



This briefing provides advice for practitioners and can also be used to inform partners, learners and their parents in taking forward Curriculum for Excellence.

CfE Briefing ⁶

A guide for practitioners: Progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase

Part 1: The S3 Experience

Scottish education is going through a period of significant and important change to its curriculum, learning and teaching, to the assessment processes that underpin them and to the qualifications that they may lead to.¹ Education Scotland is supporting this change by evaluating and sharing evolving practice as part of a national professional learning community. This is the sixth in a series of briefings which provide succinct advice on the progress being made in key areas of change, to help inform discussion and promote further, innovative development. This briefing can also be used to underpin the information given to staff and partner agencies more widely, to learners themselves, and to ensure that their parents are fully and clearly informed of the changes that are

taking place. This latest addition to the series explores the pivotal role of the S3 experience. It builds on the information in CfE Briefing 1: Broad General Education in the secondary school. Parts 2 and 3, to follow, will focus on features of learning in the Senior Phase and curriculum planning in the Senior Phase.

“Staff ensure that learners experience a coherent curriculum across the four contexts of learning. By focusing on the standards and expectations in the experiences and outcomes and in qualifications and awards, staff plan opportunities for progression and ensure learners build progressively on all aspects of their learning.”

The Journey to Excellence

¹ Visit www.sqa.org.uk for detailed information about the new qualifications.

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The S3 experience is when learners complete their **entitlement to the Broad General Education**, including all of the Es and Os to third level

1. What is the S3 experience in Curriculum for Excellence?

S3 is a critical year for learners and the S3 experience is pivotal because it has several unique features which serve a number of purposes. It is:

- when learners complete their **entitlement to the Broad General Education (BGE)**, including all of the experiences and outcomes (Es and Os) to third level;
- when, through **personalisation, choice, and specialisation**, learners have opportunities to **stretch their learning** into fourth curriculum level Es and Os and beyond; and
- the year when learning **paves the way to qualifications** at the Senior Phase.

S3 also:

- provides learning experiences which continue to grow the **attributes and capabilities** of the four capacities in all learners, alongside increasing their use of higher-order thinking skills, opportunities for leadership and developing **skills for learning, life and work**;
- provides a seamless transition from Es and Os into qualifications by **blending learning which is relevant to both**;
- ensures a meaningful and **valued culmination to learning** in subjects that may not be continued in the Senior Phase and, through the S3 profiling process and in other ways, gives full account of and **recognises what has been achieved**; and
- ensures that learners' needs, interests, abilities and aspirations inform fully any decisions that are made about pathways, such as planning the **number and level of subjects taken** during the Senior Phase, including the **length of time** subjects might be studied.

Does your planning of the S3 experience take account of these features?

How will we ensure learners complete their entitlement to the BGE in S3?

Schools are now exploring a range of ways to help learners benefit in full from the rich potential of the BGE at S3. They are not viewing S3 in isolation but recognising that it is the culmination of learning that began long before, as well as an important bridge into the Senior Phase. They are using the flexibility within the Es and Os to provide learning which is stimulating and engaging and which promotes self-motivation amongst learners. Some are doing this by linking learning in different curriculum areas and subjects so that Es and Os have more relevance through meaningful connections. This approach also enables young people to practise and consolidate skills in different curriculum areas and contexts so that they become more readily transferable, and to deepen their knowledge and understanding of important concepts. Others are designing flexible progression routes which have a clear focus on challenge and raising attainment. A key consideration is how best to ensure young people progress and achieve well in key areas which permeate the whole curriculum, such as literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Staff are also planning innovative approaches for learners, including those who require additional support, who may not achieve all of the outcomes but who may nevertheless benefit from the experiences, as well as for those who are capable of challenge well beyond third level. Overall, the potential of the BGE in S3 to enhance the quality and breadth of learning, and self-motivation driven by high-quality learning, is now being increasingly recognised.

How well do you ensure that all young people receive their full entitlement including literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing?

How will we ensure learners continue to grow their attributes and capabilities in S3?

Es and Os provide the context for all learners to continue to grow the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities. Together with the higher-order thinking skills, the attributes and capabilities promote the skills for learning, life and work that are so vital to young people's futures. Because staff now have the flexibility in S3 to devise rich learning experiences which embed relevant attributes and capabilities, they can ensure that it is learning itself that drives motivation, rather than focusing on practising for tests and assessments as may have been the case in the past at S3. Staff can now focus clearly their planning with learners on experiences which develop creativity, resilience, respect, secure values and beliefs,



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and active and responsible citizenship, for example. The potential impact on learners of these improved attributes and capabilities is very significant in terms of life-long learning and young people's ability to become effective contributors to society.

How do you ensure that the attributes and capabilities are embedded in learning?

How will we ensure learning in S3 stretches into fourth level and beyond?

