

Choice, Attainment and Positive Destinations: Working Paper No. 2

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS FROM THE SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERS
SURVEY: A SUMMARY

SHAPIRA, M., PRIESTLEY, M., PEACE-HUGHES, T., BARNETT, C. & RITCHIE, M.

**UNIVERSITY of
STIRLING**



Cite this work: Shapira, M., Priestley, M., Peace-Hughes, T., Barnett, C. & Ritchie, M. (2021). *Preliminary findings from the secondary school leaders survey: a summary*. Nuffield Project, Working Paper No. 2. Stirling: University of Stirling.

Acknowledgements

This research is funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

The Nuffield Foundation is an independent charitable trust with a mission to advance social well-being. It funds research that informs social policy, primarily in Education, Welfare, and Justice. It also funds student programmes that provide opportunities for young people to develop skills in quantitative and scientific methods. The Nuffield Foundation is the founder and co-funder of the Nuffield Council on Bioethics and the Ada Lovelace Institute. The Foundation has funded this project, but the views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily the Foundation. Visit www.nuffieldfoundation.org



Table of contents

Acknowledgements	1
Table of contents	2
List of Tables	4
List of Figures	5
Executive summary	7
Key findings	7
Curriculum models	7
Broad General Education (BGE)	7
Senior Phase	8
The factors influencing curriculum provision in the BGE and the Senior Phase	9
Background and context	11
Survey overview	12
Our Sample	12
School curriculum models	15
Broad General Education: overview	15
Number of subjects studied across the BGE	16
Student choice	18
Rotational or integrated subjects	18
Interdisciplinary learning across the BGE	20
Factors influencing the BGE	20
National level policy influence on the BGE	20
Wider societal influence on the BGE	22
Educational infrastructure influence on the BGE	23
Educational data influence on the BGE	25
School context influence on the BGE	26
Factors in the BGE ranked by most influential	28
Senior Phase: overview	29
Number of subjects studied in the Senior Phase	30
Timetabling and subject combinations	30
Alternative qualifications	33
SCQF level progression in the Senior Phase	34
	2

Factors influencing the Senior Phase	36
National level policy influence on the Senior Phase	36
Wider societal influence on the Senior Phase	38
Educational infrastructure influence on the Senior Phase	39
Educational data influence on the Senior Phase	40
School context influence on the Senior Phase	41
Factors in the Senior Phase ranked by most influential	44
Data, measurement and tracking	45
Meeting the needs of students	46
Developing areas of interest for the wider study	48
Survey	48
Secondary data	48
Qualitative strand	48
Discussion and concluding remarks	49
References	52

List of Tables

Table 1: Survey response coverage	13
Table 2: Survey sample characteristics	14
Table 3: The maximum number of subjects studied in S1 - S3	17
Table 4: The percentage of schools offering subject groupings on rotational or fully integrated basis	19
Table 5: Most commonly offered subject grouping in the rotational and fully integrated basis categories by the average number of subjects studied across the BGE	20
Table 6: The influence of national level policies on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	21
Table 7: The influence of wider societal factors on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	22
Table 8: The influence of educational infrastructure on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	24
Table 9: The influence of educational data on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	25
Table 10: The influence of school context on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	27
Table 11: The proportion of schools who allow students to take either SCQF level 6 or 7 courses without a prior qualification in that subject	35
Table 12: The percentage of schools practicing multi-course teaching in each subject	35
Table 13: The influence of national level policies on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase	37
Table 14: The influence of wider societal factors on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase	38
Table 15: The influence of educational infrastructure on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase	39
Table 16: The influence of educational data on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase	40
Table 17: The influence of school context on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase	42
Table 18: The proportion of schools using tracking tools by curriculum model	45
Table 19: The proportion of schools using tracking tools by importance placed on monitoring student progress through tracking	46
Table 20: The mean rating for schools regarding offering flexibility, choice and provision from external partners to students when choosing their subject choices	47

List of Figures

Figure 1: Curriculum models in schools	15
Figure 2: The proportion of schools first offering subject choice to their students in the BGE	18
Figure 3: The proportion of schools who rated national policies as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	22
Figure 4: The proportion of schools who rated wider societal factors as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	23
Figure 5: The proportion of schools who rated educational infrastructure as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	24
Figure 6: The proportion of schools who rated educational data as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	26
Figure 7: Proportion of schools who rated school context as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	27
Figure 8: The proportion of schools rating each factor as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE	28
Figure 9: The reported ease with which students are able to fit different subject combinations into their timetable	31
Figure 10: The reported ease with which students are able to fit different subject combinations into their timetable by the proportion of students receiving Free School Meals	32
Figure 11: The importance reported by respondents regarding student ability to take different courses and course combinations	33
Figure 12: The proportion of schools not offering different types of vocational courses	34
Figure 13: The proportion of schools offering different wider achievement awards	34
Figure 14: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated national policies as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and the Senior Phase	37
Figure 15: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated wider societal factors as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and Senior Phase	38
Figure 16: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated educational infrastructure as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and Senior Phase	40
Figure 17: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated educational data as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and Senior Phase	41
Figure 18: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated school context as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and Senior Phase	43

Figure 19: The proportion of schools rating each factor as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase	44
Figure 20: The proportion of schools offering flexibility, choice and provision from external partners to students when choosing their subject choices (rating of 7 or higher)	46
Figure 21: The proportion of schools offering flexibility, choice and provision from external partners to students when choosing their subject choices, by the proportion of students receiving Free School Meals	47

Executive summary

The aim of the research is to develop new understanding about how contemporary curriculum policy is enacted in Scottish schools, what factors shape its enactment, and how emerging practices impact the lives of young people. As part of a larger project, a survey of school leaders in secondary schools in Scotland was undertaken in order to contextualise curriculum provision in Scottish secondary schools, and to understand variation between schools in their curriculum making. In this paper the preliminary results of that survey are presented. The survey data was merged with administrative data on schools' characteristics (e.g., size, proportion of free school meals registered, location context). The survey data was collected from 116 Scottish secondary schools which are largely representative of the research population. Analysis of this data, which this paper details, allows us to begin to understand possible reasons for variation in school curriculum practices.

Key findings

Curriculum models

- All of the independent schools in our sample were guided by a 2+2+2 approach. Among the publicly funded schools 18% stated they were guided by a 2+2+2 approach, with the remaining 82% following the 3+3 model.

Broad General Education (BGE)

- In S1 and S2 a student typically studies 8 or more subjects per week and in S3 students typically study 7 or more subjects per week.
- Over 30% of schools offered students opportunities to study a maximum of 16+ subjects in a typical week in S1 and S2.
- On average, the maximum number of subjects for S1 and S2 was 15 while the average for S3 was 12. There was no variation in averages between reported 2+2+2 or 3+3 curriculum models.
- 2% of schools reported students had no choice of subjects in the BGE phase. In 14% of schools students first had a choice over subjects in S1, in 51% of schools students first had a choice in S2 and in 34% of schools students first had a choice of subjects in S3.
- 36% of schools offered no subjects on a rotational basis and 17% of schools offered no subjects on a fully integrated basis.
- Social subjects were the most frequently offered on a rotational basis (39% of schools) and sciences were as a rule were offered on a fully integrated basis (70% of schools).

- 27% of schools reported having planned Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL) days for specific year groups, 20% had a weekly timetabled slot for IDL, and 67% reported having a strategic approach to IDL across curricular areas and year groups (e.g. Faculties working together across curriculum areas and/or year groups to design).

Senior Phase

- In S4 and S5, students typically take the maximum number of subjects available to them, whereas in S6 they are taking fewer than the maximum number of subjects available.
- In S4, the most frequent answer was 7 for both the maximum and typical number of subjects studied (with 41% and 43% of schools, respectively, reporting this number).
- In S5, the most frequent answer was 5 for both the maximum and typical number of subjects studied (with 58% and 83% of schools, respectively, reporting this number).
- In S6, the most frequent answer for the maximum number of subjects was 5, while the modal answer for the typical number of subjects studied was 4 (with 56% of schools reporting this number for both maximum and typical number of subjects studied).
- All schools can facilitate 2 expressive arts in their S4 timetable, with 96% of schools easily facilitating and the remaining 4% finding it more challenging. The vast majority of schools can easily facilitate students taking 2 social subjects in S4 (94%); only 1% of schools cannot facilitate this.
- 6% of schools cannot accommodate students taking 3 sciences in S4 and a further 24% find it challenging to facilitate this, although it can be accommodated. Schools where a higher proportion of students are registered for free school meals report finding it more challenging to facilitate this provision.
- 3% of schools cannot accommodate S4 students taking 2 languages and a further 20% find it challenging to facilitate, though it can be accommodated. Schools where a higher proportion of students are registered for free school meals appear to find it more challenging to facilitate this provision.
- 87% of schools felt it was important for students to study vocational subjects and courses. 78% rated expressive arts important and 74% rated being able to take 2 or more social subjects important, 64% rated 2 or more modern languages important, and 61% rated 3 science subjects important.
- The majority of schools offer vocational qualifications across various SCQF levels. Only 6% of schools do not offer Awards, followed by 11% not offering Skills for Work courses and 16% not offering National Progression Awards. 75% of schools report they do not offer National Certificates.
- Most schools offer wider achievement awards. 91% offer Duke of Edinburgh's Award, 74% offer Saltire, 54% offer John Muir Awards. Participative Democracy Certificate, Community Achievement

Awards and Moving on – Transition in Action Awards were the least likely to be offered by schools (2%, 3% and 3%, respectively).

- In S4, 55% of schools do not allow students to study for a SCQF level 6 qualification without holding a SCQF level 5 qualification in the same subject. In S5 18% do not allow this and in S6 2% do not allow this.
- 16% of schools reported offering a two-year pathway to Highers.
- Multi-course teaching is practised in 85% of schools. This is most prevalent in technologies (69%), languages (66%) and social subjects (65%).
- Most schools reported providing flexibility and choice at a high level (94% and 96%, respectively).
- 64% of schools reported provision through external partners. Schools with a higher proportion of students registered for free school meals are less likely to use external partners.
- 8 in 10 of schools responded that their school used tracking tools to inform curriculum design and provision.

The factors influencing curriculum provision in the BGE and the Senior Phase

- Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) is the most important policy influence on curriculum provision and decision-making across both the BGE and the Senior phase (85% and 86%, respectively).
- CfE policies are at least moderately influential in the majority of schools' BGE curriculum design. Of the CfE policies, the Four Capacities are the least influential at this level.
- CfE policies are less influential in the senior phase (for example, the influence of Experiences and Outcomes falls from 83% in the BGE to 60% in the Senior Phase).
- The National Gaelic Language Plan and STEM strategy are considered amongst the least influential policies in both the BGE and Senior Phase (6% to 5% and 44% to 47%, respectively).
- Most schools reported that academic research is at least moderately influential on curriculum design in both the BGE and Senior Phase (90% across both stages).
- Across the BGE and Senior Phase, the majority of schools reported unofficial league tables (67% and 53%, respectively), the press (47% and 43%, respectively), and social media (47% across both stages) were 'not at all influential' on curriculum provision and design.
- The most important educational infrastructure factors influencing BGE and Senior Phase provision were Local Authorities (58% and 57%, respectively) school inspections (57% and 56%, respectively) and support and advice from Education Scotland (52% and 55%, respectively).
- Most schools use a range of data sources to inform their curriculum decisions at both BGE and Senior Phase. The most commonly used are self-evaluation (88% and 90%, respectively), How Good

Is Our School? (HGIOS) (81% and 83%, respectively), positive destinations (68% and 79%, respectively), and attainment data (69% and 78%, respectively).

- Across the BGE and Senior Phase, the views of staff (84% and 83%, respectively), students (82% and 85%, respectively) and parents (57% and 63%, respectively), and values and beliefs of staff (84% and 83%, respectively) and senior leadership (81% and 83%, respectively) are very or extremely influential in most schools. These factors, alongside student and school demographics (76% and 80%, respectively), were reported to be at least partly influential in all schools.

Background and context

Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) has been widely acknowledged as the most significant educational development in a generation (Priestley & Humes, 2010), with the potential to transform learning and teaching in Scottish schools. In common with recent developments elsewhere, CfE seeks to provide a broad competency-based education suited to the demands of the 21st century and is underpinned by strong values relating to social equity. It is accompanied by a variety of policy agendas with an equally explicit focus on equity (*Getting It Right For Every Child, Pupil Equity Funding, the Scottish Attainment Challenge, etc.*). However, contrary to policy intentions, there is emerging evidence of and controversy about a reduction of choices and curriculum narrowing. For example, in 2017, in 57% of schools, only 6 subjects were offered in secondary year 4 (S4) (Secondary School Survey 2017). Further, analysis of enrolment data shows that the average number of subject entries for National 5 level qualifications (typically taken in S4) declined from 7.26 in 2013 to 5.22 in 2017 (Shapira & Priestley, 2018, 2020). This decline in S4 is more rapid in schools situated in areas of higher socio-economic deprivation (Shapira, 2018), suggesting that curriculum narrowing is socially stratified.

Decisions made by schools about curriculum provision (i.e., the configuration of subjects available to study) during the middle-to-senior stages of secondary school are highly consequential in loosely stratified and loosely standardised education systems (Iannelli, 2013). As a result, subject choice at ages 14-15 (years S3 and S4) in Scottish secondary education are linked to subsequent subject choice at ages 16-17 (S5-6), to career opportunities of young people, and to their chances of entering Higher Education. Existing research shows that subject choice is socially patterned and that young people from disadvantaged family backgrounds are less likely to select 'facilitation' subjects that help them to secure a university place (ibid). Thus, subject choice effectively replaces formal tracking into academic and vocational subjects and becomes an important factor in the reproduction of socio-economic inequality (Iannelli & Smyth, 2017). Moreover, subject choice in the senior phase (S4-6) is shaped to a large extent by the subject options available to young people in the junior phase (S1-3) of secondary education – known as the Broad General Education (BGE) in Scotland.

