



Secondary schools in Scotland: governance, policy and curriculum

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Introduction

For over 300 years, since the United Kingdom (UK) was formed, Scotland has developed and governed its own education system, which is separate, and at times quite different, from the education systems of England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Education is therefore widely recognised as one of the three key Scottish institutions that mark it as distinct from the rest of the UK, alongside the church and legal system. This unit aims to identify the distinguishing structures and characteristics of the Scottish education system. It starts by outlining some of the core features of the Scottish education system, and describes the main driving forces behind current education reform. It then illustrates the systems of governance of education by introducing key legislation and stakeholders while describing the processes by which policies are made and implemented. This unit also examines the structure and nature of the new curriculum in Scotland, Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), and describes assessment in the secondary sector. Finally, it discusses the changing nature of secondary teaching in Scotland, by considering the distinctive nature of key policies that are driving reform in the Scottish education system.

Objectives

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the distinctive features of the structures of governance in Scottish schools and the processes by which education policy is made;
- describe the recent changes to the teaching profession in Scotland and be aware of the policies behind this reform;
- describe the structure and features of the Scottish secondary school curriculum; and
- have a clear understanding of the standards for initial teacher education (ITE) programmes and a basic understanding of the standards for full registration of teachers in Scotland.

Check the requirements for your ITE programme to see which relate to this unit.

The 'distinctive' nature of Scottish education

The Scottish education system has always been developed and governed separately from the rest of the UK and, as a result, it appears to have taken an increasingly divergent path from the education systems of England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Following the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in 1999, and the Referendum on Scottish Independence in 2014, a strong political identity has been created for Scotland. One of the central pillars of this identity is the Scottish education system (Paterson 2003), which is increasingly used to position Scotland as distinct from the rest of the UK. The Scottish education system appears to be characterised by a number of distinct features, the most important of which will be discussed in this unit.

Throughout history, a particular set of values has come to be associated with Scottish education. These are widely cited as: *democracy*, *egalitarianism* and *meritocracy*; and attached to these are a number of claims about the purpose and importance of education in Scotland:

- education should be a public good and available to all at no personal expense;
- education systems should be democratic and self-governing, encouraging a culture of democratic debate, thus allowing for the continuity of values; and
- academic success comes to those who work hard, regardless of social class.

These values and claims are often used to heighten the differences between Scotland and England. Whether real, imagined or embellished, these beliefs have influenced the way that those working in Scottish education view the system, and continue to shape the processes through which policy is made. For example, the Scottish education policy process is often described as highly consultative and democratic.

There are a number of key features of the Scottish education system that are considered 'distinctive'. This includes the school curriculum, legislation and governance, policymaking processes, teacher education provision, approaches to professional learning, and teacher standards and regulation. Each of these will be discussed in the following sections of this unit.

At the time of writing, secondary education in Scotland is undergoing a significant transformation. Although this wide-scale reform offers a number of exciting opportunities for both teachers and pupils, it has not come without its challenges. Secondary school teachers are currently developing and implementing the new curriculum, CfE. Although it was officially introduced to schools in 2010, and has been generally perceived as a success, there continues to be a lack of clarity around its structure and pedagogical content. Furthermore, changes to teacher education, professional standards, teacher registration, teacher conditions and new responsibilities around professional learning have left Scottish education and the teaching profession in a state of flux.

In Scotland, the effects of poverty and socio-economic background on pupil learning are a cause for great concern. There are continuing and intractable gaps in attainment and achievement between children and young people from low-income and high-income households. Recent research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2014) has highlighted this persistent and significant attainment gap, which begins before children start school, and widens as they progress through the system. By the age of 5, this gap is already 10-13 months. This reflects the findings of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Review of the Quality and Equity of Education Outcomes in Scotland (2007), which was conducted almost 10 years ago. With specific reference to secondary education, the OECD highlighted the need for Scottish secondary teachers to 'build on the strong

4 7 THE SCHOOL, CURRICULUM AND SOCIETY ■ ■ ■ ■

To a large extent, the provision of education in Scotland is still governed by the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, which emphasised:

- the right of pupils to be educated as far as is reasonable in accordance with the wishes of their parents;
- the duty of parents to provide efficient education by ensuring their children regularly attend school or receive efficient education by other means; and
- the duty of education authorities to secure adequate and efficient provision of school education.

