective partnership and collaborative leadership across educational sectors and services will be essential.

Scotland is now looking to harness the skills, experiences and leadership of its educational practitioners in making the vision for lifelong learning a reality. A vision where educational outcomes for all learners are improving; inequity in educational outcomes is eradicated; and public confidence in education is high.

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