Yet with the exception of some analysis of publicly available data aggregated at the level of local authorities, there is a lack of a robust evidence base for drawing conclusions about contemporary patterns of curriculum provision in secondary schools in Scotland, and their effects on attainment and transitions. Moreover, there is no existing Scottish research that explains the reasons for the form that curriculum takes in different schools or the relationships that exist within the curriculum (e.g., how patterns in early secondary school shape choices in the senior phase).

This research builds upon insights about curriculum making in schools from previous studies by members of the project team (e.g., as detailed above: Shapira & Priestley 2018; Shapira 2012; Priestley & Minty, 2013; Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015). However, the research fills a major gap in the evidence base, and in turn aims to facilitate better understanding of the patterns of provision and the social/system dynamics that shape them. The project explores curriculum provision in Scottish secondary schools and the relationships between patterns of provision and educational outcomes/transitions. The study combines the analysis of existing secondary data (e.g., Scottish Population Census data linked with administrative education data) with the generation of new data about curriculum provision. It is this new data which is the focus of this paper.

Survey overview

In order to gain insights into the nature of narrowing of choice and subject uptake, and into the main drivers of curriculum narrowing, this project is generating currently missing data on the way schools, teachers, students, and parents are making decisions about curriculum. The first stage of the data collection entailed a survey of secondary school leaders across a representative sample of publicly funded schools in Scotland.

The aims of the survey were to:

1. identify curriculum provision in S1-S6 and variation in this provision between regions, local authorities and schools of different characteristics;
2. explore between-school variations in the number of subject choices offered to students;
3. explore the factors that affect these variations;
4. identify school resourcing issues, including those related to funding and staff shortages in different areas, school-level responses to these issues and the impact these have on curriculum provision.

Our Sample

Permission was obtained from 28 local authorities to contact schools with an email invitation to take part in the survey. Retrospective permission was also obtained for 2 local authorities (from which 1 school in each authority had completed a survey response). In total, 116 secondary schools from 29 local authorities completed the survey; which represents about 1/3 of Scottish secondary publicly funded schools. Below, Table 1, shows a breakdown of the total number and proportion of schools in each region of Scotland compared with the total number and proportion in our response sample

Permission was not obtained to contact schools in Highland, Orkney, or Shetland. This limited the geographical coverage of the sample in the Highlands and Islands. Additionally, permission to contact

schools in Aberdeen City Council was not obtained. However, in the sample there are very high response rates from the other local authorities in the North East which means the overall sample coverage across this region is high. Therefore, the survey sample and responses provide reasonable coverage of the North of Scotland. Across other areas of Scotland, the coverage is similar to the national picture.

Region	Local authorities within Region	Total number of schools		Number of schools in our sample	
Aberdeen and North East	Aberdeen City*, Aberdeenshire, Moray	36	(10%)	16	(15%)
Highlands and Islands	Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar, Highland*, Orkney*, Shetland*	55	(16%)	5	(5%)
Tayside, Central and Fife	Angus**, Clackmannanshire, Dundee City, Falkirk, Fife, Perth and Kinross, Stirling	62	(18%)	26	(24%)
Edinburgh and Lothians	City of Edinburgh, East Lothian, Midlothian, West Lothian	44	(12%)	14	(13%)
Glasgow and Strathclyde	East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Ayrshire, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Ayrshire, South Lanarkshire, West Dunbartonshire	131	(37%)	44	(40%)
Scotland South	Dumfries and Galloway, Scottish Borders	25	(7%)	5	(5%)
<p>*Permission was not obtained to contact schools in these local authorities</p> <p>** There were no responses from schools in this local authority</p> <p><i>Additionally, in the sample there are 6 responses from independent schools which are not included in this table.</i></p>					

Table 1: Survey response coverage

Using government administrative data, the composition of the survey sample was compared with the national picture according to characteristics such as urban-rural classification, school size, proportion of students registered for free school meals (FSM), proportion of ethnic minority students (BME) and proportion of students with additional support needs (ASN). The comparison shows the survey sample characteristics are remarkably similar to the national averages (see Table 2). However, it is likely that the lower coverage of schools in the Highlands and Islands (where there are some very remote and small schools with low pupil rolls) has led to a higher-than-average pupil roll in the survey sample.

Nevertheless, as previously stated, there is reason to maintain that the survey sample is largely representative of the Scottish national picture with the caveat that some care must be taken when considering small, rural schools in the North of Scotland, as there is less coverage of these schools in the sample.

	National Average	Sample Average
Urban rural classification ¹		
<i>Remote Rural</i>	14%	10%
<i>Remote Small Towns</i>	7%	10%
<i>Accessible Rural Areas</i>	5%	5%
<i>Accessible Small Towns</i>	9%	11%
<i>Large Urban Areas</i>	27%	26%
<i>Other Urban Areas</i>	38%	39%
Pupil Roll	804	871
Proportion of BME students	11%	10%
Proportion of FSM students	14%	14%
Proportion of ASN students	33%	33%

Table 2: Survey sample characteristics

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-urban-rural-classification-2016>

Additionally, 6 responses were obtained from independent schools. While independent school curriculum-making and influences are not the focus of this study, the data does provide a useful comparison with local authority schools.

In most cases, the survey was completed by the school Head Teacher, although some responses came from deputy headteachers, acting headteachers and curriculum heads.

School curriculum models

Schools were asked ‘Are you guided by a 3+3 approach or a 2+2+2 approach to your school curriculum?’². All of the independent schools in our sample were guided by 2+2+2 approach, when these schools were excluded 18% of the local authority schools sampled stated they were guided by a 2+2+2 approach, with the remaining 82% following the 3+3 model (Figure 1).

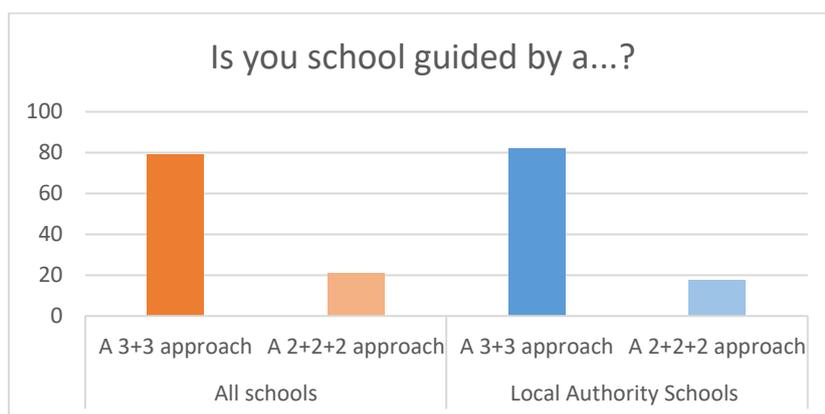


Figure 1: Curriculum models in schools

Broad General Education: overview

The Broad General Education (BGE) is the phase of education from formal early years learning until the end of S3. It is the basic level of education provided to all state educated Scottish citizens. Curriculum for Excellence extended the BGE by a year to include S3, and precluded preparation for exams, to afford students the opportunity to experience breadth and depth of learning across curriculum areas, and to develop skills for learning, life and work (Scottish Government, 2008).

² The 2+2+2+3 approach is one commonly associated with the previous system prior to the introduction of CfE. The 3+3+3 approach is the intended curriculum model under CfE (with the two stages split into Broad General Education and Senior Phase).

The implementation of the BGE has been problematic from the outset. The Curriculum Review Group highlighted that the BGE should be prioritised as an area for curriculum reform to improve continuity and progression between primary and secondary schooling, and to provide a purposeful focus on this stage of schooling (Scottish Executive, 2004). However, this recommendation was superseded by a focus on the senior phase. Qualifications changes made early in the implementation phase of CfE necessitated that teachers focus their limited time and resources on implementing qualifications changes due to the high-stakes nature of these assessments (RSE, 2019). The new qualifications have arguably come to define the enactment of CfE in secondary schools (Humes & Priestley, 2021) and contributed to the implementation gap that exists in the BGE.

Emerging evidence suggests that there is fragmentation in terms of many secondary schools' approaches to the BGE and a lack of clear curricular rationale for the different structures adopted (OECD, 2015; Priestley, 2018; Scott, 2018). The OECD reported that the BGE curriculum was fragmented and not fully enacted in many secondary schools (OECD, 2015). Similarly, the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) have raised concerns with the Scottish Parliament's Education & Skills Committee that there is a lack of accessible information on school's curricular models, and on the curriculum-making practices which determine the curricular structures adopted by schools in the BGE. Further, they have called for more research in this area to develop a robust evidence base (RSE, 2019).

A lack of consistency in BGE provision has implications for student equity, and the realisation of wider educational aims, such as developing an informed citizenry equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century. Moreover, curriculum provision in the BGE is highly consequential because senior phase subject choices are shaped to a large extent by subjects available in the BGE (Iannelli, 2013). Therefore, it is important to understand patterns of BGE provision at school level and to identify the curricular rationales, and decision-making processes, which, underpin the BGE.

Number of subjects studied across the BGE

In the survey, schools were asked to report the maximum number of subjects a student could study in a typical week in each year of the BGE. Respondents were asked to exclude one off courses, but to include subjects such as Religious Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS), Physical Education (PE) and Personal, Social Education (PSE). In S1 and S2, students can study at least 8 or more subjects, and in S3 they can study at least 7 or more subjects. The maximum reported for all years was 40 but this school does seem to be

somewhat of an outlier³. On average, the maximum number of subjects for S1 and S2 was 15 while the average for S3 was 12. Table 3 shows the percentage distribution of maximum number of subjects at every stage across the study's sample. In this table, it appears that the maximum number of subjects typically studied is narrower in S3.

Maximum number of subjects	S1	S2	S3
7 subjects	0 %	0%	1%
8 subjects	1%	1%	5%
9 subjects	0%	0%	6%
10 subjects	4%	4%	13%
11 subjects	4%	4%	24%
12 subjects	6%	9%	28%
13 subjects	12%	6%	7%
14 subjects	22%	19%	7%
15 subjects	18%	23%	4%
16 subjects	12%	12%	1%
17 subjects	13%	11%	2%
18 subjects	4%	7%	0%
19 subjects	1%	2%	0%
20 subjects	1%	2%	0%
21 subjects	0%	1%	0%
22 subjects	1%	0%	0%
40 subjects	1%	1%	1%

Table 3: The maximum number of subjects studied in S1 - S3

We found that the stage when students are first offered subject choice is associated with the maximum number of subjects typically studied in S3. For example, in schools that first offer subject choice as early as S1 or S2 (65% of the sample) the maximum number of subjects that can be studied in S3 was, on average, was 12. While for schools which first offer subject choice in S3 (34% of the sample) the maximum number of

³ One school reported 40, but this requires further investigation.

subjects that could be studied in S3 was, on average, 13. Therefore, it seems that offering subject choice earlier in the BGE may lead to a form of curriculum narrowing.

On average, the maximum number of subjects that could be studied in each year does not vary between schools that are guided by a 2+2+2 curriculum model as opposed to a 3+3 curriculum model.

Student choice

When asked, ‘When are students given a choice over the courses and subjects they will study?’, 2% of schools reported students had no choice until the end of the BGE phase (Figure 2). A total of 14% of schools offered students choice in S1, 62% of schools reported student choice in S2 and 91% offered students choice in S3. Concerning, when schools first offer subject choice to their students, 14% of schools reported students had a choice in S1, 51% of schools reported students had a choice in S2 and 34% percent reported students had a choice in S3.

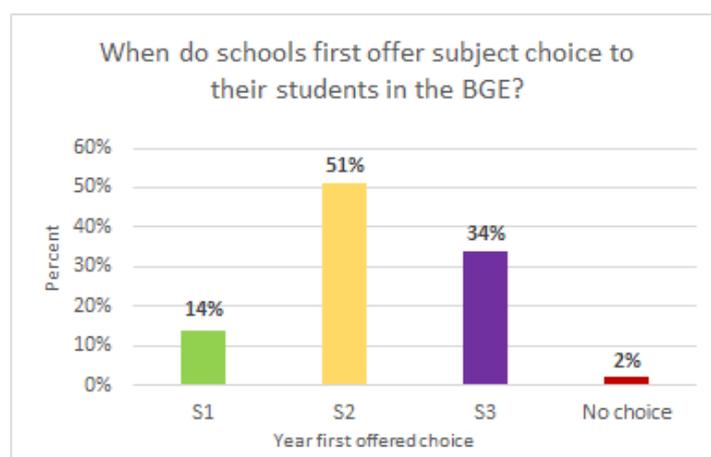


Figure 2: The proportion of schools first offering subject choice to their students in the BGE

Rotational or integrated subjects

Schools were asked if they offered any subjects/courses in the BGE phase on a rotational⁴ or a fully integrated basis⁵, with the majority of schools offering subjects either on a rotational or fully integrated basis. However, 36% of schools offered no subjects on a rotational basis and 17% of schools offered no

⁴ One or more teachers teaching different subjects in different blocks across the school year.

⁵ This is an approach which breaks down traditional subject boundaries and covers contents from several disciplines when discussing particular topics.

subjects on a fully integrated basis. Below, Table 4 shows the percentage of schools offering various subject groupings on a rotational or fully integrated basis⁶. Although there is a higher percentage of schools that offer social subjects on a fully integrated basis as opposed to rotational basis, social subjects are the subject grouping which is offered on a rotational basis more often than any other subject grouping. For example, social subjects are offered on rotational basis in 39% of the schools, compared with 16% of schools offering languages and 13% of schools offering sciences on this basis. Among subjects offered on a fully integrated basis, sciences are the most commonly offered subject grouping: 70% of schools offer sciences on this basis followed by 48% of schools offering social sciences on a fully integrated basis.

