

Item: 3

Education, Leisure and Housing Committee: 29 March 2023.

Collaborative Improvement Review of Senior Phase.

Report by Corporate Director for Education, Leisure and Housing.

1. Purpose of Report

To advise of the findings of the Three Island Authorities, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and Education Scotland Collaborative Improvement Review of the Senior Phase.

2. Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note:

2.1.

That, under the leadership of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and in partnership with Education Scotland, all local authority areas in Scotland have made a commitment to work together to undertake Collaborative Improvement Reviews.

2.2.

That a Collaborative Review Project Team, comprising representatives from the undernoted authorities, was established in early 2022 with a remit to agree the focus of a review of the Senior Phase curriculum and post-school outcomes and design a delivery programme:

- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.
- Shetland Islands Council.
- Orkney Islands Council.
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.
- Education Scotland Northern Alliance Regional Team.

The Committee is invited to scrutinise:

2.3.

The findings of the Three Island Authorities Collaborative Review of the Senior Phase carried out in conjunction with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland and Education Scotland, detailed in Appendix 1 to this report, in order to obtain assurance.

3. Background

3.1.

Under the leadership of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and in partnership with Education Scotland, all local authority areas in Scotland have made a commitment to work together to undertake Collaborative Improvement Reviews.

3.2.

The critical role of cross-authority collaborative improvement work has been recognised for several years as a key approach to improving outcomes for Scotland's learners, strengthening professional practice and decreasing inequalities. The following reports specifically recognise the vital role of collaborative improvement activity:

- The Muir Report (2022) Putting Learners at the Centre.
- Education Reform – Joint Agreement (2018).
- OECD Report (2015) Improving Schools in Scotland: An OECD Perspective.
- OECD Report (2021) Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future.

3.3.

Working closely with ADES and Education Scotland, it was identified that the three island authorities of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Shetland Islands Council and Orkney Islands Council would be able to form a strong partnership to undertake a review, recognising the similarities, cross-cutting themes and issues of delivery of education in island settings.

4. Focus

4.1.

A Collaborative Review Project Team was established in early 2022 with a remit to agree the focus of the review and design a delivery programme. The project team involved a senior officer from each of the three authorities along with a senior representative from ADES and the Education Scotland Northern Alliance Regional Team. It was agreed from the outset that this review would take place online and that evidence would be gathered from virtual focus group meetings, document sharing and online collaboration sessions.

4.2.

The three partner authorities agreed that the Senior Phase curriculum and post-school outcomes was an area in which all were keen to evaluate, share good practice and identify both common and individual areas of development. To that end, the review question was agreed to be:

- How well do the three local authorities meet the needs of all their learners in the Senior Phase to maximise outcomes for positive and sustained destinations beyond school?

4.3.

The focus of the review was then further distilled into three key focus areas to allow for more detailed analysis of contributing elements, as detailed below:

- **The Curriculum and Learner Pathways in the Senior Phase (S4-6)**
 - Quality, breadth, equity and consistency of the curriculum offer.
 - Curriculum design and the number and type of pathways.
 - How well the curriculum offer meets all learners' needs.
 - The timetabling and organisational structure of the senior phase.
 - Relevance of curriculum to local labour markets and post-school opportunities.
 - Quality and accessibility of pathways through and beyond schools.
 - Support for learners with additional needs.
- **Vocational Provision Within the Secondary Curriculum and the Contribution of Partners**
 - Equity and quality of access to vocational and applied learning pathways in school.
 - Range and type of vocational pathways and how they feed into post school options for employment and/or training.
 - Effective partnerships external to the school such as colleges, employers etc.
 - Quality and impact of work experience.
 - Recognition of voluntary work and wider achievements.
- **The Broad General Education in S1-3 and the Support Given to Transition to Senior Phase**
 - Considering the equity and effectiveness of learner experiences in the S1-3 Broad General Education.
 - How well it prepares learners for the senior phase and pathways beyond school.
 - Transition arrangements: P7-S1 and S3-S4.
 - Pastoral support and guidance for young people at the end of S3 to support progression into the senior phase.
 - Quality of information and communication provided to learners and parents about options and choices.