One of the first Acts of the Scottish Parliament was the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000. This Act set out five national priorities for education, which local authorities and schools are required to take forward:

- (1) Achievement and Attainment: to raise standards of educational attainment for all in schools, especially in the core skills of literacy and numeracy, and to achieve better levels in national measures of achievement including examination results;
- (2) Framework for Learning: to support and develop the skills of teachers, the self-discipline of pupils and to enhance school environments so that they are conducive to teaching and learning;
- (3) Inclusion and Equality: to promote equality and help every pupil benefit from education, with particular regard paid to pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and to Gaelic and other lesser used languages;
- (4) Values and Citizenship: to work with parents to teach pupils respect for self and one another and their interdependence with other members of their neighbourhood and society and to teach them the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society; and
- (5) Learning for Life: to equip pupils with the foundation skills, attitudes and expectations necessary to prosper in a changing society and to encourage creativity and ambition.

Task 7.5.1 asks you to consider how to integrate the national priorities from the Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2000 into your professional practice.



Task 7.5.1 Integrating the national priorities into professional practice (Scotland)

Examine the national priorities above. Choose one to think about in more detail. How could you integrate the aims of this national priority into your professional practice? What critical factors would need to be taken into account? Store your responses in your professional development portfolio (PDP).

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 is another important Act for Scottish secondary school teachers. It provides the legal framework for identifying and addressing the additional support needs (ASN) of children and young people who face a barrier or barriers to learning. In particular, this Act:

Aims to ensure that all children and young people are provided with the necessary support to help them work towards achieving their full potential. It also promotes collaborative working among all those supporting children and young people and sets out parents' rights within the system. The Act has been subsequently amended by the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009.

(Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice
(Revised Edition) 2010 Scottish Government)

More recently, the Scottish Government introduced the Education (Scotland) Act 2016. This legislation has been designed to support work to raise educational standards and places a statutory duty on local authorities to narrow the 'attainment gap' and report on progress. It also enhances children's rights, promotes Gaelic education and ensures that all teachers in Scotland (including independent and grant aided schools) are registered with the General Teaching Council for Scotland.

Policy processes in Scottish education

Although the Scottish Government sets the direction of policy at the centre, the education system is maintained by a small number of key institutions, two of which will be discussed in this unit in more detail. Representatives from these key institutions are invited to participate in educational policymaking through the form of 'consultation' or 'implementation boards'. The policymaking process in Scottish education is therefore strongly influenced by a distinct group of powerful institutions. Key organisations include:

- General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) (regulates the teaching profession).
- Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA) (develops school assessment and examinations).
- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (represents leaders and managers from education services based in local authorities).
- Scottish Teacher Education Committee (represents every School of Education based in a Scottish Higher Education Institution).
- Education Scotland (develops school curriculum, supports pupils and teachers, and reviews education system).
- Teacher Associations or Unions (the Education Institute of Scotland (EIS) is Scotland's biggest teacher union).
- Universities Scotland (represents every university in Scotland).
- Association of Scottish Principal Educational psychologists (ASPEP).

Scottish education policy processes are often said to be highly consultative and democratic (Menter and Hulme 2008). It is rare, if not unheard of, for policy to be made and implemented without each of the main stakeholders being involved or consulted beforehand. Although this has its advantages, some concerns have been raised about the length of time it takes for decisions to

be taken and changes to be made (Reform Scotland 2013). Concerns have also been raised about the notion of the 'usual suspects' being drawn on to inform policy development (Humes and Bryce 2014).