Subject grouping	Percentage of schools offering on a rotational basis	Percentage of schools offering on a fully integrated basis
Sciences	13%	70%
Social subjects	39%	48%
Languages	16%	18%
Expressive arts	12%	4%
Technologies	13%	24%
RMPS	12%	10%
Other	3%	2%

Table 4: The percentage of schools offering subject groupings on rotational or fully integrated basis

Below, Table 5 shows the variation, on average, of the maximum number of subjects students study per year of the BGE according to the most commonly offered subject grouping on a rotational or fully integrated basis (social sciences, 39%, and sciences, 48%, respectively). In the second column, the average number of maximum subjects studied for the whole sample is noted in order to provide a point of comparison. There appear to be some slight differences between the average number of subjects studied according to whether subject groupings are offered on rotational or integrated basis. For example, students studying sciences on a rotational basis in S3 are more likely to be studying fewer subjects on average than the sample average (11 compared to 12).

⁶ Please note these rows do not total to 100%. Not all schools offer subjects on a rotational or integrated basis in the BGE.

	Average number of subjects studied by students	Average number of subjects studied by students in schools offering social sciences on a rotational basis	Average number of subjects studied by students in schools offering sciences on a fully integrated basis
S1	15	14	15
S2	15	14	15
S3	12	12	11

Table 5: Most commonly offered subject grouping in the rotational and fully integrated basis categories by the average number of subjects studied across the BGE

Interdisciplinary learning across the BGE

When asked, ‘How does your school incorporate Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL) into your curriculum?’, 27% of schools reported having planned IDL days for specific year groups, 20% had a weekly timetabled slot for IDL, and 67% reported having a strategic approach across curricular areas (e.g., Faculties working together across curriculum areas and/or year groups to design IDL).

Factors influencing the BGE

Schools were asked to consider the factors that influence the design and provision of their school's BGE. This included a list of factors across national level policy, wider society, educational infrastructure, education data and school context. Schools were asked to what extent each individual factor influenced and informed the design and provision of their school's BGE. Respondents used a five-point rating scale from 1 ‘Not at all influential’ to 5 ‘Extremely influential’.

National level policy influence on the BGE

In Table 6 the results are shown for national level policies. From the reported data, CfE policies are at least moderately influential in most schools. However, of the CfE policies, the Four Capacities⁷ are the least influential. Notably, the Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)⁸ policy is also notably a very strong influence of school curriculum. The policy which is least influential is the National Gaelic Language Plan⁹ with

⁷ <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5/what-is-curriculum-for-excellence>

⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

⁹ <https://www.gaidhlig.scot/bord/the-national-gaelic-language-plan/>

over 8 in 10 schools (83%) reporting this policy as ‘not at all influential’ in designing and providing their school’s BGE.

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
CFE: The Four Capacities	1%	10%	29%	37%	23%
CFE: Principles	0%	4%	14%	47%	34%
CFE: Experiences and outcomes	0%	2%	16%	41%	41%
CFE: Benchmarks	0%	6%	14%	38%	42%
Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth employment strategy	2%	3%	28%	47%	22%
Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy for Scotland	3%	13%	38%	33%	14%
Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)	0%	1%	14%	34%	51%
Language Learning in Scotland: a 1 + 2 approach	3%	12%	27%	32%	26%
National Gaelic Language Plan	83%	7%	4%	3%	4%
National Improvement Framework	0%	9%	19%	35%	36%
Policies focused on closing the poverty-related attainment gap	1%	5%	17%	29%	48%
STEM strategy	2%	10%	44%	30%	14%
Widening Access to Higher Education	10%	15%	34%	22%	20%

Table 6: The influence of national level policies on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

Figure 3 displays the levels of influence more clearly by focusing on the ratings of ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential to highlight which national level policies are most influential in designing and providing the BGE.

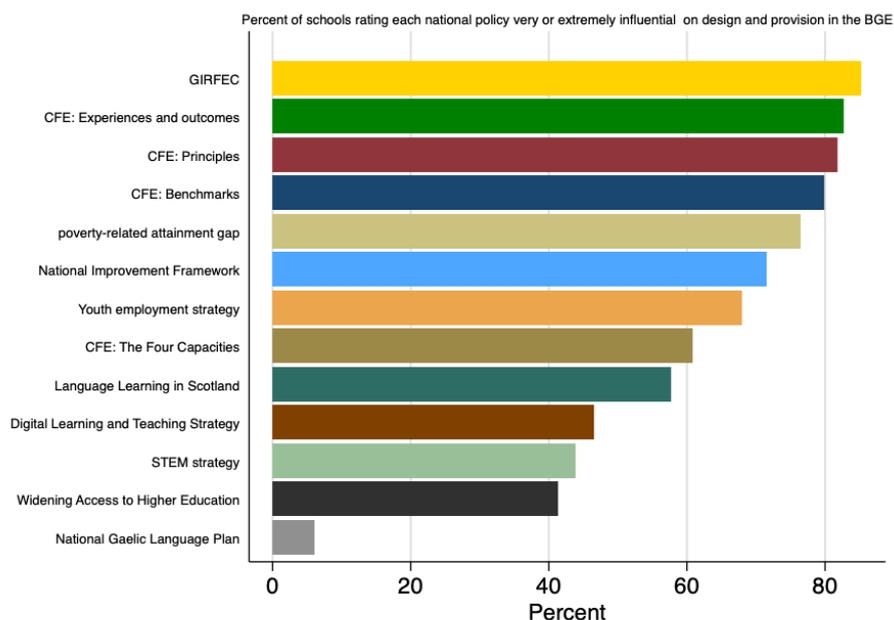


Figure 3: The proportion of schools who rated national policies as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

Wider societal influence on the BGE

Schools were also asked to what extent a range of wider societal factors influenced and informed the curriculum design and provision in the BGE (see Table 7). In general, these wider societal factors were not as influential on curriculum making as government, national level policies.

The most influential wider societal factor appears to be academic research, with 45% reporting academic research as ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential. The least influential appears to be unofficial school league tables with 67% reporting unofficial league tables as ‘not at all influential’. However, both national and local press (22%) and social media (6%) have low proportions in the ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential ratings (see Figure 4).

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Social media	47%	22%	25%	5%	1%
National and local press	47%	31%	16%	6%	0%
School league tables (unofficial)	67%	14%	16%	3%	1%
Academic research	3%	7%	44%	28%	17%

Table 7: The influence of wider societal factors on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

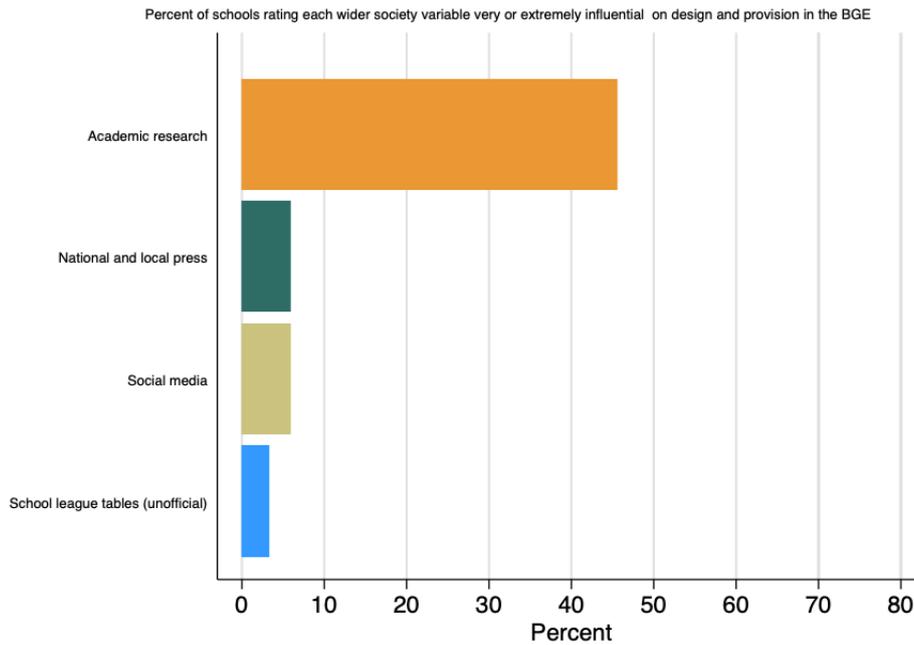


Figure 4: The proportion of schools who rated wider societal factors as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

Educational infrastructure influence on the BGE

Schools were also asked to consider the influence of education infrastructure on design and provision in the BGE (see Table 8). The strongest influences appeared to be support and advice from Local Authorities (58% ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential), school inspections (57% ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential) and support and advice from Education Scotland (52% ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential).

On the other hand, support and advice from Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs)¹⁰ was reported as the least influential, with 28% of schools reporting RIC support and advice as ‘not at all influential’.

¹⁰ https://consult.gov.scot/learning-directorate/education-scotland-bill/user_uploads/sct1017199316-1_p6.5.pdf

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Support and advice from Education Scotland	2%	14%	33%	33%	19%
Support and advice from your Local Authority	5%	15%	22%	36%	22%
Support and advice from your Developing the Young Workforce Regional Groups	9%	17%	47%	22%	5%
Support and advice from Regional Improvement Collaboratives	28%	36%	24%	10%	2%
Support and advice from Skills Development Scotland	9%	21%	47%	17%	6%
School inspections	1%	8%	34%	39%	18%

Table 8: The influence of educational infrastructure on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

In Figure 5, the levels of influence are more clearly illustrated by focusing on the ratings of ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential, to highlight which educational infrastructure factors are most influential in designing and providing the BGE.

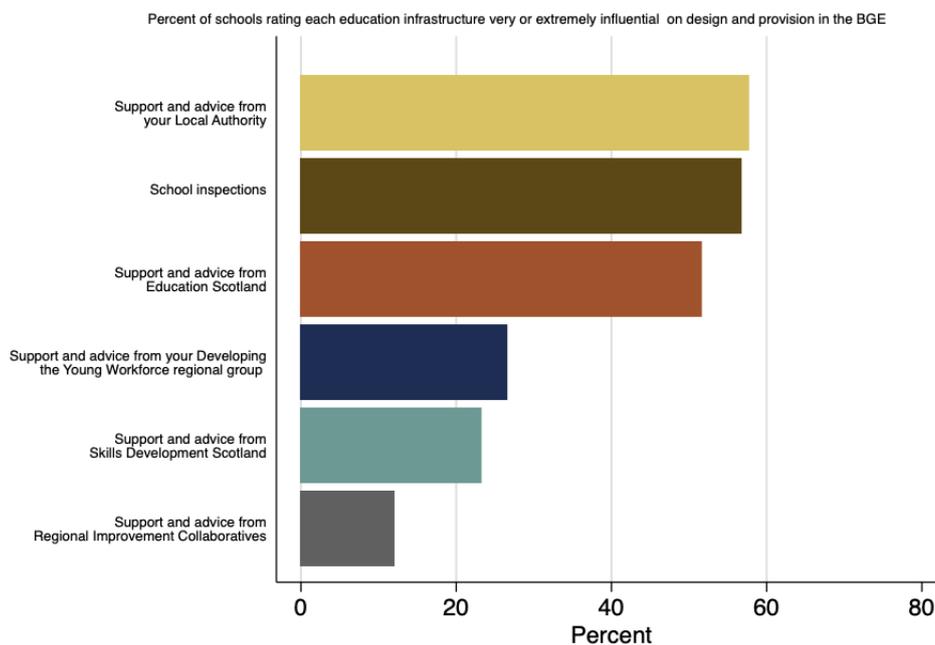


Figure 5: The proportion of schools who rated educational infrastructure as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

Educational data influence on the BGE

Schools were asked to report on how influential a range of data sources were on design and provision in the BGE (see Table 9). It is clear that the majority of schools are using various data sources to inform their curriculum decisions, with the majority of schools highlighting that attainment data and positive destinations data¹¹ are at least 'slightly influential' – with only 1% and 2% (respectively) reporting these data sources as 'not at all influential'.

The least influential data source is reported to be data gathered from the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs)¹².

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Attainment data (SQA)	1%	6%	24%	35%	34%
Positive destinations data (SDS)	2%	8%	22%	34%	34%
Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA)	16%	21%	35%	22%	7%
Teacher Professional Judgement (Achievement of CfE levels)	6%	9%	29%	43%	12%
Self-evaluation	0%	1%	11%	47%	41%
Inspection data	2%	6%	30%	41%	21%
Insight benchmarking tool	7%	11%	23%	32%	27%
How good is our school? (HGIOS)	0%	0%	19%	37%	44%
Local Authority Quality Improvement Outcomes	8%	12%	28%	33%	19%

Table 9: The influence of educational data on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

Although attainment and positive destinations data have a high level of overall influence, the most influential (rated as 'very' or 'extremely' influential), as displayed in Figure 6, is reported to be self-evaluation data and 'How good is our school?' data (HGIOS)¹³.