5. Links to Council Plan

5.1.

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Council Plan strategic priority themes of Thriving Communities.

5.2.

The proposals in this report relate directly to Priority 3.1 – Extend the Orkney Offer to learners of all ages of the Council Delivery Plan.

6. Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan

The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priority of Strong Communities.

7. Financial Implications

There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

8. Legal Aspects

There are no legal implications arising from the recommendations of this report.

9. Contact Officers

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1: Report of the Three Island Authorities, ADES and Education Scotland Collaborative Improvement Review Programme, May 2022.

Appendix 2: Extract from the Orkney Education Service Report 2022-25. The full document can be found in the “Related Downloads” Section of the Schools page on the Orkney Islands Council Website [here](#).

Appendix 1: Report of the Three Island Authorities, ADES and Education Scotland Collaborative Improvement Review, May 2022

1. Introduction

1.1.

Under the leadership of the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) and in partnership with Education Scotland, all local authority areas in Scotland have made a commitment to work together to undertake Collaborative Improvement Reviews.

1.2.

A Collaborative Review Project Team, comprising representatives from the undernoted authorities, was established in early 2022 with a remit to agree the focus of a review of the Senior Phase curriculum and post-school outcomes and design a delivery programme:

- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar.
- Shetland Islands Council.
- Orkney Islands Council.
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland.
- Education Scotland Northern Alliance Regional Team.

2. Process

2.1.

Focus groups were drawn from a broad range of stakeholders and each session included representatives from the three authorities alongside a member of the project team. Membership of various groups included:

- ADES representatives.
- Education Scotland staff.
- Local Authority education department staff.
- Headteachers and deposes.
- Subject teachers.
- Learners.
- Parents.
- College staff.
- Community delivery partners.
- Trade unions/professional associations.
- Employers/industry partners.

2.2.

Participants in the focus groups were asked to consider four consistent questions across the three themes to support feedback to the project team:

- What is working/going well in schools/the local authority and what are the strengths?
- Where are the challenges and concerns?
- What should be the focus moving forward?
- How can your local authority/ADES/Education Scotland provide support?

2.3.

Feedback from the focus groups was taken together with other performance evidence provided by the three authority leads on the project team and a verbal feedback session with ADES, Education Scotland and the Project team took place on 26 May 2022. Since that date, the three island project leads have met to further discuss and collate the findings and begin to develop action plans to take forward the priorities identified in the review.

3. Findings

3.1. Strengths

In the overarching feedback from the review, the following common strengths were identified and reported:

- The knowledge of, and relationships with, learners and the commitment of education staff to meet the needs of all learners.
- Strong, positive and sustained destinations for young people leaving school.
- The curriculum rationales in schools are very much linked to local economies and local employment needs.
- Strength in the development of Foundation Apprenticeships for learners.
- Online collaboration and engagement are widening course choice for learners and addressing some of the recruitment and retention challenges schools are experiencing.
- Strong relationships with local partners, including Skills Development Scotland, Developing the Young Workforce staff and local colleges.
- Relationships with the community, partners and local businesses are very good.
- Good breadth of wider opportunities within schools and employment options for young people.
- Many pastoral transitions within the secondary stage are very strong and learners feel supported through these transitions.
- Partnership working examples to support learners were evident during the review, including children with additional support needs.
- Good practices learned in terms of ensuring continuity of learning through COVID-19, including the positive impact of online professional learning and collaboration opportunities for staff.

