



SCA Brief Guide to the Scottish Curriculum

Brief Guide # 1: Curriculum Overview

In 2005 the Scottish Government introduced the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) to state-funded schools in Scotland. It was to be implemented over ten years until it was fully implemented by 2015.

The Curriculum for Excellence is a set of **principles**, guidelines and educational **outcomes** that informs schools about what children should learn through their 14 years at school. It is not a prescriptive curriculum in the sense of describing the exact content that must be taught in schools, or the methodologies that must be used. Rather, Scottish local authorities and individual schools are responsible for creating appropriate, locally relevant learning programmes that will fulfil the outcomes described by the CfE.

The CfE contains guidance for schools and local authorities on creating their teaching programmes, including over-arching **principles**, qualities and **capacities** that education should develop in children, as well as the subject areas of the curriculum that should be covered.

As children and young people move through their school years they advance through **levels** of the CfE, each of which takes around 2-3 years to complete. Their achievement of each level is measured with formal and informal assessments undertaken by teachers in the classroom. However there are no national assessments of students in Scotland until they reach the 4th year of secondary school, around age 15.

The bulk of the CfE documentation consists of sets of **Experiences and Outcomes** in the different subject areas of the curriculum. These describe what understandings children should develop and what abilities children should acquire through undertaking learning and teaching programmes in school.

The levels of the CfE from ages 5-14 (Nursery to Secondary year 3) are collectively called the **Broad General Education** phase of the curriculum. In this phase children and young people cover a set range of subjects, making only a few specialist choices in early Secondary schooling in areas such as science, languages and expressive arts.

At the end of this **Broad General Education** phase, at the beginning of Secondary year 4, students enter programmes of study that lead to national assessments. This three year period is known as the **Senior Phase**. There are four types of assessment, known as **Access, Nationals, Highers** and **Advanced Highers**, each of increasing complexity. Each programme of study and assessment takes one academic year, with exams held in May and June.

Over the three years of the **Senior Phase** students can undertake a selection of these assessments, some as formal exams and some as portfolios of work and internal assessment, to accumulate a set of formal qualifications with which they leave school sometime between ages 16 and 19.

This set of formal qualifications, together with the broad general education they have received, is intended to enable school-leavers to access further education, training programmes, employment, apprenticeships etc.