

A Vision for S6

1 Background

- 1.1 Following discussions about Level 7 (Advanced Higher) provision in schools and Further and Higher Education, between the Chief Executive of Aberdeenshire Council, and the Principals of Aberdeen University, North East Scotland College and Robert Gordon University, a stakeholders' event was held to collect views which could shape a "Vision for S6". The stakeholders included pupils, school staff, parents and representatives from Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, NESCol, Aberdeen University and RGU. The half-day event was held on 14th December, 2016.
- 1.2 The aims of the Vision for S6 event were:
- To consider the purpose of S6 for those who choose to stay on
 - To consider how well S6 prepares pupils for their chosen next step
 - To consider the strengths and weaknesses of S6 and how this transition year could be improved
- 1.3 The reasons why young people choose to remain in school for a sixth year are varied. While some stay on to take their qualifications to Level 7, others require to stay on to achieve the qualifications necessary for their chosen next step. Underpinning the decision to stay on, however, is often a concern that the young person is not yet mature enough to embark on study at college or university, or not yet ready for employment.
- 1.4 Where young people have the opportunity to access a broad range of courses and qualifications, with a variety of wider achievement opportunities, they feel they are mostly well prepared for their chosen next step. Those progressing to FE/HE, however, are not always able to develop necessary independent learning skills. Level 7 courses - Advanced Higher courses - are not always available to young people, because the small number of young people who wish to pursue Level 7 study in S6 makes timetabling classes of reasonable size a challenge for some schools.
- 1.5 In S6, young people value the opportunity to give something back to their school at the same time as they are developing skills which will help them in the future. Parents represented at the event were supportive of young people staying on at school so that they have the time to mature, parents' concern being more for the well-being of their children than their academic attainment. School staff attest to the positive role S6 students can play in the life of the school, while at the same time recognising that young people need to be exposed to a range of opportunities to help them complete UCAS Personal Statements or application forms in general.

- 1.6 There are however weaknesses in S6 provision, not least in the problem of offering a sufficiently wide range of Advanced Courses. Where S6 students are able to access Advanced Higher courses, concern was expressed that motivation to complete the courses to the best of their ability dips once unconditional offers for college or university courses are received. School staff would welcome a move by Universities to encourage successful completion of courses embarked upon in S6. Motivation stays strong when students are required to gain a pass in a course in order to secure a place, a situation which is relevant to some courses - especially Medicine - and to some institutions.
- 1.7 A number of possible improvements to the S6 experience were identified. The need for increased emphasis on, and teaching of, independent learning skills was highlighted. Offering Advanced Higher courses across schools, in consortia groupings, was suggested. This could help young people develop independent learning skills, interact with a wider group and experience different learning approaches and styles. Issues of travel, and the need for more harmonising of school timetables, however, would need to be addressed. Opportunities for more blended learning, with input from school staff and, perhaps, college or university staff, possibly exploiting E-Learning opportunities more, might offer models for change.
- 1.8 Greater access to college and university staff, with opportunities to experience the different teaching styles utilised in Further and Higher Education institutions would also help young people make better transitions. There was interest, for example, in college or university units or courses being provided on or off-site. Alternatively, perhaps the existing support given to Advanced Higher Courses, mainly in the Sciences, could be expanded to cover other disciplines, enhancing the experience young people already have and giving those moving onto Higher education exposure to a university environment, and perhaps greater motivation to stay focused on study.
- 1.9 While Advanced Higher courses give young people experience of SCQF Level 7, a wider range of Level 7 courses could be offered through further partnership working with universities and colleges. It was clear, however, that there was a need for greater awareness of the range of pathways available to young people, including the opportunities already available through NESCol's School-College Links offer.
- 1.10 The collated feedback from the event is included in Appendix 1.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Education and Children's Services work with partners from Aberdeen City, Aberdeen University, NESCol and Robert Gordon University to enhance provision for S6 pupils in general, and Level 7 courses in particular, to help in the transition from school to further/higher education or employment.
- 2.2 Further discussion involving students from college and university take place to further inform planning.

APPENDIX 1

Raw Feedback from Vision for S6 Event

The feedback records comments made and, where possible, identifies which group of stakeholders - pupils, parents, teachers, college/university staff - made each point. The number of asterisks indicates the numbers of times a comment was made.

Task 1a and b : Feedback

Why should pupils stay on for S6	When and why staying on is inadvisable	Why leaving at end of S5 was attractive to pupils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maturity***** • Youngsters who are still 16 at end of S5 • Learn life skills eg finance* • Develop leadership skills* • Develop skills for 1st year uni* • Gain further qualifications***** • Uncertainty about S5 results* • Finish qualifications ensuring all qualifications required are gained • Further experience in other areas* • More opportunity to work outside school and save money • “Rest” after Highers • When pupils don't know what they want to do* • To progress in to the English 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you hate school • Delaying decision making • If 6th Year would be a year of not working/wasting time* • Not being able to get right qualifications/skills in school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting a job* • No more exams • Meeting new people* • New experiences* • More mature/independent*

university system

- Work experience essential for some careers
- No other options
- Having to pay for things*
- Having to leave home- being alone
- Leaving friends
- Having to do something with your life
- To give something back to school
- To gain 2nd Year access to university
- To build up CV/Personal statement

Asterisks:

- Teachers
- Pupils
- Parents
- University/college staff

Task 2

Skills required for a student	Skills for a young employee	Skills common to both
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Independent living*** • Resilience* • Budgeting* • Communication* • Confidence to start new things* • Know where to ask for help • Prioritising* • Time-management* • Curiosity • Problem solving • Resourcefulness* • Good attendance** • Perseverance • Motivation to study** • Passion/interest in subject/course* • Note-taking • Balancing social life and study • Teamwork/group work* • Flexible/adaptable** • Social media skills (professionalism) • Good literacy/numeracy skills • Reasoning skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication with strangers/colleagues* • Prioritising* • Time management • Ability to encourage others • Teamwork* • Trust • Budgeting* • Resilience* • Problem Solving • Self-evaluation • Resourcefulness • Good attendance** • Committed* • Use initiative • Positive attitude • Independence • Social media skills (professionalism) • Good work ethic • Flexibility/adaptability • Thinking skills • Self-discipline • Tolerance of diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgeting • Communication • Time-management • Prioritising • Problem solving • Resourcefulness • Good attendance • Resilience/perseverance • Positive attitude/passion/interest • Teamwork • Flexible/adaptable • Social media (professionalism) •

SWOT Analysis Feedback

SWOT ANALYSIS of S6 Provision	
<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Weaknesses</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepares you to leave school • Feel like you have outgrown S6 by time you leave • Leadership ** • Responsibility * • Treated like an adult • Consolidating your learning • Life-long friends/smaller cohesive social group • Access to more qualifications • More breadth of choice in qualifications ** • A year to plan for post-school options * • Year to mature *** • Wider achievement • PT responsible for Wider Achievement • Employer interaction • Flexibility of qualifications youngsters can take in S6 • Collaborative approach to delivery of advanced higher in some schools • Study time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of progression for some • Staff shortages and the impact on range of courses offered • Adds a year to reach career destination • Not as prepared as A Level students from 6th form college • Some S6 waste the year • Not all schools offer wider achievement • Not all schools offer accredited wider achievement • Not all schools have a PT responsible for skills • Too many free periods • Lack of structure • Lack of consistency across all schools * • Lack of consistency in subjects and level of subjects offered • Having to do extra unwanted subjects to fill a timetable column • Lack of guidance/mentor support • Too few Advanced Higher choices • Being with S5s • Not enough emphasis on independent learning skills • Mixed messages from universities re qualifications • Too much emphasis on attainment • Not enough out of school experience of industry/work

<u>Opportunities</u>	<u>Threats</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership roles • Giving something back to the school • Ensure consistency in the offer made in all schools • Make more use of local employers, universities and colleges • Smooth or ease transitions * • Experience of learning at Level 7 • Provision of college/university courses on or off-site • Combination of school/university courses • More blended learning opportunities • Opportunities to have timetabled work placements, volunteering (day long) • College courses in S5 and S6 rather than S4 • Distance learning input or university/college visits/lectures to aid transition • Diversify what is available instead of more of the same • Give more weighting to Advanced Highers • Use technology to improve collegiate/partnership working • More opportunities to deliver wider skills • Develop case studies/videos on value of S6 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there gender bias in S6 offer eg is the curriculum more biased towards girls • Being influenced by friends • Complexity of timetabling • Funding * • Teacher shortages ** • Targets for S6 attainment • Timing of unconditional offers • Lower tariff points for non SQA qualifications • Travel issues related to off-site provision • Authority measurement of attainment instead of focus on whole person • Lack of consistency in university requirements

Task 3 - feedback

Colour coding: Black: teachers
 Blue: Pupils
 Green: college/university
 Red: parents

Two features of S6 that I would keep:

- Wider achievement (awards) ****
- Life skills development (mandatory) **
- Leadership opportunities ****
- Opportunities for S6 pupils to give something back to school ***
- Opportunities to take responsibility including for their own learning **
- Advanced higher options **
- Work at SCQF Level 7 not just advanced higher
- A variety of options to add to the suite of qualifications ****
- Other qualifications relevant to uni, college, employment
- Timetable flexibility to meet individual needs *
- S4-6 timetable together
- Work experience ****
- Opportunities to become prefects/house captains/head boy, girl **
- Opportunities to be independent *
- Being treated like an adult **
- Study time ***
- Opportunity to do highers over two years
- Opportunity to do three advanced highers in one year to ensure progression to English university
- A chance to mature
- Opportunities to engage with external partners eg employers, college, university

Two features of S6 I would change / Two improvements I would like to see made to S6:

- *Practical* opportunities to develop pupils' social and independent living including finance *****
- Increased emphasis and teaching of independent learning skills *****
- Greater emphasis on skills development to ensure youngsters are able to articulate and evidence their skills
- *Less emphasis on attainment, more on skills development* ***
- Diversity of choice**
 - Work experience/ work placement*****
 - (Accredited) volunteering
 - College courses *
 - *N5, Higher, Advanced Higher, College*
 - *Engagement with employers*
- Shared courses across schools, consortia/sixth form college provision/college courses *****
- Greater awareness from all stakeholders of range of pathways available to young people *****
- *Making all, even the most academic aware of the diversity and benefits of doing something other than school subjects*
- More blended learning opportunities *****
- S6 should look different to S1-5 eg number of hours spent in school, provision in different locales eg work experience, university twilights in place of school courses **
- Make more use of technology/VLE with college/university to widen range of courses *
- Courses offered by college/universities should be recognised nationally *
- Input from University/college to aid transition *****
- Encouragement from HE/FE for youngsters to complete courses
- *Courses other than SQA* *
- Career education should be stronger and progressive from S1 to ensure S6 are clear about pathways/options
- Work experience compulsory
- *Make wider achievement mandatory across all schools* *
- *Not having to choose a subject from every column/fixed numbers of subjects* *
- *Make it more welcoming to less academically led pupils*
- *Success in Advanced Higher leading to direct entry to second year university*
- *Emphasis of relevance/brand of S6**
- *Replace some study time with time out of school to develop life skills*
- *Consistency across schools - ensure all offer academic and wider achievement/ life skills opportunities* *
- *Closer working of all providers of SCQF Level 7 to increase choice for young people* *