

CPG on Children and Young People
Wednesday 3 February
12:30 – 14:00
Education Recovery – Exams and Assessments
Chair: Alex Cole Hamilton MSP

Fulton MacGregor MSP	Alex Cole Hamilton MSP	Iain Gray MSP
John Erskine	Chris Ross	Sarah Paterson
Adam Wilson	Jeanette Miller	Rhona Matheson
Ailsa	Joan Mowat	Romy Benshabat
Amy Woodhouse	Kay Tisdall	Salena Bagely MBE
Amy Woodhouse	Kelly Munro	Sarah Paterson
Anna McDaid	Kirsten Shield	Scott
Beth Goodyear	Linda O'Neill	Shuman
Brian Magee	Marielle Bruce	Gerry McMurtrie
Catilin Wood	Nazmi McCartney	Gilly Mendes Ferreira
Claire Hunter	Nina Collins	Gill Gracie
Yohane	Paul McGuigan	Helen Forrest
Coll McCail	Paul Sullivan	Helen McCabe
David Ashford	David MacKay	Jayne Copeland
Elaine Kerridge	Victoria McRae	

1. Welcome from Chair, Alex Cole Hamilton MSP

Alex Cole Hamilton MSP was delayed getting to the meeting due to other commitments. Chris Ross, Children in Scotland welcomed attendees to the meeting of the CPG and explained that the group has been taking a longer term look at the impact of COVID-19 and also how we ensure children, young people and families are supported as we move forward.

Chris reminded attendees that today's meeting would be looking at the impact of the pandemic on the exams system, and the impact that has had on children and young people. Chris explained that we will be hearing from a range of panellists about whether we need a significant reform of the current system, and what we have learnt, good and bad, during this time.

Chris explained that during the session we would hear a number of short contributions from panel members before breaking into small groups to formulate questions for a Q&A session.

Chris reminded attendees to please mute their microphones while in the main meeting space and to post questions in the chat box. Chris also reminded attendees to please use accessible language as much as possible during the meeting.

2. CPG Business

The minutes from the 25th of November 2020 meeting of the CPG were taken as read.

3. Does the exam and assessment system need reform? – An Introduction

The three panel members each had 3 minutes to introduce whether they thought reform of the exam system was needed and what areas they would prioritise for change.

Alex Cole Hamilton MSP joined the meeting during this section and took over chairing duties.

- *Marielle Bruce, Youth Work and Schools Manager, YouthLink Scotland*

Marielle said that the youth work sector believes that the current education system doesn't work well enough for every young person. The OECD Review of CfE and incorporation of the UNCRC provide opportunity to transform the education system, to prioritise the right to education in its broadest sense.

She went on to say that a right's based approach should include the whole education system working together to deliver every possible opportunity for children and young people to learn, develop skills and achieve. Additionally, we should genuinely value and recognise the totality of every young person's achievements.

As part of this, Marielle felt that young people should have access to youth work both in school and in the wider community. A consultation with young people across Scotland showed that 97% said access to youth work should be a right for young people in Scotland.

- *Steven Quinn, Director of Children's Services, Renfrewshire Council – representing ADES (Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)*

Steven said that we have an assessment system that was designed in the 19th/20th century and so is very out of date. He said he feels that the cancellations of exams due to the pandemic present an opportunity.

However, Steven said that people like what they know, and they have entrenched opinions because of this. He said that there is a lot of work to be done to create change in the system. He highlighted that convincing parents and universities that change is needed is hard because they are used to the current system.

Steven also told attendees that if we are changing the way we do assessments, we need to make sure that the method of assessments suits the topic or subject that we are trying to assess.

- *Andy Harvey, EIS representative and Head Teacher*

Andy highlighted that he agreed with much of what Steven had said. He said that any changes to the exam and assessment system must challenge vested interests in it remaining the same.

Andy said we need to celebrate the positives within the system but recognise that there are issues with it.

Andy finished by saying that Scottish education needs an exam and assessment system that realises and reflect the values and aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence.

4. Group Discussions – CPG members to agree questions for panel discussion.

Members of the CPG broke off into a number of small group discussion to agree questions for the main panel discussions. These sessions were facilitated by members of the secretariat.

The discussion focussed on the following two questions:

- What are the key issues are for young people you work with in relation to the current exams and assessments system? How has COVID-19 affected this?
- What would you like to see change about the system?

Full notes of the discussions will be circulated to members of the CPG.

5. Panel Discussion including all previous speakers.

Q1: How can we understand and include the differing, individual needs of children and young people who might be considered under the very broad under the additional support needs 'umbrella', in how we both deliver learning and think about attainment?

Andy Harvey, EIS:

Andy said the additional support for learning sector is the most high-pressure area to work in education. A lot of young people receiving additional support for learning find it very difficult at times.

Andy said there can be resource challenges. He said that while we can be smarter and more inclusive in the way we work and offer more, but that proper resourcing for additional support for learning is a critical issue.

He said we are using these 19th & 20th century styles of education with large classes, but that many children and young people with additional support needs require more tailored support including through technology and human interaction.

Andy said we also need a different view of engagement. He said that if we have a system that is focused on exams, and conventional modes of achievement, then the majority of children and young people with additional support needs may struggle. Andy said we are getting better at understanding the range of children and young peoples needs.

Steven Quinn, ADES:

Steven said we need to understand the needs of each individual child. He said that while resources are important, saying that we do not have enough resources can sometimes be an easy way to avoid the problem. Andy said it is not always resource that makes a difference, it's people.

Steven said we also need to minimize the barriers to learning. You need great people and staff in the classrooms and schools. He also said that we need improve professional learning and pedagogy.