There has also been a recent drive to engage teachers in the formation of Scottish education policy, through conducting large-scale reviews, creating consultation groups or inviting a select number to participate in implementation boards. Recent policy discourse in Scottish education has positioned teachers as 'agents of change' and as 'co-developers of the curriculum' (with reference to the development of CfE). This represents a shift in expected forms of teacher participation in policy formulation and curriculum development, and this is often cited as a distinctive characteristic of modern Scottish education.

Local authorities

There are a total of 32 local authorities in Scotland. Each local authority has a committee with responsibility for education that oversees and approves all matters relating to education policy and related budgets. The Committee is made up by a number of elected members and teacher representatives and is chaired by a Convener, who is a member of the ruling political administration. Each Scottish Council has an education authority, within which a number of key officers have responsibility for delivering and managing an education system that meets all statutory requirements and has due regard to the implementation of any guidance issued by the Scottish Parliament. In this regard, education officers report regularly to their respective Education Committees, who ultimately have full responsibility for meeting all the statutory requirements placed on local authorities in terms of the range and delivery of their education services.

As previously discussed, although obliged to follow government policy, each local authority has a degree of autonomy over the implementation of policies at school level. In 2007, a Concordat Agreement was made between the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), which created further distance between centrally constructed government policies and the implementation of these policies in schools. Essentially, the Concordat Agreement guaranteed the allocation of grant-aided expenditure and allowed a degree of autonomy to prioritise budget spend.

Leaders and managers from local authority education services are members of the Association for Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES). This is an independent professional network that works in partnership with local and national government to inform, develop and implement education policy. They can therefore be considered as an important actor within the Scottish educational system.

The recent economic recession has had an enormous impact on the operation of Scottish local authorities. Education budgets have experienced significant reductions, and it has been predicted, that local authority budgets will not return to normal until 2027 (Ledingham 2013). Local authorities are experiencing a significant period of change, and they face a very uncertain future. However, one factor that remains a constant is teacher numbers, which are currently protected by an agreement made between COSLA and the Scottish Government in 2011.

Education Scotland

In 2011, the Scottish Government created a new 'Scottish Education Quality and Improvement Agency', which emerged as 'Education Scotland'. This agency merges together two organisations

8 7 THE SCHOOL, CURRICULUM AND SOCIETY ■ ■ ■ ■

- Standard for Career-Long Professional Learning.
- Standards for Leadership and Management.

Professional values are at the core of each of the professional standards. Within the SPR and SFR, the GTCS list the following professional values and personal commitment as central to the role of being a teacher in Scotland:

1) Social Justice

- Embracing locally and globally the educational and social values of sustainability, equality and justice and recognising the rights and responsibilities of future as well as current generations.
- Committing to the principles of democracy and social justice through fair, transparent, inclusive and sustainable policies and practices in relation to: age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion and belief and sexual orientation.
- Valuing as well as respecting social, cultural and ecological diversity and promoting the principles and practices of local and global citizenship for all learners.
- Demonstrating a commitment to engaging learners in real world issues to enhance learning experiences and outcomes, and to encourage learning our way to a better future.
- Respecting the rights of all learners as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and their entitlement to be included in decisions regarding their learning experiences and have all aspects of their well-being developed and supported.

2) Integrity

- Demonstrating openness, honesty, courage and wisdom.
- Critically examining personal and professional attitudes and beliefs and challenging assumptions and professional practice.
- Critically examining the connections between personal and professional attitudes and beliefs, values and practices to effect improvement and, when appropriate, bring about transformative change in practice.

3) Trust and Respect

- Acting and behaving in ways that develop a culture of trust and respect through, for example, being trusting and respectful of others within the school, and with all those involved in influencing the lives of learners in and beyond the learning community.
- Providing and ensuring a safe and secure environment for all learners within a caring and compassionate ethos and with an understanding of wellbeing.
- Demonstrating a commitment to motivating and inspiring learners, acknowledging their social and economic context, individuality and specific learning needs and taking into consideration barriers to learning.