¹¹ <https://statistics.gov.scot/data/positive-destinations>

¹² <https://standardisedassessment.gov.scot/>

¹³ <https://education.gov.scot/improvement/self-evaluation/hgios4/>

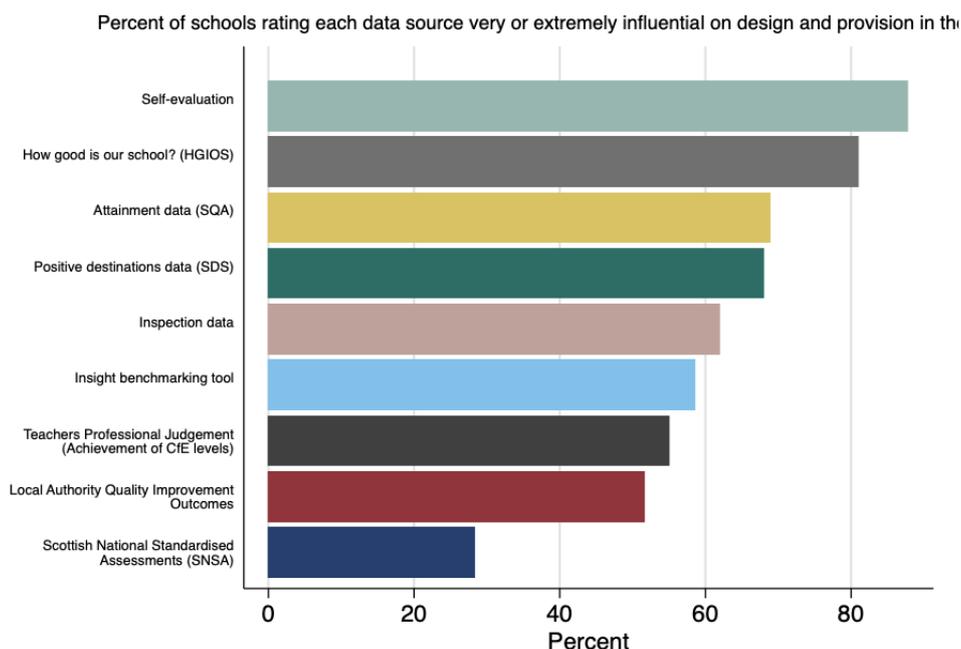


Figure 6: The proportion of schools who rated educational data as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

School context influence on the BGE

Finally, respondents were asked to consider their school's context and to what extent this influenced and informed the design and provision of their school's BGE phase (see Table 10).

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Opportunities on offer from local employers	6%	17%	48%	25%	4%
Opportunities on offer from colleges and universities	8%	16%	33%	35%	8%
Support of partners with whom you have established relationships to help develop	3%	18%	32%	33%	14%
Input from the local community	7%	31%	38%	21%	3%
Views and experiences of your staff	0%	0%	16%	52%	32%
Views of parents and your Parent Council	0%	6%	37%	38%	19%
Views and expectations of students	0%	5%	13%	47%	34%
Student and school demographics	0%	4%	20%	40%	36%
The values and beliefs of the senior leadership team	0%	3%	16%	40%	41%
The values and beliefs of all school staff	0%	3%	14%	42%	41%

Staff training	3%	13%	29%	37%	19%
Able and available staff	3%	2%	18%	37%	41%
Staff working patterns	13%	22%	21%	26%	18%
Funding restraints	5%	9%	25%	31%	30%
Availability of subject specialists	4%	8%	22%	37%	29%
School infrastructure	4%	12%	29%	32%	23%

Table 10: The influence of school context on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

The views of staff (84%), students (82%), parents (57%) and the values and beliefs of staff (84%) and senior leadership (81%) are ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential in most schools. These factors, alongside students and school demographics (76%), also had no respondent noting that these were ‘not at all influential’. However, on the whole, contextual factors are clearly influential for the majority of schools (see Figure 7), with many of the contextual factors deemed to be ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential. Those factors deemed less influential (with lower ratings of ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential) were related to the wider community such as opportunities on offer from colleges and universities (43%), staff working patterns (44%), opportunities on offer from local employers (29%), and input from the local community (23%).

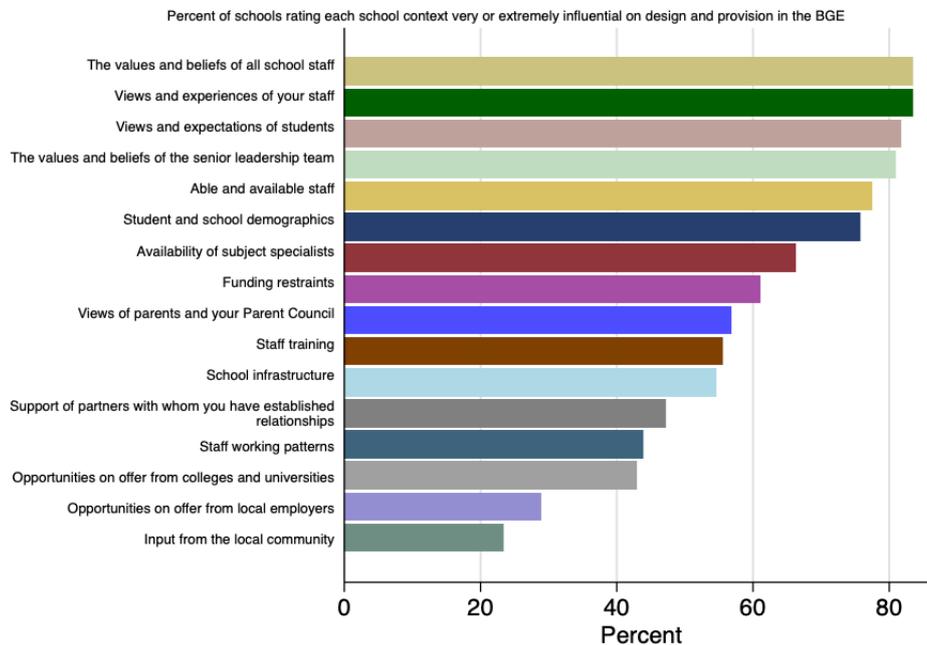


Figure 7: Proportion of schools who rated school context as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

Factors in the BGE ranked by most influential

In Figure 8, all of the curriculum influences are ranked according to the proportion of schools who rated each factor as ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential in the BGE. This clearly highlights those deemed most and least influential in the BGE.

Most influential across all factors are: self-evaluation; GIRFEC; values, beliefs, views and experiences of staff, CfE: Experiences and Outcomes¹⁴; and, the views and experiences of students.

Least influential across all factors are: unofficial school league tables; social media; National and local press; National Gaelic Language Plan; and, support and advice from RICs.

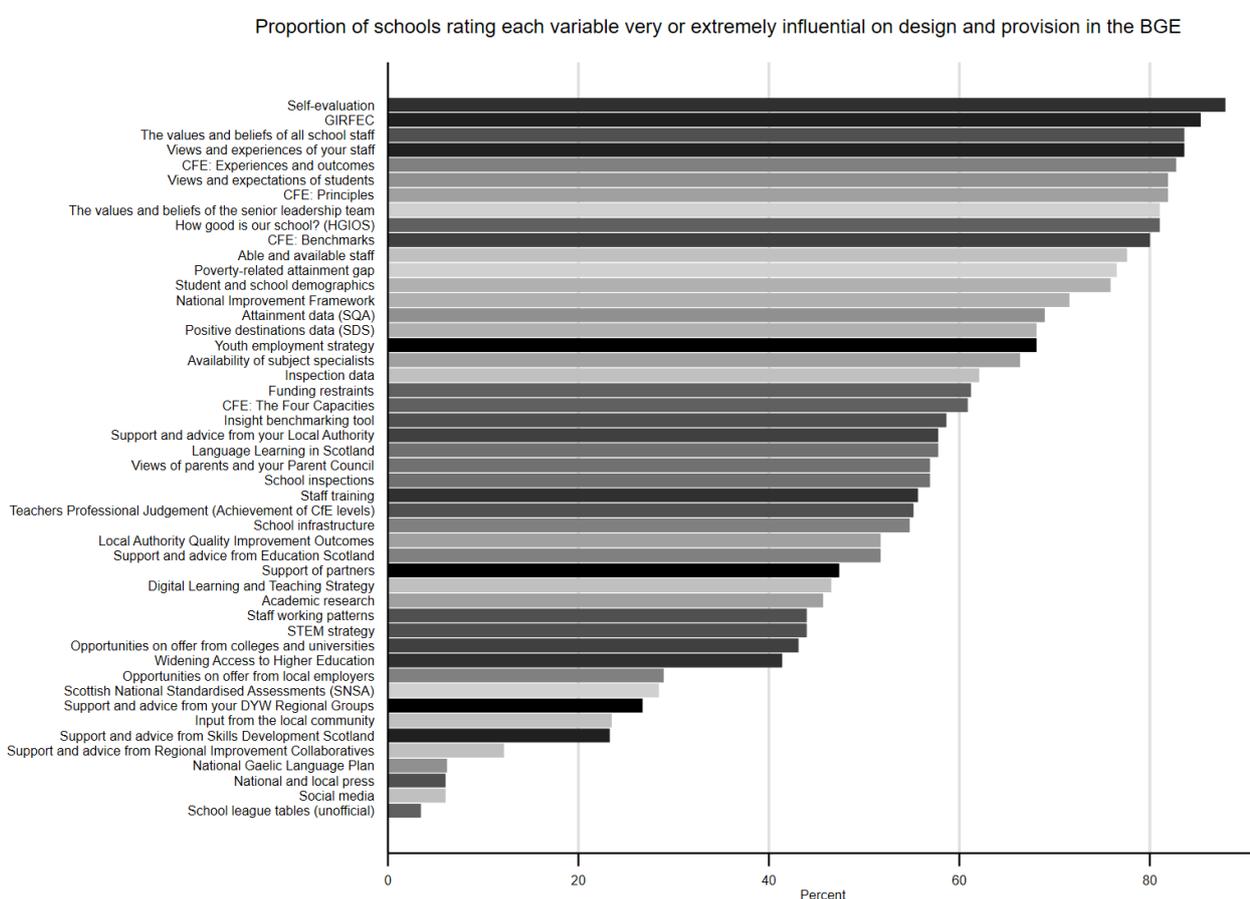


Figure 8: The proportion of schools rating each factor as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE

¹⁴ <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/scottish-education-system/policy-for-scottish-education/policy-drivers/cfe-building-from-the-statement-appendix-incl-btc1-5/experiences-and-outcomes/>

Senior Phase: overview

The Senior Phase (S4-S6) builds on the broad general education by continuing to develop young people's knowledge, understanding and skills, including the skills necessary for learning, life, and work beyond school. The senior phase is intended to provide learners with a unified but flexible curriculum whereby young people can follow various learner pathways to achieve at the highest level of their capability. Young people are entitled to a senior phase of education which offers specialisation, in-depth learning, and the opportunity to follow their interests (Scottish Government, 2008).

Curriculum provision in the senior phase is increasingly diverse with an increase in vocational provision. National policies such as Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) and the Scottish Government's Youth Employment Strategy aims to develop partnerships between education and employers at a local level. DYW has increased flexibility in the senior phase curriculum by expanding learning pathways and vocational courses on offer. For example, Modern Apprenticeships are increasingly available to students in the senior phase which entails the provision of student learning outside of the classroom and in partnership with a range of other providers such as colleges, work-based training providers and employers (Scottish Government, 2014).

The implementation of CfE in the Senior Phase has brought challenges and consequences, which were not envisioned by its architects. Problems with implementation have been most apparent in S4 where there is controversy surrounding curriculum narrowing. The introduction of new National Qualifications at levels 4 and 5 in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework from 2013 has led to a decline in the number of examination subjects that young people can study in S4. This decline can be attributed to the fact that under the new curriculum preparation for exams was precluded from S3, but the new qualifications entail the same 160 hours of study per course as Standard Grade (Scottish Government, 2008; Priestley & Shapira, 2018). Consequently, courses are being studied in one year rather than over a two-year period. This has resulted in fewer subjects being studied in S4 because it is no longer possible to timetable the typical eight subjects that were taught pre-CfE (Priestley & Shapira, 2018). The Education Committee of the Royal Society of Edinburgh have expressed concern that the new curriculum model and National Qualifications have steepened the learning curve in the transition to the Senior Phase and heightened the incidence of multi-course teaching (RSE, 2020).

Multi-Course Teaching

Multi-course teaching – also known as multi-level teaching – has increased since the introduction of National Qualifications under CfE (Hepburn, 2019). Multi-course teaching describes the practice of teachers being

required to teach simultaneously syllabuses which are separate courses rather than different levels of the same course. For instance, a teacher might teach two or more courses within one class e.g. Geography at National 4, National 5 and Higher level.

The increased incidence of multi-course teaching is a matter of concern for teachers because it increases staff workload and is a considerable source of stress. It is challenging to teach multiple syllabi simultaneously; to meet the needs of students of varying ability; and to keep up to date with individual learning outcomes and assessments. The SSTA teaching union have expressed concern that multi-course teaching is becoming normalised in Scottish secondary schools and emphasised that the practice is unfair to both staff and students. Further, they have indicated that many parents are unaware of the practice and its potential impact on their children's learning and attainment (SSTA, 2019).

Number of subjects studied in the Senior Phase

Schools were asked to report on the maximum number of subjects and the typical number of subject students studied in the Senior Phase of schooling (S4-6). In S4, the most frequent response was 7 for both the maximum and typical number of subjects studied (with 41% and 43% of schools, respectively, reporting this number). In S5, the most frequent response was 5 for both the maximum and typical number of subjects studied (with 58% and 83% of schools, respectively, reporting this number). In S6, the most frequent response for the maximum number of subjects was 5, while the most frequent answer for the typical number of subjects studied was 4 (with 56% of schools reporting this number for both maximum and typical number of subjects studied). This suggests that in S4 and S5 students are typically taking the maximum number of subjects available to them whereas in S6 they are taking fewer than the maximum number of subjects available.