3.2. Challenges/areas for further exploration or development

Feedback also identified common areas of challenge or areas for further exploration or development across the three-island councils' partnership:

- The recruitment and retention of staff, particularly in our most rural settings and within certain shortage subjects.
- The inequity of learning options/curriculum offers across schools within local authorities.
- The relevance and consistency of the curriculum offer for learners with Additional Support Needs.
- The access to, and harmonisation of, timetables between different schools and between schools and local colleges.
- Consistency of communication with parents and carers around the curriculum options for their children.
- Consistent teacher knowledge of both learner pathways and the totality of the curriculum offer available for young people.
- Developing greater consistency of language to support a parity of esteem in respect of more traditional academic routes and emerging vocational opportunities, including when communicating with parents and carers.
- Short term funding decisions around the curriculum causing difficulties in respect of strategic medium and long-term planning.
- Travel and accommodation barriers for some learners accessing the curriculum, particularly from more remote localities.
- The quality and availability of the online experience for learners is variable across the three areas and leads to digital inequity.
- The transition from the Broad General Education into the Senior Phase, and the experience of learners in S3 is inconsistent and requires development.
- Ensuring the principles and entitlements to a broad curriculum are adhered to in S3, and the presence of appropriate assessment and moderation within the final year of the BGE.
- There is an increased demand on Guidance and Pupil Support staff, partly due to the pandemic, and this needs to be considered carefully.
- There is evidence of a skills gap, post COVID-19, due to the restrictions and mitigations that young people and schools have faced over the last two years.

4. Next Steps

4.1. Focus areas for the 3 Island Authorities

Areas for the three island authorities to focus on following the review are as follows:

- Young People:
 - Building resilience in young people to support them into destinations beyond school.

- Harnessing the learner and teacher voice and involving young people in curriculum planning.
- Networking opportunities for young people within and across the island authorities.
- Staff:
 - Broadening this kind of professional discussion experienced by some through the Collaborative Improvement Review to all practitioners.
 - Increased networking for schools with similar sized school rolls.
 - Introduction of subject, and other, network groups across the three islands.
- Curriculum:
 - Clarify the totality of the Senior Phase curriculum offer.
 - Reviewing and developing Foundation Apprenticeships in collaboration with the Scottish Government's skills reviews.
 - A further review of how interdisciplinary learning (IDL) must be used to enrich learners' experiences.
 - Bringing all relevant parties together to develop a consensus around online / digital learning.
 - Promote and support parity between traditional subjects and courses that are more vocational.

4.2. Focus areas for Orkney Islands Council

Focus areas for Orkney Islands Council emanating from the Collaborative Improvement Review are:

4.2.1. Theme 1: Curriculum and Learner Pathways

- Is our curriculum design based on preparing young people for their future and responding to their wants and needs – or for SQA exams and measures such as 5+ Highers or total tariff points?
- Learner voice in shaping the curriculum.
- Links to local employment market – current, upcoming, in isles. Supported by the work of Developing the Young Workforce Co-ordinators.
- Is the 6/6/6 model for S4-6 in Kirkwall Grammar School/Stromness Academy giving best value to the greatest number of learners? Has it improved attainment as envisaged? Does it provide an appropriate range of opportunities for S5/6? Is there evidence to support concerns raised regarding lack of breadth? Are smaller subjects missing out?
- Is Orkney College provision sufficiently accessible to pupils in Junior High Schools?
- Inequity of provision in different settings – how much variation are we comfortable with?
- Promotion of literacy and numeracy; ensuring learners who do not attain appropriate levels in a particular year group continue to progress in the next.

- Is there an argument for further harmonisation of timetables/school day timings to support learners attending courses across campuses (remotely and in-person)?
- Quality of “positive” destinations – are they sustainable and providing career progression? Tracking of leavers beyond initial destinations.
- Digital learning as a way of providing access to the curriculum and employment for teachers in remoter locations.
- Appropriate curriculum offer for pupils with Additional Support Needs.
- Quality teaching and learning, whether in-person or online, focused on the experience rather than the outcome.
- Building young people’s resilience and reducing anxiety.
- Parent, learner and staff (other than Guidance) understanding of the total curriculum offer in order to advise learners appropriately. Teachers must have a culture of advising what is best for the learner and cannot do that if they are not informed.
- Greater collaboration/networking of teachers in subject groups.