4) Professional Commitment

- Engaging with all aspects of professional practice and working collegiately with all members of our educational communities with enthusiasm, adaptability and constructive criticality.
- Committing to lifelong enquiry, learning, professional development and leadership as core aspects of professionalism and collaborative practice.

(GTCS 2012, Standard for Registration)

The school curriculum

In 2002, a national debate on education was conducted to determine the future of Scottish education. Following this, a Curriculum Review Group was established in 2003, which identified the key principles to be applied in any curriculum redesign. A CfE was published in 2004 and was implemented in Scottish primary and secondary schools in 2010, after a lengthy period of review and consultation.

CfE aims to provide a coherent, more flexible and enriched curriculum that enables each child and young person to become a successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor. As well as focusing on traditional academic subjects, it has also been designed to help each child and young person develop a host of attributes and skills essential for life in an increasingly globalised world. CfE aims to develop children and young people in four capacities, helping children to become: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. The curriculum is based on a set of learning experiences and positive outcomes, which are planned for children and young people throughout their education, and they can be sectioned into four categories:

- Curriculum areas and subjects: These set out the experiences and outcomes and each area contributes to the four capacities.
- Interdisciplinary learning: The curriculum should include space for learning beyond subject boundaries.
- Ethos and life of the school: It highlights the importance of a positive ethos and climate of respect and trust based upon shared values across the school community.
- Opportunities for personal achievement: It stresses the importance for pupils to experience achievement inside and outside of the classroom, which allows them to develop a sense of satisfaction and build motivation, resilience and confidence.

The experiences and outcomes are a core feature of CfE and are used by teachers to assess progress in learning and to plan the next steps for their pupils. They are intended to provide professional space for teachers to meet the varied needs of their pupils. In secondary schools, they are generally used until the end of S3. Secondary teachers use them to see where they can make contributions to experiences and outcomes from more than one curriculum area, allowing for a more coherent curriculum before the senior phase. They are organised into eight curriculum areas:

- expressive arts;
- health and well-being;
- languages;
- mathematics;
- religious and moral education;
- sciences;
- social studies; and
- technologies.

CfE is now in its final stages of implementation, with the new assessments and examinations being introduced in many schools for the first time this year (2014). However, there has been a degree of anxiety around this, particularly within the secondary sector. Tensions have emerged from

**Task 7.5.4 Preparing pupils for national assessments (Scotland)**

Visit the same website from Task 7.5.3 above (www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/45625.3728.html), select the subject that you teach and look for a specimen or exemplar question paper. Look at the nature and structure of the examination papers. How could you ensure pupils are prepared for undertaking examinations of this nature? Store your response in your PDP.

The teaching profession in Scotland

ITE in Scotland is provided solely by universities. Although the nature of school experience has changed slightly, with new partnership approaches between university staff and teachers to support student teacher learning (see Conroy et al. 2013), the provision of ITE has remained firmly within higher education. This is one of the distinctive features of Scottish teacher education. In direct contrast to England, there has been a strong resistance to alternative routes into teaching in Scotland, such as Teach First and Schools Direct. There are eight universities in total offering ITE, and recently a number of these have created additional campuses in rural parts of Scotland to ensure that anyone who wants to become a teacher in Scotland is not restricted by geographical location.

The teaching profession in Scotland has recently experienced a number of significant changes. First, the introduction of CfE required teachers to develop new pedagogical approaches, and also to rethink their role as a teacher:

Curriculum for Excellence is much more than a reform of curriculum and assessment. It is predicated on a model of sustained change, which sees schools and teachers as co-creators of the curriculum. In that respect it is different from previous reforms that have worked more directly through the central development of guidance and resources. It is therefore critically dependent on the quality of leadership at all levels and on the ability and the willingness of teachers to respond to the opportunities it offers.