However, it is worth noting that there is diversity amongst schools with 8% of schools offering a maximum of 8 or 9 subjects studied in S4 and a small minority (2%) offering a maximum of 4 or 5 subjects in S4. The same patterns can be seen in S5 and S6 where the maximum numbers of subjects or courses studied fall between 4 to 10 despite the most frequent responses lying at 5 and 4, respectively.

Timetabling and subject combinations

Schools were asked 'How easy is it for an S4 student to fit different subject combinations into their timetable?' (see Figure 9). The subject combinations included:

- 3 sciences;
- 2 social subjects;

- 2 languages courses (excluding English), or;
- 2 expressive arts courses.

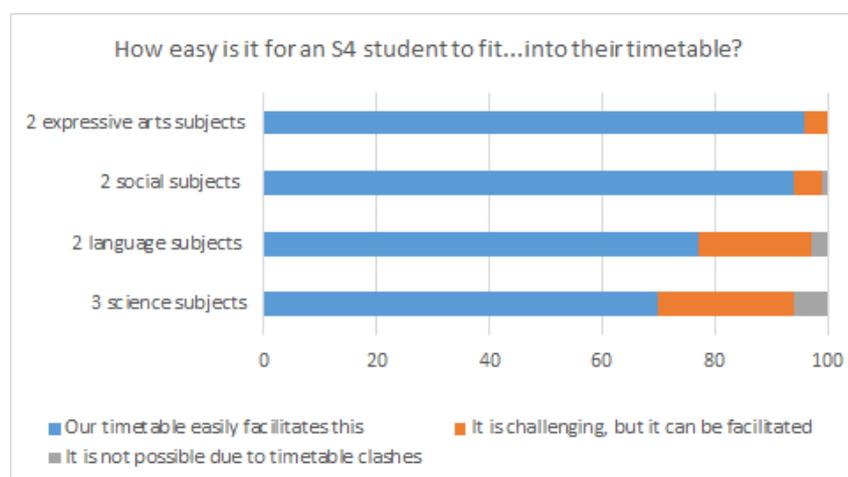


Figure 9: The reported ease with which students are able to fit different subject combinations into their timetable

All schools can facilitate 2 expressive arts, with 96% of schools easily facilitating this into the S4 timetable with the remaining 4% finding it challenging, but reporting that it can be facilitated. Further, the vast majority of schools can easily facilitate students wanting to take 2 social subjects (94%) and only 1% of schools cannot facilitate a student wanting to take this subject combination.

However, fitting 3 science courses or 2 language courses into a S4 student’s timetable is reported to be more problematic, with 70% and 77%, respectively, easily facilitating this into the timetable – and slightly higher proportions (6% and 3%, respectively) finding it not possible to facilitate such combinations.

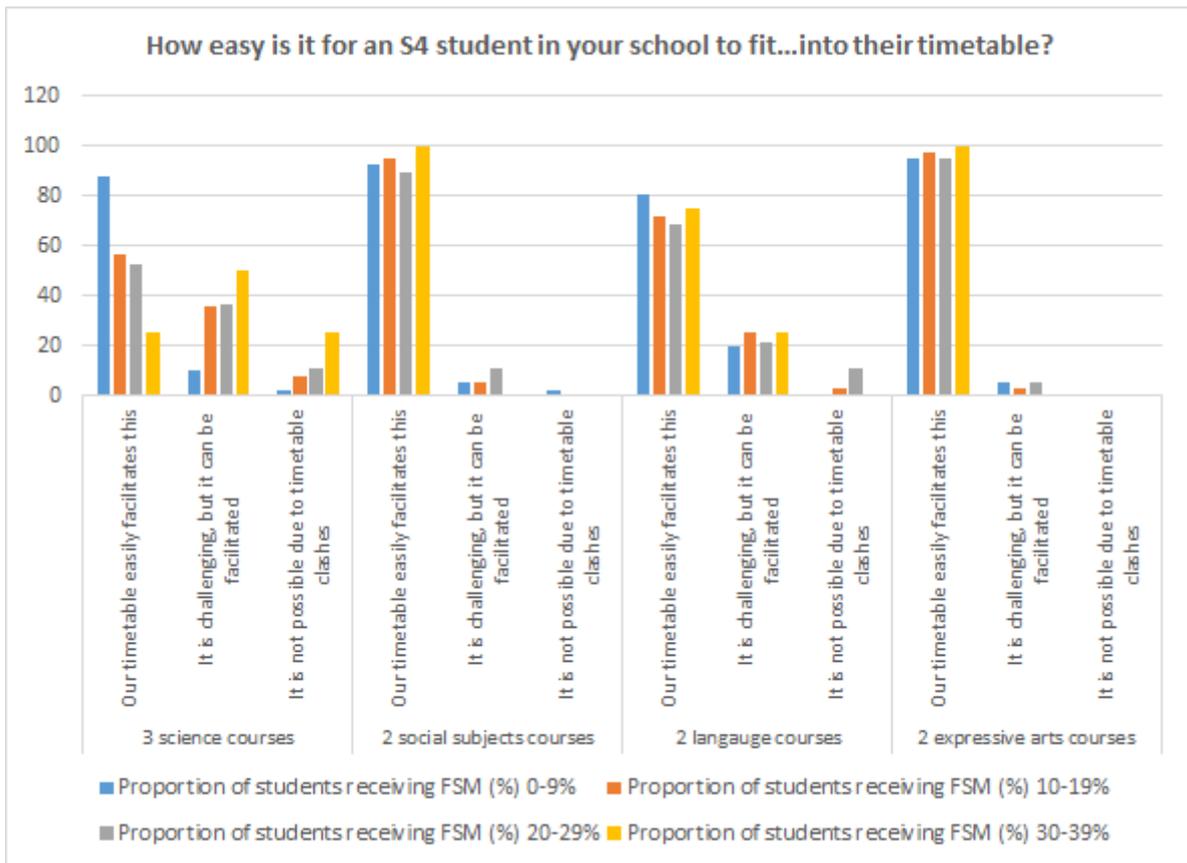


Figure 10: The reported ease with which students are able to fit different subject combinations into their timetable by the proportion of students receiving Free School Meals

Figure 10 illustrates the ease of facilitation alongside the proportion of students registered for Free School Meals (FSM). Schools with low proportions of students registered for FSM are more likely to be able to easily facilitate 3 sciences, with the ease of facilitation falling as the proportion of FSM increases. For example, 88% of schools where under 10% of students are registered for FSM report this being easy to facilitate compared to only 25% of schools where 30-39% of students are registered FSM. Similarly, in Figure 10, the number of schools who are unable to facilitate 3 sciences increases, alongside rising FSM proportions.

Respondents were also asked to consider how important it was that Senior Phase students to take certain subjects and subject combinations. Respondents used a rating scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was 'Not at all important' and 10 was 'Extremely important'.

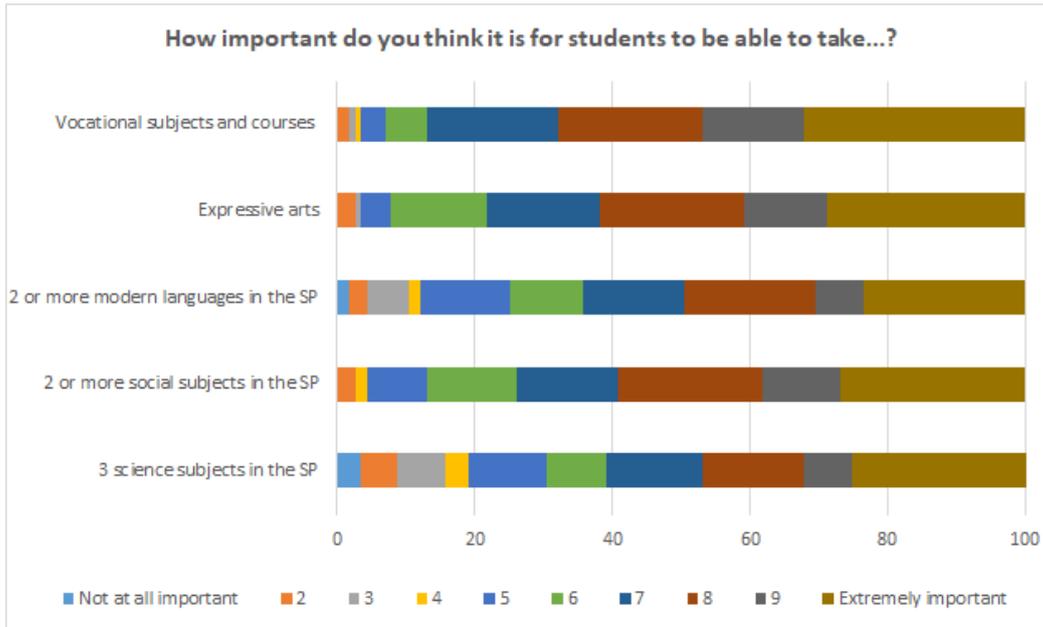


Figure 11: The importance reported by respondents regarding student ability to take different courses and course combinations

Figure 11 illustrates these importance ratings, with schools more likely to place importance on the studying of vocational subjects and courses, expressive arts courses and 2 or more social subjects. Almost 9 in 10 schools (87%) felt it was important (rating of 7 or higher) for students to study vocational subjects and courses. Around three-quarters of schools reported expressive arts or 2 or more social subjects to be important (78% and 74), respectively). These subject combinations also had 0% of schools rate these as ‘not at all important’.

In contrast, 2 or more modern languages and 3 science subjects were seen to be less important with 64% and 61%, respectively, rating these 7 or higher on the importance scale. This can be seen in Figure 11.

Alternative qualifications

Schools were asked, ‘Does your school offer the following vocational qualifications to students at the following levels’. The majority of schools offer vocational qualifications across various SCQF levels. Figure 12 illustrates the proportion of schools not offering certain types of vocational qualifications. Only 6% of schools do not offer Awards followed by 11% not offering Skills for Work courses and 16% not offering National Progression Awards. The least common qualification that is offered to students is National Certificates, with 75% of schools responding that they do not offer this qualification.

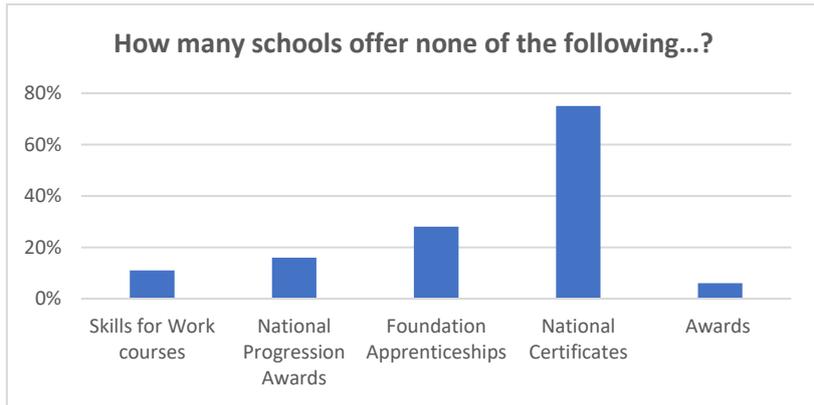


Figure 12: The proportion of schools not offering different types of vocational courses

Schools were asked to select if they offered any of a number of different wider achievement awards at their school. Figure 13 highlights the popularity of the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award – with 9 in 10 schools offering this wider achievement award (91%). Saltire and John Muir Awards were also popular (74% and 54%, respectively). While Participative Democracy Certificate, Community Achievement Awards and Moving on – Transition in Action Award were the least likely to be offered by schools (2%, 3% and 3%, respectively).

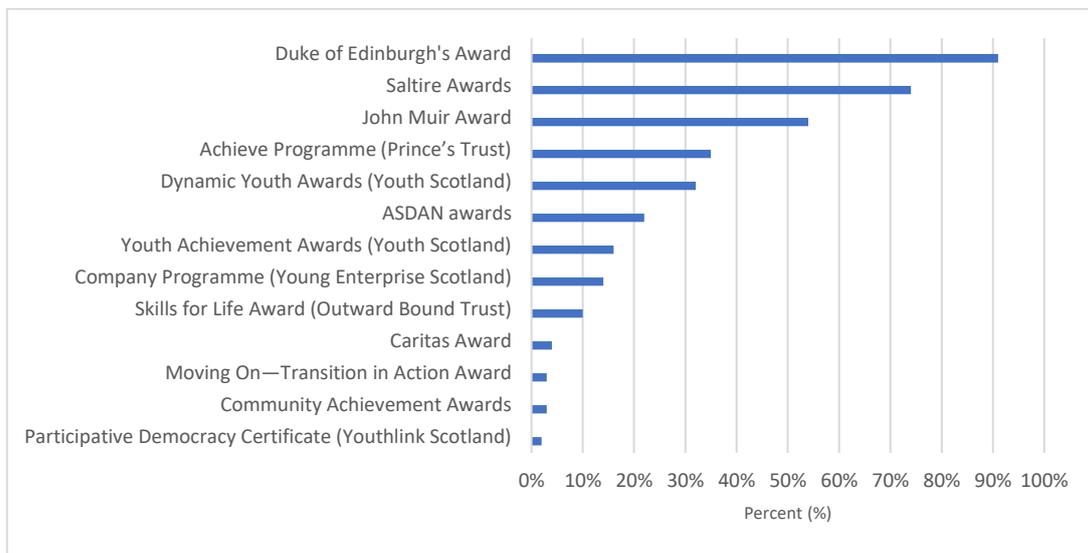


Figure 13: The proportion of schools offering different wider achievement awards

SCQF level¹⁵ progression in the Senior Phase

Schools were asked if students were able to study for a SCQF level 6 qualification without holding a SCQF level 5 qualification in the same subject in S4, S5 and S6. Table 11 displays that there is a trend of this

¹⁵ <https://scqf.org.uk/about-the-framework/interactive-framework/>

becoming more permissible by schools in later stages of the Senior Phase. For example, the majority of schools do not allow this in S4 (55%) but only 2% of schools do not allow this in S6. However, it is worth noting that it would be unusual for a student to study for a SCQF level 6 qualification in S4. So, the increasing likelihood of being able to take a SCQF level 6 qualification rising with each year group in the Senior Phase is not surprising. Similarly, when asked if a student could take a SCQF level 7 qualification without holding a prior qualification in that subject this was more commonly permissible in S6 than S5 (38% and 21%, respectively).