Steven said that we also need to have assessments that ask about what we are trying to assess, and then we can find the right methodology that allows the young people to demonstrate what they have achieved in the way that best fits them. He said that we need the right assessment for young people to overcome barriers.

Q 2: How can we capture activities that young people take part in – the non-academic activities - and how can we use that to steer their development and be included in assessments?

Marielle Bruce, YouthLink Scotland:

Marielle said that youth awards are great way to capture the activities that young people take part in. She said that they give young people a portfolio and a qualification as many of them are on the SCQF framework.

Marielle said she would encourage the increased use of these awards. She said it is also important to work with teachers to follow up with young people on their progress on these awards and encourage schools to recognise them more.

Andy Harvey:

Andy said we currently have a child centred approach to teaching but that schools need to figure out how to capture skills beyond academic subjects. He said we need to start thinking outside the context of schools, there is scope for schools to do more beyond the current exams.

Steven Quinn:

Steven said we have improved at measuring through wider achievement, youth awards and the activities young people get involved in.

He said that young people are leaving school with more skills than ever before. But Steven said the question is, how do we continue to improve and help young people sell themselves in the job market? You can have all the qualifications, but it only gets you in the door. He said we need to teach kids to sell themselves.

Salena Bagely MBE: *(comment through the chat box).*

There is a real focus on measuring and recording wider achievement, but there also has to be greater emphasis in ensuring equal opportunity to access and fully participate in wider achievements. Disabled young people often face significant barriers to accessing opportunities, whether financial, lack of training or equipment or training of staff/ volunteers.

Q3. We all recognise the value of continuous assessment and recognising wider achievement, but what are the barriers to achieving this?

Steven Quinn:

Steven said that one of the barriers is mindset, he said that we like familiarity. Steven also said that whatever is developed must be manageable and must work within the constraints of a classroom. He said it also needs to fit the curriculum and the subject; it cannot be one size fits all to assessment.

Steven said that the formal exam has a place in the future, continuous assessment will not work for everything; each subject needs an appropriate assessment.

Steven said the big challenge is winning hearts and minds and convincing people that that it is the correct approach.

Marielle Bruce:

Marielle said that a key barriers is that continuous assessment is not given equal weight to or see to be as valuable as a final test or assessment.

Andy Harvey:

Andy said that he largely agreed with the other speakers. He said that there is a view of education as a product and another as a process. Andy said that the view that sees it as a product sees children as an empty vessel that are filled with knowledge and then tested. He said that this might work for some subjects, but it is not appropriate for all. He said the method of assessment needs tailoring for different subjects.

Q4. Scotland is incorporating UNCRC, with all the changes this year, we need a system that is fit for purpose. How can we use the upcoming legislative to support the needs of every child and support them?

Marielle Bruce:

Marielle said that UNCRC incorporation can support access to a range of opportunities and support both in school and wider community to give young people a choice in their learning and make it more personal.

She also said we need to listen to the voices of young people and listen to practitioners, have them tell us how a rights-based approach would work.

Andy Harvey:

Andy said it is easy to talk about a rights-based approach, but he said the reality is that this will be a huge challenge for Local Authorities, schools, and teachers. The challenge is adopting this throughout the whole school environment.

Steven Quinn:

Steven said that UNCRC Incorporation is much wider than schools and education, and even than dealing with Local Authorities and charities.

He said we need to think about how you ensure that UNCRC is built into the plans that they are making for supporting children and young people.

Steven also said that what schools appear to be doing and what they are actually doing can be completely different things. He said that too often, when young people are asked to share their opinion, the highest achieving young person is

usually chosen. Steven said that we need to work out how to represent the whole community.

Steven said he think that all schools start from the position of wanting to meet the needs of every child, but in practice this isn't done. He said we also need to consider how we balance practicalities in schools and the need to capture young people's opinions?

Q5. Given that we know that exams work for some and continuous assessment work for others, how do we give children a choice for what works for them?

Steven Quinn:

Steven said that any system that we do change to needs to be manageable, he said this will unfortunately fit some young people better than others. Steven said that we need to work out what type of assessment is required to fit the best needs to different subjects and also what the best way to demonstrate knowledge for different subjects is.

Marielle Bruce:

Marielle asked whether it needs to be either or? She asked whether we can we do both exams and continuous assessment and can we help young people understand what different methods demonstrate.

Andy Harvey:

Andy said that the old models of continuous assessment were removed because of the over-assessment that became inherent in them. He said that a lot of the units provided different forms of assessment, but that over-assessment was the problem.

Andy said that we have the capacity for schools to create tailored courses, but there is so much focus on the majority and the way things currently works. We need to make these courses as valued as formal assessment.

Q6. If the exams systems are changed from memory based to practical tests not all young people would benefit. Practical subjects can be incredibly broad, you can do so many different aspects, so how do we grade people on these subjects when they are so broad? Memory test in some subjects, can be the fairest way of assessment.

Marielle Bruce:

Marielle said that this highlights the need for flexibility in assessments. Some people might find the practical aspect more useful. Others may need a combination of a practical exam and a memory test.

Steven Quinn:

Steven said he was not suggesting that we do away with exams, but we need to balance to make sure they are not the only way we measure the learning that is taking place. He said there must be an opportunity for children and young people to demonstrate their learning in different ways, because that is what the real world is like.

Steven also closed by saying that it is easy to criticise our education system, but it is excellent. We have wonderful teachers and pupils; we must work to be even better.

Andy Harvey:

Andy said that we need to look at how we can adapt assessment so we can play to young people's strengths.

6. Reflections and Close

Alex Cole Hamilton MSP thanked all participants in the panel discussion for their contributions and for an interesting discussion.

Alex closed the meeting by confirming that all CPG Business will need to be finished by the 24th of March in advance of the election.