4.2.2. Theme two: Vocational provision within the curriculum and the contribution of partners

- Re-invigoration of work experience, for all learners, and listening to their voice.
- Further development of wider achievement opportunities through partner organisations – Dynamic Youth, Duke of Edinburgh, Saltire awards etc.
- Making skills central to day-to-day learning and teaching – embedding meta-skills and the Career Education Standard.
- Foundation Apprenticeships responding to local labour market; address concerns that doing a Foundation Apprenticeship compromises access to other options in school.
- Addressing the attainment of young people who enter school set on employment as early as possible.
- An Inter Disciplinary Learning project focusing on employability in the Broad General Education.

4.2.3 Theme three: The Broad General Education and the support given for transition to the Senior Phase

- Progression/stagnation in S3.
- A Broad General Education which learners value, not just about preparing for N5s that most will not take.
- Assessment across the Broad General Education, not just in Maths/English.
- An examination experience before S4.
- S3 attainment data informing S4 course choice.
- Re-invigoration of Inter Disciplinary Learning post-covid.
- National advice not to start National Qualifications in S3 versus the practicalities of provision for Junior High School pupils via itinerant teaching staff.

4.3. Next steps for Orkney Islands Council

Key actions and next steps from the Collaborative Improvement Review have been incorporated into the Learning and Achievement strand of the Education Service Priorities 2022-25, which was presented to the Education, Leisure and Housing Committee in September 2022. The relevant pages of the Plan are included in Appendix 2 attached to this report.

5. Conclusion

5.1.

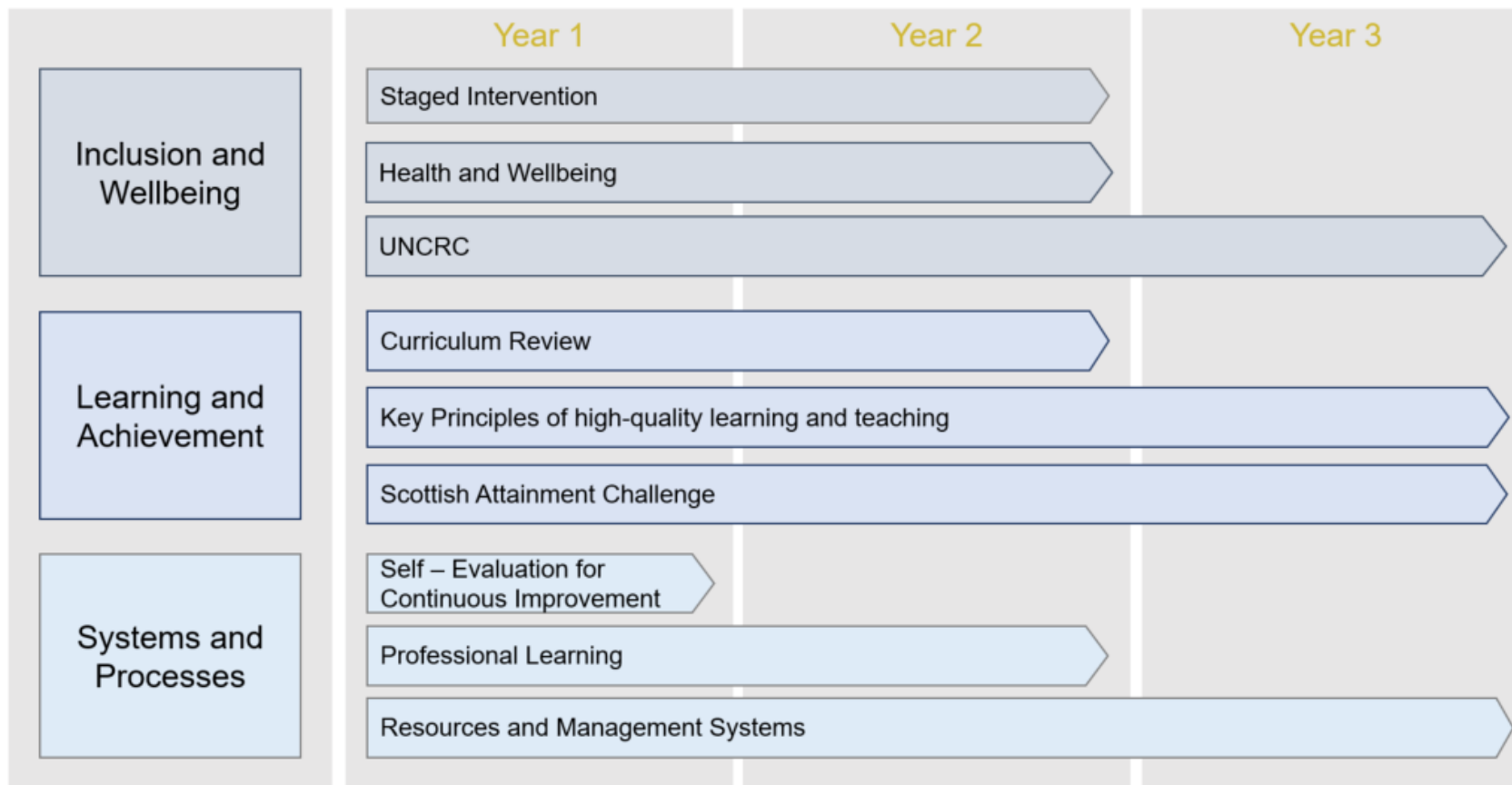
Participation in the Collaborative Review enabled the Council to receive high-quality collegiate feedback on its own work within the Senior Phase as well as to contribute to evaluation of the work of colleagues in the Western Isles and Shetland, including finding areas of strength and good practice that can be developed locally. The collaboration has fostered links between staff across the three island areas and forms a platform for further networking and collaboration into the future.