Are students allowed to...in different year groups?	Take a SCQF level 6 with our prior qualification		Take a SCQF level 7 with our prior qualification	
	Allowed	Not allowed	Allowed	Not Allowed
S4	45%	55%	-	-
S5	82%	18%	21%	79%
S6	98%	2%	38%	61%

Table 11: The proportion of schools who allow students to take either SCQF level 6 or 7 courses without a prior qualification in that subject

When asked, ‘Does your school offer a two-year pathway to Highers¹⁶?’, only 16% of schools reported offering this pathway. However, multi-course teaching was reported to be common, with this practised in 85% of schools. Schools were asked in which subjects multi-course teaching was most commonly practised, with technologies (69%), languages (66%) and social subjects (65%) being the most prevalent (see Table 12).

	Multi-course teaching practised
Maths	34%
English	39%
Sciences	46%
Social subjects	65%
Languages	66%
Technologies	69%
Other subjects	24%

Table 12: The percentage of schools practicing multi-course teaching in each subject

¹⁶ This is the practice of students not sitting a SCQF level 5 exam in S4 in order to focus on SCQF level 6 content across S4 and S5 – with the student sitting the SCQF level 6 exam in S5.

Factors influencing the Senior Phase

Schools were asked to consider the factors that influence the design and provision of their school's Senior Phase. These influences were the same as those listed in the previously answered questions in the BGE section. Schools were asked if the factors influencing the design and provision of their schools Senior Phase differed to those encountered in the BGE with 44% of schools saying these influences differed.

As with the BGE factors, the influences included a list of factors across national level policy, wider society, educational infrastructure, education data and school context. Schools were asked to what extent each individual factor influenced and informed the design and provision of their school's BGE. Respondents used a five-point rating scale from 1 'Not at all influential' to 5 'Extremely influential'.

National level policy influence on the Senior Phase

When schools were asked about the influence of national level policy on the design and provision of their Senior Phase, the most influential are GIRFEC, Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth employment strategy¹⁷, and policies focused on closing the poverty-related attainment gap (see Table 13).

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
CFE: The Four Capacities	7%	12%	29%	34%	18%
CFE: Principles	3%	11%	18%	41%	26%
CFE: Experiences and outcomes	11%	13%	15%	31%	31%
CFE: Benchmarks	11%	13%	14%	31%	30%
Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland's Youth employment strategy	1%	2%	20%	47%	30%
Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy for Scotland	3%	14%	34%	36%	14%
Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)	0%	2%	12%	36%	51%
Language Learning in Scotland: a 1 + 2 approach	14%	18%	25%	22%	20%
National Gaelic Language Plan	83%	6%	7%	3%	2%
National Improvement Framework	1%	6%	25%	33%	35%

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/developing-young-workforce-scotlands-youth-employment-strategy/>

Policies focused on closing the poverty-related attainment gap	2%	4%	17%	30%	47%
STEM strategy	4%	13%	36%	30%	18%
Widening Access to Higher Education	4%	8%	30%	30%	28%

Table 13: The influence of national level policies on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase

When comparing the influences on the BGE phase and the Senior Phase (Figure 14), GIRFEC is the most influential in both stages (85% and 86%, respectively). Developing the Young Workforce: Scotland’s Youth employment strategy is more influential in the senior phase than the BGE (78% compared to 68%), whereas CfE policies are less influential in the senior phase (for example, the influence of Experiences and Outcomes falls from 83% in the BGE to 60% in the Senior Phase). Notably, the National Gaelic Language Plan and STEM strategy remain fairly uninfluential across the BGE and Senior Phase (6% to 5% and 44% to 47%, respectively).¹⁸

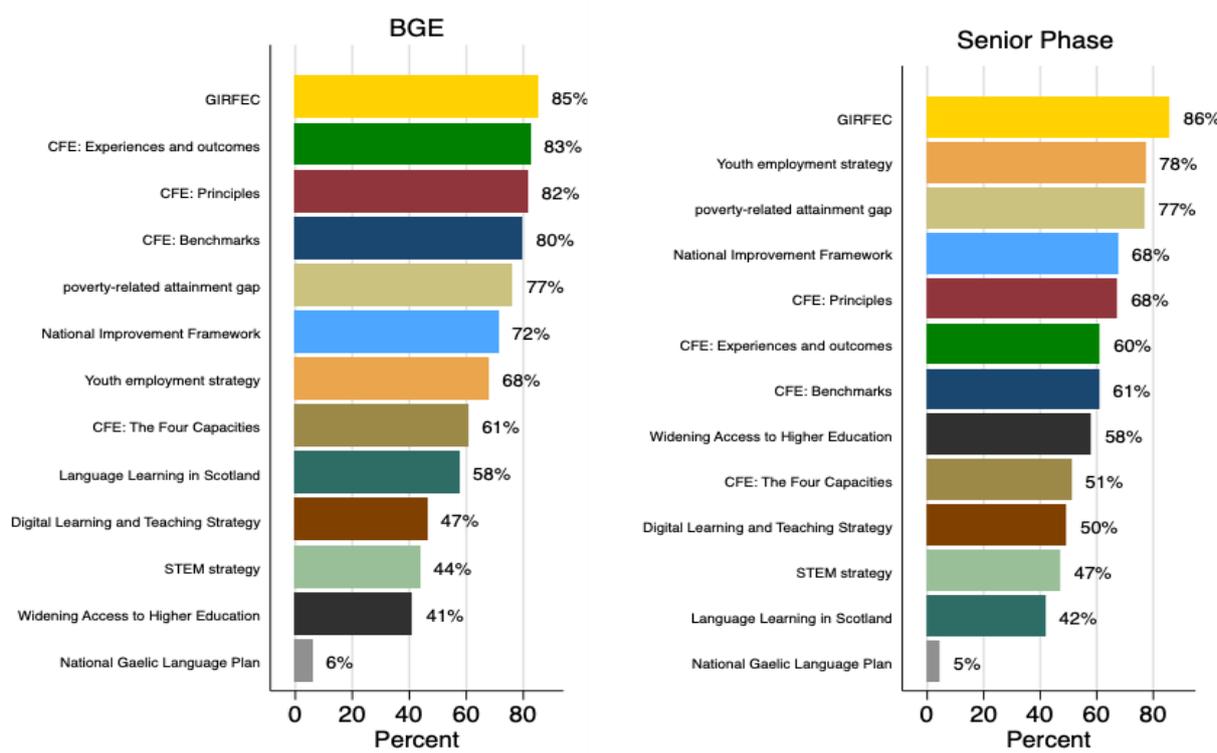


Figure 14: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated national policies as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and the Senior Phase

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/science-and-research/stem-education-training/>

Wider societal influence on the Senior Phase

When asked about the wider societal factors which influence curriculum design and provision, schools reported very similar influence levels to those reported in the BGE. Academic research is at least ‘moderately influential’ in most schools (90%), whereas social media (26%), unofficial school league tables (26%) and the press (21%) are less strong influences (see Table 14; see Figure 15 for the levels of influence reported for ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential).

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Social media	47%	27%	20%	5%	1%
National and local press	43%	36%	16%	4%	1%
School league tables (unofficial)	53%	21%	20%	5%	1%
Academic research	3%	6%	44%	27%	20%

Table 14: The influence of wider societal factors on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase

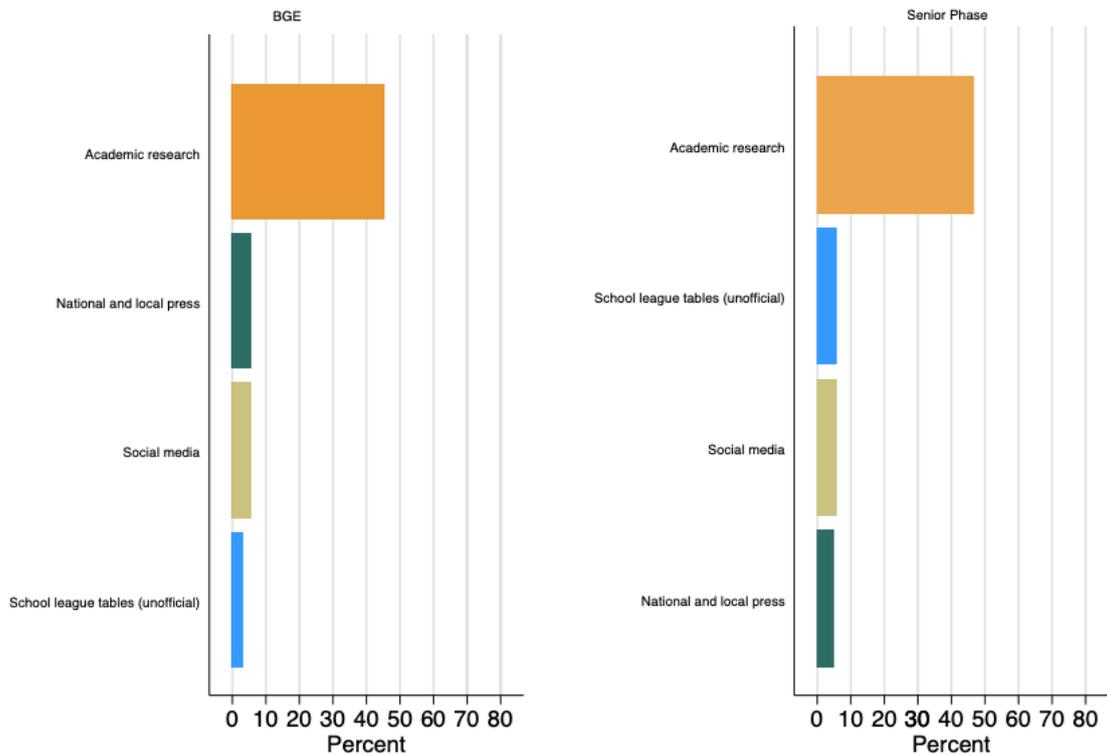


Figure 15: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated wider societal factors as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and Senior Phase

Educational infrastructure influence on the Senior Phase

Schools were also asked to consider the influence of education infrastructure on design and provision in the Senior Phase (see Table 15). The strongest influences ('very' or 'extremely' influential) appear to be school inspections (57%), support and advice from Local Authorities (56%), and support and advice from Education Scotland (55%).

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Support and advice from Education Scotland	3%	13%	29%	37%	18%
Support and advice from your Local Authority	6%	13%	24%	37%	20%
Support and advice from your Developing the Young Workforce Regional Groups	7%	14%	39%	33%	7%
Support and advice from Regional Improvement Collaboratives	32%	29%	23%	10%	3%
Support and advice from Skills Development Scotland	5%	17%	47%	24%	7%
School inspections	2%	5%	37%	39%	17%

Table 15: The influence of educational infrastructure on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase

In Figure 16, the influence of wider societal factors is compared between the BGE and the Senior Phase. When asked about the wider societal factors which influence curriculum design and provision, schools reported very similar levels of influences to those reported in the BGE with school inspections, support and advice from Local Authorities, and support and advice from Education Scotland deemed the most influential. In contrast, support and advice from RICs and Skills Development Scotland (SDS)¹⁹ were reported to be less influential.

¹⁹ <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

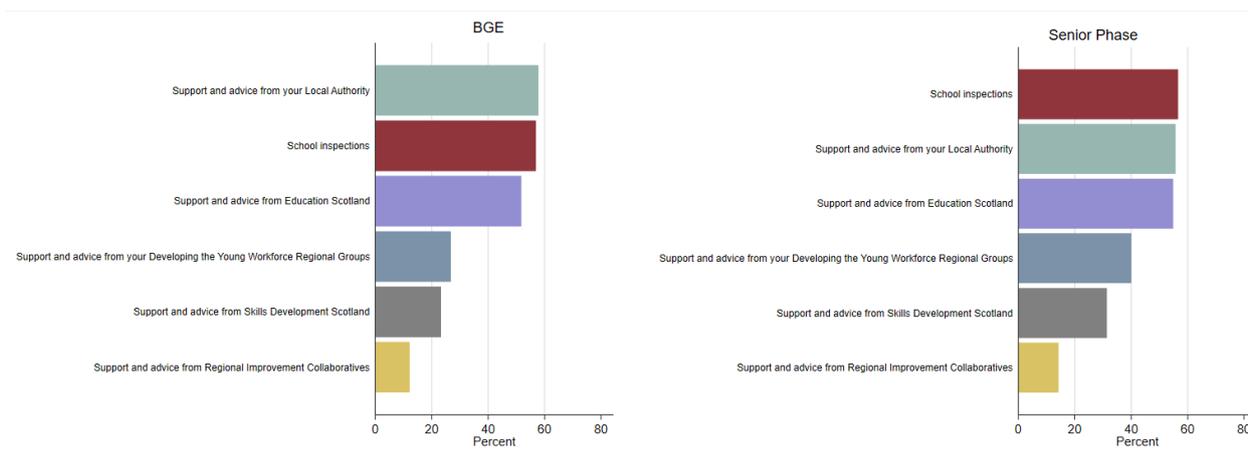


Figure 16: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated educational infrastructure as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and Senior Phase

Educational data influence on the Senior Phase

Schools report a range of data to be influential in designing and providing their Senior Phase (see Table 16). The most influential ('very' or 'extremely' influential) are similar to those found in the BGE: self-evaluation (90%); HGIOS (83%); Positive Destinations data (79%); attainment data (78%), and the Insight benchmarking tool²⁰ (73%). As with the least influential, again this was similar to that reported in the BGE, SNSAs (22%).