(Donaldson 2011: 4)

Second, teacher pay and conditions have recently been revised in line with recommendations from 'The Review of Teacher Employment' conducted in 2011 (outlined in the subsequent report: 'Advancing Professionalism in Scottish Teaching: Report of the Review of Teacher Employment in Scotland'). The most significant change to emerge from this policy was the end of the Chartered Teacher Scheme, which was met with some resistance among the teaching profession (for an extended discussion about the end of the chartered teacher scheme, see Hudson 2012). The review also recommended that teachers' pay should not be increased, and that 35 hours per annum contracted continuous professional development (CPD) time should remain, as previously recommended by the McCrone Agreement in 2001. An overarching recommendation of the review was the need for more flexibility within the Scottish education system.

Perhaps most importantly, the concept of teacher professionalism and what it means to be a teacher today in Scotland has been transformed by the recommendations from 'The Review of Teacher Education' conducted in 2010 and published in 2011 in 'Teaching Scotland's Future: Report

of a Review of Teacher Education in Scotland' (also known as the 'Donaldson Report'). This policy was regarded by many as a significant move by the Scottish Government to reform and modernise teacher education in line with global policy trends. It was also widely regarded as somewhat radical in nature, given the scope of change that was recommended. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Related to the national drive to reform teacher professionalism in Scotland are the new professional standards developed by the GTCS, and their programme of professional update. Both of these developments have been discussed earlier in this unit; however, it is important to note that their formation was a central recommendation of 'Teaching Scotland's Future', which proposed a new 'Standard for Active Registration'.

Practitioner enquiry is a common theme within each of these recent policy agendas, and the general belief driving this is that:

The most successful educational systems . . . invest in developing their teachers as reflective, accomplished and enquiring professionals who have the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education and to be key actors in shaping and leading educational change.

(Donaldson 2011: 4)

This is reflected in both the new GTCS professional standards and professional update. In order for teachers to meet this requirement, they must develop 'expertise in using research, enquiry and reflection as part of their daily skill set' (Donaldson 2011: 70), which of course raises a number of problems around awareness, engagement and workload.

Teaching Scotland's future

In 2010, Professor Graham Donaldson was invited by the Scottish Government to conduct a large-scale review of teacher education in Scotland. The review looked at teacher education provision in its entirety, with key areas including: selection for entry to ITE; content and structure of ITE; career-long professional learning (CLPL); and leadership. The report of the review, 'Teaching Scotland's Future' (Donaldson 2011), contained 50 recommendations to improve and modernise the Scottish teacher education system. These recommendations were underpinned by the importance of reshaping teacher professionalism in line with the changing nature of society and the need to further develop partnerships between local authorities and universities.

The Scottish Government accepted each of these recommendations, 'in full, in part or in principle' and established a National Partnership Group (NPG) to further develop and implement the core ideas of the report. A National Implementation Board (NIB) now oversees the implementation of 'Teaching Scotland's Future', and there have already been a number of changes to the system as a result of the NPG and NIB, including:

- restructuring of traditional undergraduate B.Ed. degrees to incorporate a broader spectrum of academic subjects;
- increase in level of qualifications required for entry to ITE;
- development of partnership agreements between local authorities and universities;
- creation of a Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL);

- drive towards master's level learning and the creation of master's credits for ITE student teachers;
- new models of school experience involving joint assessment of student teachers between classroom teachers and university tutors; and
- revision of GTCS professional standards and the development of professional update.

The future of Scottish education

The education system in Scotland faces a number of challenges, the most significant of which is to close the attainment gap between children and young people from low-income and high-income households. The national push for a more equitable school system will continue to shape educational reform in Scotland, and related to this is the drive for increased inclusion of children and young people with additional support needs (ASN) in mainstream schools, which continues to be a key educational policy in Scotland. However, the apparent need to raise academic 'achievement', as demonstrated by international comparative test scores (e.g. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)) and the fragmentation of local authority provision threatens to undermine inclusion (Allan 2013).

In Scotland, educational psychological services are the direct responsibility of local authorities, and are therefore vulnerable to budget cuts. The number of educational psychologists has been reduced, and the Scottish Government has recently removed their financial support for individuals training to be educational psychologists in Scotland. This poses a significant problem to the future of Scottish education and the wellbeing of Scottish children and young people.