5.2.

When considering the original question posed by the Collaborative Review “How well do the three local authorities meet the needs of all their learners in the Senior Phase to maximise outcomes for positive and sustained destinations beyond school?”, the evidence points to significant areas of good practice and a positive senior phase experience for many learners that leads to positive post-school destinations. There are challenges, though, in terms of equity of access to the curriculum offer with significant differences between experiences of pupils in Junior High and Secondary Schools. A review of the curriculum model, firstly at Senior Phase and then at Broad General Education, which incorporates the views of all stakeholders, but particularly young people, will be a key first step in addressing this.

Appendix 2: Extracts from Orkney Islands Council Education Service Plan 2022-25

Our Service Priorities (2022 – 2025)



Learning and Achievement: Curriculum Review

| Outcomes | Performance Indicators | |
|---|---|--------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young people experience, and influence, a curriculum which prepares them for the next stage of their education, training or employment, leading to them entering positive destinations. | <p>Triennial: 1+ L4, 5 and 6 awards; 5+ L5 and 6 awards; Tariff points and Early leavers</p> <p>Annually: Participation and Destinations</p> | |
| Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the curriculum model for senior phase pupils including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> reviewing the 6/6/6 model, strengthening the provision in liaison with Orkney College UHI, strengthening the wider achievement offer in liaison with CLD, strengthening links to the labour market, widening the work experience offer, and ensuring value added for all learners [JP] Inclusion of learner voice in curriculum planning and improving communication about the curriculum offer [JP] Develop the online learning offer, increasing learner / teacher access [JP] Continued development of Literacy and Numeracy beyond S4 [JP] Embedding Meta-skills and the Career Education Standards [JP] Building learners' resilience and independence [JP] Develop tracking, monitoring and intervention processes to maximise achievement for all learners [JP] Re-establish subject groups, across Orkney and in partnership with Northern Alliance and 3 Islands [JP] Strengthen the work with the Pathway Planning group to ensure all learners leave to positive destinations [KS] | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review BGE curriculum across all institutions Re-invigoration of Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL) post-covid | |