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Attainment data (SQA)	1%	3%	18%	34%	43%
Positive destinations data (SDS)	1%	4%	16%	33%	46%
Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA)	20%	21%	37%	14%	8%
Teacher Professional Judgement (Achievement of CfE levels)	5%	6%	28%	43%	17%
Self-evaluation	0%	0%	10%	51%	39%
Inspection data	3%	3%	32%	39%	23%
Insight benchmarking tool	5%	5%	17%	38%	36%
How good is our school? (HGIOS)	0%	1%	17%	43%	40%
Local Authority Quality Improvement Outcomes	8%	8%	28%	34%	23%

Table 16: The influence of educational data on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase

²⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/schools/national-improvement-framework/>

As reported above, and illustrated in Figure 17, the position in rank, and influence levels, of data sources remained similar across the BGE and Senior Phase.

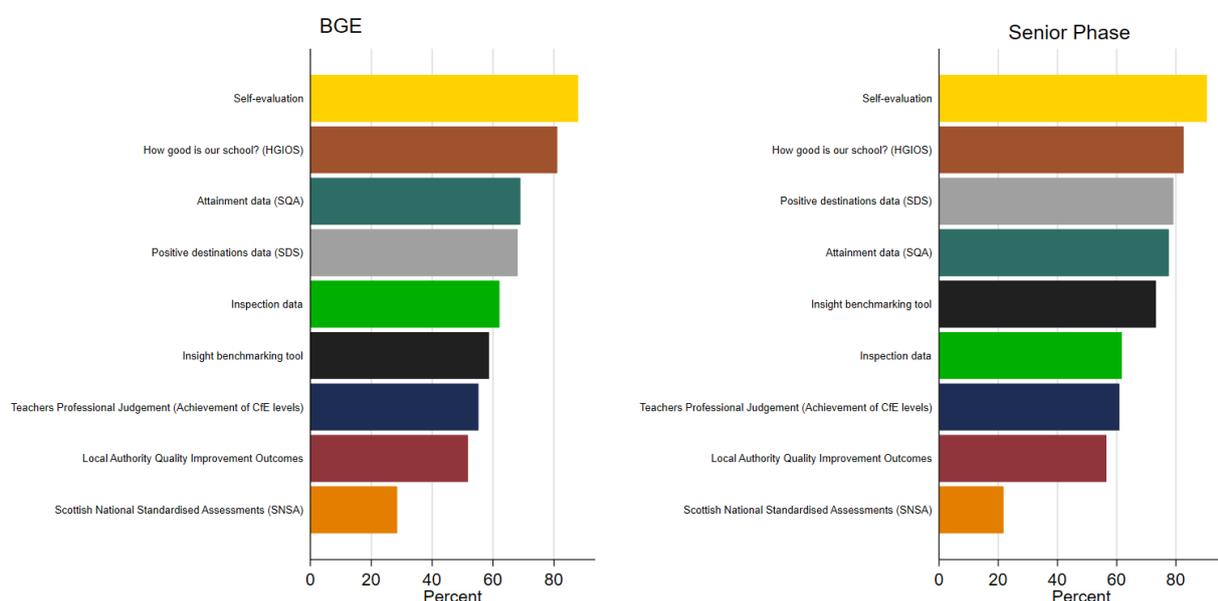


Figure 17: Comparison of the proportion of schools who rated educational data as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the BGE and Senior Phase

School context influence on the Senior Phase

Finally, respondents were asked to consider their school's context and to what extent this influenced and informed the design and provision of their school's Senior Phase (see Table 17).

	Not at all influential	Slightly influential	Moderately influential	Very influential	Extremely influential
Opportunities on offer from local employers	5%	9%	43%	36%	8%
Opportunities on offer from colleges and universities	1%	10%	25%	45%	19%
Support of partners with whom you have established relationships to help develop	1%	8%	36%	40%	15%
Input from the local community	4%	28%	44%	21%	4%
Views and experiences of your staff	0%	0%	17%	50%	33%
Views of parents and your Parent Council	0%	3%	34%	44%	19%
Views and expectations of students	0%	3%	12%	45%	41%
Student and school demographics	0%	3%	17%	43%	37%

The values and beliefs of the senior leadership team	0%	1%	16%	38%	45%
The values and beliefs of all school staff	0%	1%	16%	40%	43%
Staff training	2%	10%	28%	40%	21%
Able and available staff	3%	2%	17%	39%	40%
Staff working patterns	12%	17%	27%	26%	18%
Funding restraints	5%	9%	25%	31%	30%
Availability of subject specialists	4%	7%	22%	31%	35%
School infrastructure	4%	9%	30%	32%	25%

Table 17: The influence of school context on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase

The views of staff (83%), students (85%), parents (63%) and the values and beliefs of staff (83%) and senior leadership (83%) are 'very' or 'extremely' influential in most schools. These factors along with student and school demographics (80%) were found at least 'slightly influential' by all schools with no schools selecting the 'not at all influential' option.

In Figure 18, the levels of influence ('very' or 'extremely' influential) are ranked for both the BGE and Senior Phase. In the Senior Phase there are increases in levels of influence for some contextual factors from those reported in the BGE. This includes: opportunities on offer from loyal employers (43% and 30%, respectively), opportunities on offer from colleges and universities (64% and 43%, respectively), support of partners with whom the school has established relationships (55% and 47%, respectively), and student and school demographics (80% and 76%, respectively). However, for both BGE and Senior Phase, input from the local community remains the least influential factor informing curriculum design and provision.

Factors in the Senior Phase ranked by most influential

In Figure 19, all of the curriculum influences are ranked according to the proportion of schools who rated each factor as ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ influential in the Senior Phase. This clearly highlights those deemed most and least influential in the Senior Phase.

Most influential across all factors in the Senior Phase are: self-evaluation; GIRFEC; values, beliefs, views and experiences of staff; CfE: Experiences and Outcomes; and the views and experiences of students.

Least influential across all factors in the Senior Phase are similar to those found in the BGE. These are: National Gaelic Language Plan; National and local press; social media; unofficial school league tables; and support and advice from RICs.

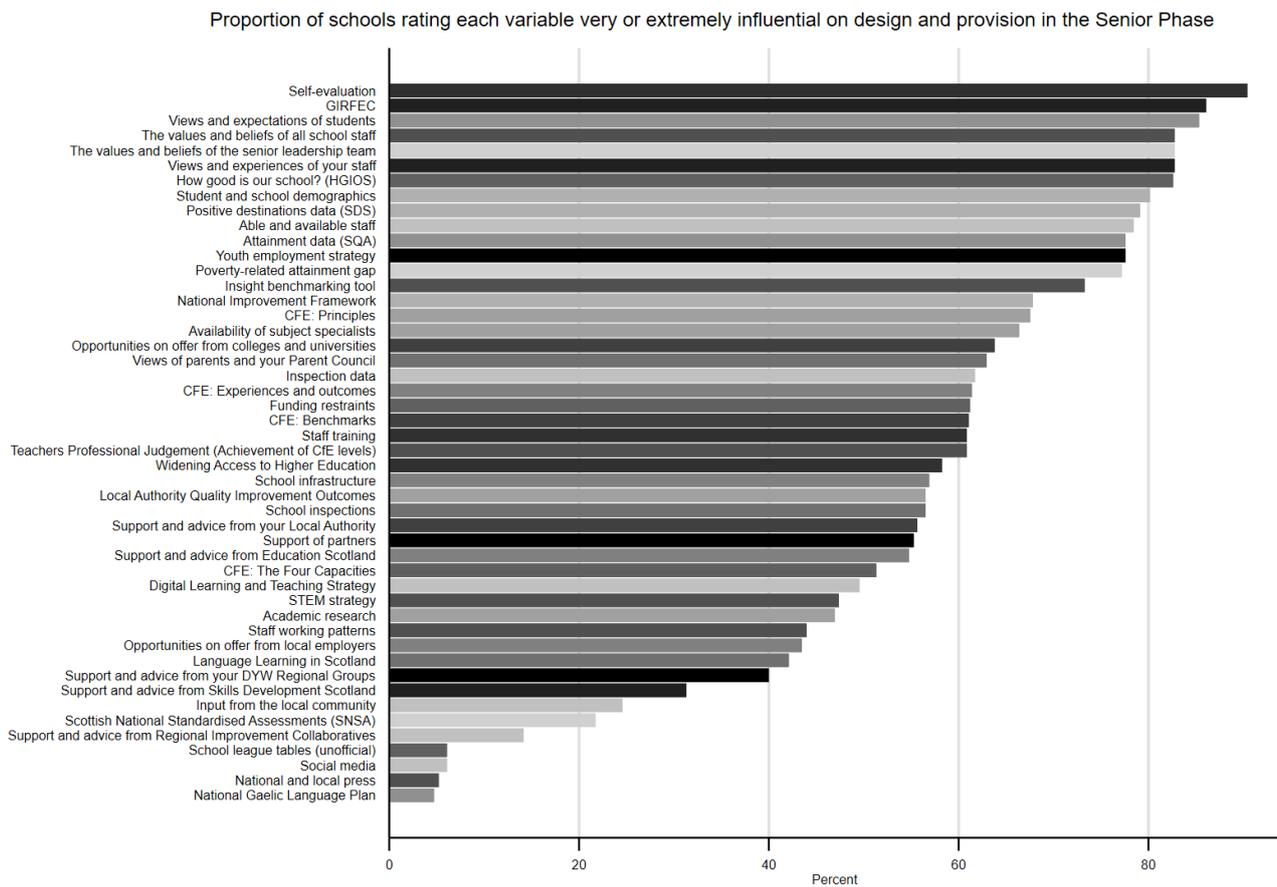


Figure 19: The proportion of schools rating each factor as very or extremely influential on curriculum design and provision in the Senior Phase

Data, measurement and tracking

8 in 10 of schools (80%) responded that their school used tracking tools²¹ to inform curriculum design and provision, with the remaining 2 in 10 (20%) responding that they do not use such tools.

There was some variation amongst schools following different curriculum models. For example, Table 18 below shows the different proportions using tracking tools dependent upon whether they follow a 3+3 or 2+2+2 approach to their school curriculum. Those following a 3+3 approach were slightly less likely than those following a 2+2+2 approach to be using tracking tools to inform their curriculum design and provision (77% and 87%, respectively).

Do you use tracking tools in your school to inform curriculum design and provision?	Are you guided by a...?	
	A 3+3 approach	A 2+2+2 approach
Yes	77%	87%
No	23%	13%

Table 18: The proportion of schools using tracking tools by curriculum model

Further, Table 19 illustrates how important schools feel it is to monitor student progress through tracking in order to inform subject and course choice provision in their school, by whether they use tracking tools to inform curriculum design and provision. In particular, Table 19 shows schools that are using tracking tools are more likely to say they are important in monitoring student progress with 78% of such schools giving an importance rating of 8 or higher. In contrast, only 56% of schools not using tracking tools to inform curriculum design and provision give an importance rating of 8 or higher, with a further 39% of ratings falling to 6 or 7 on the 10-point scale.

²¹ For example, using a system to track and monitor individual attainment and progression over time.

Do you use tracking tools in your school to inform curriculum design and provision?	On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'not important at all' and 10 is 'very important', how important is monitoring student progress through tracking in making subject and course choice provision decisions in your school?							
	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Yes	2%	1%	3%	5%	23%	20%	35%	100%
No	0%	4%	13%	26%	17%	17%	22%	100%

Table 19: The proportion of schools using tracking tools by importance placed on monitoring student progress through tracking

Meeting the needs of students

Schools were asked to consider to what extent they offered flexibility, choice and provision from external partners to their students when choosing their subject choices. The responses were on a rating scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was 'we do not provide or support this' and 10 was 'we fully provide or support this'. Figure 20 displays that the most commonly provided or supported (rated 7 or higher) were flexibility and choice (94% and 96%, respectively). In contrast, only 64% of schools reported providing or supporting provision through external partners.

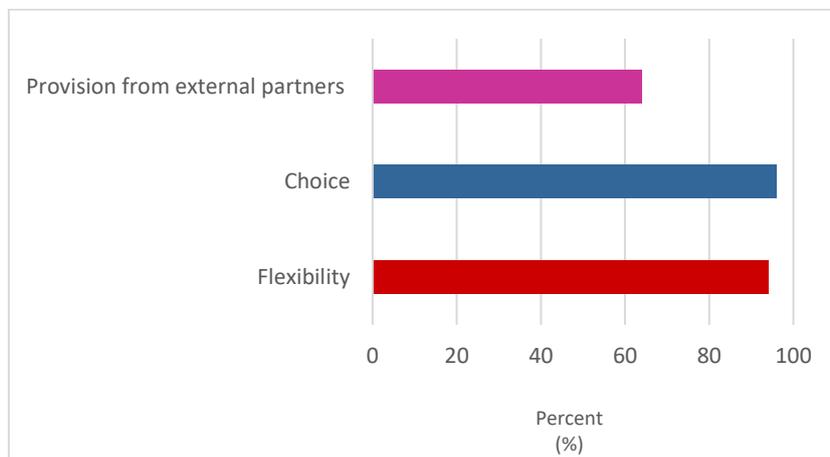


Figure 20: The proportion of schools offering flexibility, choice and provision from external partners to students when choosing their subject choices (rating of 7 or higher)

For those schools located in large urban areas and accessible small towns, flexibility and choice for students were given higher ratings than those schools situated in other geographical areas. This is outlined in Table 20. For example, when comparing large urban areas and remote rural areas, flexibility falls by 0.9 and choice by 1.1 in remote rural areas.