The Smith Commission and subsequent agreement that was reached between the Scottish Parliament and Westminster, following the Referendum on Scottish Independence, is likely to lead to further devolved powers for local councils. There is a lot of uncertainty about what a further devolved Scotland will look like, and this will in time change the way that local authorities operate and impact on the education system.

The role that global policy trends play in the shaping of educational reform is important to bear in mind when thinking about the future of the Scottish education system. Although there is less of a 'testing culture' in Scotland when compared to England, the results from international comparative tests such as PISA do impact on education policy. School curriculum reform and teacher education reform are both global policy trends, and can be identified in many countries across the world. What is interesting, however, is the different directions that these have taken in Scotland and England.

One final point to consider is the current and future challenges that the Scottish teaching profession has and will encounter. Scottish education has never seen such a large-scale reform. Balancing the ongoing development and implementation of the new curriculum, along with all of the new responsibilities of teachers to become 'agents of change', 'enquiring professionals' and engage in extensive professional learning is causing anxiety among much of the profession. This is particularly the case among secondary school teachers, many of whom are waiting to see whether new forms of assessment and examinations have been successful.

SUMMARY AND KEY POINTS

This unit has sought to identify key features that make the Scottish education system distinctive from that in the rest of the UK. It has also tried to raise awareness of the structure and balance of the curriculum in Scotland and highlight the preparation that may be required to teach within the secondary sector. An additional aim of this unit was to show the distinctive model that is used to govern the education system, and the apparent 'consultative' nature of policymaking processes. The intention has been to stimulate thinking about some of the issues that are likely to impact upon the professional practice of secondary teachers in Scotland.

- The Scottish education system is currently going through a period of *significant transformation* in a number of areas, including: primary and secondary school curriculum and assessment; teacher education; teacher professionalism and career-long professional learning; and teacher standards and regulation.
- The Scottish education system is often regarded as more '*democratic*' and '*meritocratic*' than the English education system.
- The Scottish Government frames legislation for education, but often only issues guidance to local authorities and schools. Scottish schools are therefore not legally required to follow policies set by government, although tend to follow guidance closely.
- There is no formally prescribed national curriculum in Scotland.
- The development of education policy involves a range of *stakeholders* and attempts are often made to engage teachers at early stages of policy development (e.g. in the development of CfE, they were invited to be 'co-developers of the curriculum'). The policy process in Scottish education is therefore regarded as '*consultative*'.
- At the time of writing, the biggest educational priority for the Scottish Government is to reduce inequity in the education system and close the attainment gap between children and young people from low-income and high-income households.
- There is a drive to change the nature of teacher professionalism in Scotland. The GTCS have revised their suite of teacher standards and introduced a new system of Professional Update to ensure that student teachers, newly qualified teachers and existing teachers become 'reflective' and 'enquiring' professionals.

Check which requirements for your ITE programme have been addressed through this unit.



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Relevant websites

General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)

The new suite of GTCS Professional Standards can be accessed at: www.gtcs.org.uk/standards/standards.aspx

Information about the GTCS professional update can be accessed at: www.gtcs.org.uk/professional-update/professional-update.aspx

Curriculum for Excellence

Information about the Scottish curriculum and related assessments and awards can be found at: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/58062.html

Teaching Scotland's Future (2011)

Donaldson, G. (2011) *Teaching Scotland's Future: Report of a Review of Teacher Education in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

The PDF version of the report can be accessed at: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/01/13092132/15

Additional information about this policy can be found at: www.teachingscotlandsfuture.org.uk/

Advancing Professionalism in Scottish Teaching (2011)

Scottish Government (2011) *Advancing Professionalism in Scottish Teaching: Report of the Review of Teacher Employment in Scotland*, Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

More information and a PDF version of this report can be accessed at: www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Review/reviewofteacheremployment

The Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004

This Act can be accessed at: www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2004/4/pdfs/asp_20040004_en.pdf