Urban rural classification	Flexibility (mean)	Choice (mean)	External provision (mean)
Large urban areas	9.0	9.1	7.5
Other urban areas	8.5	8.8	7.5
Accessible small towns	9.1	9.5	6.9
Remote small towns	8.7	8.2	7.1
Accessible rural	7.8	8.4	7.4
Remote rural	8.1	8	6.5

Table 20: The mean rating for schools regarding offering flexibility, choice and provision from external partners to students when choosing their subject choices

Further, as illustrated in Figure 21, there appear to be patterns in the data regarding flexibility, choice and external provision by the proportion of students registered for FSM. Schools with higher numbers of students registered for FSM are more likely to be offering (rating of 8 or higher) flexibility (100%) but are less likely to be offering choice (75%) compared to schools with lower proportions of students registered for FSM (for example, the average for schools in the 0-29% FSM categories are 85% and 88%, respectively). Concerning external provision, this appears to be most provided and supported by schools with low proportions of students registered for FSM (61%), compared to the other FSM categories (47-50%).

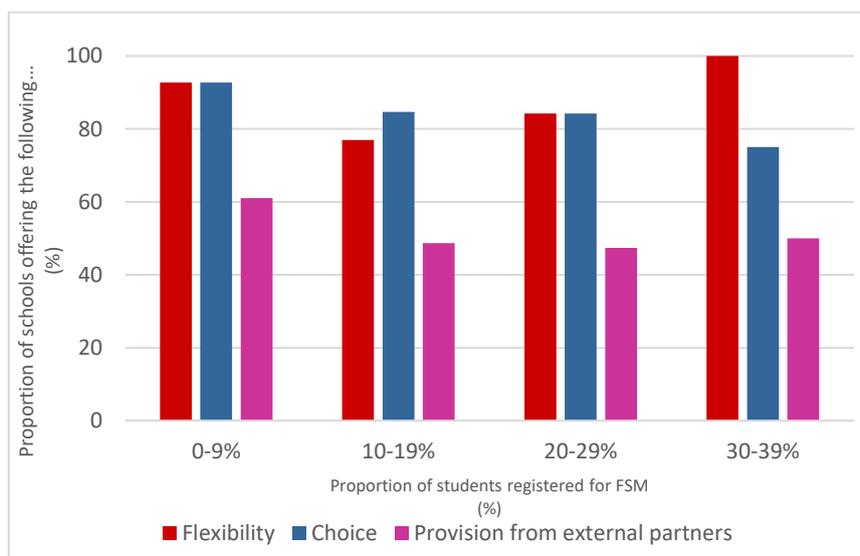


Figure 21: The proportion of schools offering flexibility, choice and provision from external partners to students when choosing their subject choices, by the proportion of students receiving Free School Meals

Developing areas of interest for the wider study

The survey findings are preliminary, with the research team currently completing further, more detailed analysis of the data – with the intention of further linking the survey data with Scottish Government administrative data (attainment and positive destinations). However, the data presented in this paper does suggest further avenues for exploration across the wider project.

The project has both a quantitative and qualitative strand with multiple sub-strands in these two key strands. This includes:

- Quantitative
 - Primary data – survey,
 - Secondary data – Scottish Longitudinal Study²²,
 - Secondary data – Scottish Government attainment and positive destinations data,
- Qualitative
 - National level focus groups with a range of education stakeholders following up on themes arising from the quantitative strand of the project,
 - Case study research in a small number of schools (who participated in the survey),

Below, the emerging areas for future analysis and research are noted for each of these sub-strands.

Survey

- As noted above, more detailed analysis of the survey data is required. This will include modelling and weighting in order to obtain greater insights from the data.

Secondary data

- As noted above, further analysis of the survey will include linking the data with Scottish Government attainment and positive destinations data.

Qualitative strand

- The number of subjects studied in the BGE appears to be fragmented with some schools offering no choice until the end of the BGE. The qualitative research will provide some understanding of how this works for schools in practice.

²² <https://sls.lscs.ac.uk/>

- Curriculum narrowing between S2 and S3 is more noticeable in schools where students first have choice over the subjects they will study in S1 and S2. The qualitative research will provide further insights into the mechanisms of BGE curriculum narrowing.
- The student experience and perspective concerning their curriculum choices and school flexibility will provide further insight to the nature, and extent, of choice in the BGE and Senior Phase.
- Exploration of the positive steps taken by schools to incorporate a whole school strategic approach to IDL and the integration of subjects in the BGE.
- The use of data in schools to inform curriculum-making and provision needs further exploration – possible in both the national level focus groups and the case study research.
- The levels of influence of some of the factors affecting the BGE and Senior Phase require further exploration.
- The combinations of subjects offered in schools, as well as perceived difficulties in timetabling and the perceived importance of offering these combinations, appears to be linked with student and school demographics. Qualitative research will allow for further exploration of the underlying processes that link between these areas.

Discussion and concluding remarks

The research project seeks to build a robust evidence base for drawing conclusions about contemporary patterns of curriculum provision in secondary schools in Scotland, and their effects on attainment and transitions. In this paper, focused on recently collected survey data, drawn from senior school leaders from 116 schools in Scotland, preliminary findings have been presented which provide insights into curriculum choices, decision-making and the main factors influencing curriculum design and provision. The survey data highlights areas for future analysis and research (as outlined in the previous section), but the findings also begin to provide insights into Curriculum for Excellence provision and decision-making processes across secondary education in Scotland.

In particular, the survey findings highlight the diversity of curriculum offer in schools. There was a wide range of maximum number of subjects studied in a typical week in the BGE, alongside variation in when BGE students are first given subject choice. There is concern this suggests a fragmented approach to the BGE and the lack of personalisation and choice, which some students appear to experience, opposes the key principles of CfE, GIRFEC and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Further, the survey findings suggest there is variation in the curriculum approaches adopted by schools. While this does not necessarily suggest schools not following the typical CfE model (associated with a 3+3

approach), there is a need for further analysis and research to explore the different models. Indeed, the qualitative strand of this research study will seek to explore the level of breadth which remains in the second and third years of secondary education.

Focusing on the Senior Phase, the survey findings highlight the most frequent responses to both the maximum and typical number of subjects studied in the Senior Phase of schooling. These are unsurprising, but the diversity across schools (with the range falling between 4 and 9 for the maximum number of subjects studied in S4 across the survey sample) continues to be an area which requires further exploration.

Additionally, the section on timetabling and subject combinations raises concern regarding the challenges facing staff and S4 students trying to fit two language subjects (excluding English) and three science subjects into their timetable. Further, respondents were asked to state how important they thought different subject combinations for students were with two languages and three science given lower importance than the other subject combinations. The difficulties in timetabling are perhaps unsurprising given the policy focus on these areas (STEM strategy and Language Learning in Scotland: A 1+2 Approach²³) and further analysis is required to explore if these issues are down to resourcing, student and school demographics or other contextual factors. The views and beliefs of senior school leaders towards different subject combinations which can be crucial for young people's progression within and beyond secondary education are something which needs further exploration in the qualitative strand of the project. This section also raises an equity issue with schools with higher proportions of students registered for FSM facing more challenges in trying to fit three science subjects into their timetable. This is important in terms of student equity and equal access to subjects and courses, but also raises questions surrounding social mobility and equal access to Higher Education and widening participation.

Finally, the practice of multi-course teaching is another area which requires further exploration in the qualitative data collection.

However, there are many positives in the Senior Phase with a wide range of vocational qualifications on offer, at various SCQF levels. Further, schools offer a wide range of wider achievement awards for their students. These elements are fundamental aspects to CfE with the curriculum intended to blend opportunities for academic and vocational education for students. The use of data in schools to inform curriculum design and provision is also encouraging, but this is an area of further exploration in order to provide insights into what data and how the data is being used. Additionally, the self-reported levels from

²³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/language-learning-scotland-12-approach/>

school leaders of the choice and flexibility offered to students when choosing their subjects is another positive area. There appears to be some differentiation based on geographical area and the proportion of students registered for FSMs. Therefore, further survey analysis, including statistical modelling, and the collection of qualitative data should provide further insights into this area of curriculum provision.

Finally, the survey asked about the influential factors affecting curriculum design and provision across both the BGE and Senior Phase. The most highly influential factors were: national level policies; the views, experiences and beliefs of staff, senior leadership and students; school context; and school level data. Nevertheless, these findings do raise some concerns. For example, GIRFEC is the most influential national policy, and one of the most influential factors, across the BGE and Senior Phase (85% and 86%, respectively). However, almost 2 in 10 (18%) schools reported that GIRFEC was moderately influential or less in the BGE, Senior Phase or both. Similar findings can be seen in relation to the CfE policies. It is a cause for concern that national curricular policy – in effect, the intentions, the principles and purposes laid out in national policy – seem to be only moderately influential in many schools. This indicates the need for greater engagement with the intended curriculum as schools engage in curriculum making. It is perhaps also significant that there is reportedly low engagement with the RICs, the bodies established to support curriculum making in schools, following the previous OECD (2015) report's recommendations to 'strengthen the middle'. Further attention to this issue appears to be merited, to ensure that curriculum principles and concepts lie at the heart of educational planning. Also, as mentioned previously, the low influence of STEM strategy alongside the National Gaelic Language Plan, is a further concern and suggests further policy initiatives and action are required. Therefore, there is a need for further exploration of influential factors affecting curriculum design and the perceived importance of these factors across different types of schools.

In conclusion, this working paper has highlighted the diversity in findings from a recent survey with secondary school senior leaders regarding their curriculum provision and decision-making across the BGE and Senior Phase. This diversity suggests that curriculum-making processes in schools are being affected by a variety of factors, ranging from student and school demographics to school resources to contextual factors in order to offer a curriculum that is tailored to the needs of their students. However, further analysis and research are required in order to explore, if this is so and, what this means at a regional and national level in terms of equity for students, staff and the wider education system.

References

- Hepburn, H. (2019). Multi-course classes 'norm in most Scottish schools. *Tes Scotland*, 24/09/2019. Available from: <https://www.tes.com/news/multi-course-classes-norm-most-scottish-schools>
- Humes, W. & Priestley, M. (2021). Curriculum reform in Scottish Education: Discourse, Narrative and Enactment. In: M. Priestley, D. Alvunger, S. Philippou. & T. Soini (eds) *Curriculum making in Europe: policy and practice within and across diverse contexts*. Bingley: Emerald.
- Iannelli, C. (2013). The roll of the school curriculum in social mobility. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 34 (5-6), pp. 907-928.
- Iannelli, C. & Smyth, E. (2017). Curriculum choices and school-to-work transitions among upper-secondary school leavers in Scotland and Ireland. *Journal of Education and Work*, 30 (7), pp. 731-740.
- OECD (2015). *Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective*. Paris: OECD.
- Priestley, M. (2018). Curriculum reform: Progress, tensions and possibilities. In: Bryce T, Humes W, Gillies D & Kennedy A (eds.) *Scottish Education*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Priestley, M. (2011). Schools, teachers, and curriculum change: A balancing act?. *Journal of Educational Change*, 12, pp. 1-23.
- Priestley, M., Biesta, G. & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Priestley, M. & Humes, W. (2010). The development of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Amnesia and Déjà vu. *Oxford Review of Education*, 36 (3), pp. 345-361.
- Priestley, M. & Minty, S. (2013). Curriculum for Excellence: 'A brilliant idea, but. . .'. *Scottish Educational Review*, 45 (1), pp. 39-52.
- Royal Society of Edinburgh (2020). *Curriculum for Excellence Review: a response from the Royal Society of Edinburgh Education Committee to the OECD*. Available from: <https://www.rse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/OECD-review-of-CfE-FINAL-PUBLISHED-VERSION.pdf>
- Royal Society of Edinburgh (2019). *Subject Choices: A response to the Scottish Parliament's Education and Skills Committee*. Available from: https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Inquiries/20190306Royal_Society_Edinburgh.pdf
- Scott, J. (2018). *Curriculum for Excellence and the Early/Middle Secondary Curriculum in Scotland: Lessons Learned or Forgotten?* Available from: <https://discovery.dundee.ac.uk/en/publications/curriculum-for-excellence-and-the-earlymiddle-secondary-curriculu>
- Scottish Executive (2004). *A Curriculum for Excellence: The Curriculum Review Group*. Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

- Scottish Government (2014). *Developing the Young Workforce Scotland's Youth Employment Strategy: Implementing the Recommendations of the Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2008). *Building the Curriculum 3. A framework for learning and teaching*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Secondary Schools Survey (2017). In:
http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Meeting%20Papers/20180919ES_Meeting_Papers.pdf
- Shapira, M. (2018). In:
http://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Meeting%20Papers/20180919ES_Meeting_Papers.pdf
- Shapira, M. (2012). An Exploration of Differences in Mathematics Attainment among Immigrant Pupils in 18 OECD Countries. *European Educational Research Journal*, 11 (1), pp. 68-95.
- Shapira, M. & Priestley, M. (2020). Do schools matter? An exploration of the determinants of lower secondary school subject choices under the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence. *Review of Education*, 8 (1), pp. 191-238.
- Shapira, M. & Priestley, M. (2018). Narrowing the Curriculum? Contemporary trends in provision and attainment in the Scottish Curriculum. *Scottish Review of Education*, 51, pp. 75-107.
- SSTA (2019). Subjects and 'Multi-Course Teaching'. *SSTA*, 01/10/2019. Available from:
<https://ssta.org.uk/subjects-and-multi-course-teaching/>