There is no ceiling to the level at which young people can learn in S3. Many will want to stretch their learning beyond third and fourth levels and be very capable of doing so, and some will go higher still. Many will be ready for fourth level in individual subjects, perhaps, or in groups of subjects, and some may well be competent to do this across most of the curriculum. The BGE in S3 recognises this diversity and has the flexibility to meet the needs and aspirations of all individuals and groups, with the intention of raising attainment. Schools are presently exploring different ways of meeting this wide range of needs. Many are doing this through a focus on the challenge of learning experiences and the extent to which they enable young people to become independent learners who can exercise significant responsibility in their own learning. Staff have long-standing experience of differentiating in classes and organising groups and individuals in ways which meet learning needs, and are skilled at recognising individual and group needs. This is a strong foundation on which to build the S3 experience.

Are you confident that learning experiences allow young people to stretch beyond third level and attain as highly as they can?



How will we blend learning which is relevant to both the BGE and qualifications in S3?

New National Qualifications have been designed to build on the Es and Os of the BGE. As such, learning can progress seamlessly through S3 into the Senior Phase when, at an appropriate point, the learning will be measured within the qualifications framework. In many cases, learning at third and fourth levels of the BGE will be directly relevant to that which will need to be demonstrated to gain a qualification. This learning may relate to knowledge and understanding, or indeed to underpinning skills. Staff are now looking closely at the relationship between Es and Os and qualifications, including in those qualifications where contexts for learning are not prescribed, with a view to paving the way into the Senior Phase.

Have you aligned learning experiences to both the Es and Os and to qualifications?

How will we ensure S3 provides a valued culmination to learning in some areas?

S3 marks an important milestone in young people's learning. This may well be their last experience of some curriculum areas or subjects, including

those which may have been an important part of their school life ever since the early years. It is an important moment to celebrate and to capture what they have achieved, and to give it full recognition. This might be done through effective use of the S3 profiling process, for example, with the profile itself serving as a valuable record which may well play an important part in learners' future progress. For example, the profile may well play an important role in discussions with potential employers or providers of ongoing education post school, as well as being an important personal record for learners themselves and their parents. S3 is also the stage when young people will make important decisions for their futures by exercising choice about which areas they want to specialise in. They will want to be well informed about potential pathways and the implications of any choices they make. So, whilst they will be drawing to a close and celebrating their achievements in some areas, in others they will be forging ahead towards qualifications. Schools will want to ensure both purposes of the S3 experience are well understood and recognised appropriately.

How well do you recognise achievement in those areas which will conclude in S3?

The S3 experience is the year when learning paves the way to qualifications at the Senior Phase

In S3, how will we ensure that planning for the Senior Phase meets learners' needs?

By providing learning in S3 which concludes the BGE and, at the same time, covers learning required for qualifications, schools can pursue their goal of raising attainment through CfE, both in terms of the depth of learning and the breadth of qualifications gained. The S3 experience needs to keep options open and avoid reducing young people's choices. It also needs to provide scope for young people to stretch well beyond third level in those areas where they can. In these areas particularly, by planning learning within the context of Es and Os which relates directly to qualifications, staff can pave the way into the qualifications framework. This will ensure that, by the start of the Senior Phase, young people are well on their way to their first tranche of qualifications, be that in S4, S5 or S6. Indeed, where this approach is taken in S3, some National 4/5 Unit Outcomes or Assessment Standards may well have been overtaken and the evidence required for qualifications gathered. When bridging in this way, some of the learning in S3 can be considered as part of the notional 160 hours for National 4/5 courses. By doing this, staff are opening up the possibility of accreditation at the point which best meets the needs of learners, including both those who may leave at the end of S4 and those who may need to take groups of subjects at specific stages to meet entry requirements for higher education. The number, level and timing of qualifications will be informed directly by learners' needs, interests and abilities, and their aspirations for future pathways into employment or ongoing

learning. To achieve this, an increased emphasis on high-quality dialogue between individual learners and staff is essential.

How can we ensure that young people can undertake a suitable number of qualifications for as long as they need to?

2. How can we take forward these important changes?

These important changes need to be underpinned by **effective self-evaluation** which involves everyone who might be affected by them; this is the case both well before and well after the BGE/Senior Phase transition point. It involves strong teamwork and objective **professional dialogue** amongst practitioners and partners, and the full involvement of learners and their parents. It also means learning from elsewhere where others might be facing similar changes, with a clear focus on the **needs of learners**. This means ensuring rigour in approaches to monitoring and tracking progress, and using the information to guide learning and choices. Consideration of this briefing and the following questions will help us all to manage these changes effectively.

- How well do we build the curriculum to meet the needs of different groups of learners, and involve them in shaping their own learning?
- How well does our curriculum help young people become more responsible and independent learners with an awareness of the totality of their BGE achievements?
- How well does the design of the S3 curriculum allow learners to receive their entitlement to the BGE and to

specialise to pave the way into the Senior Phase?

- How well does the S3 experience provide motivating and challenging learning that continues to develop knowledge and understanding, skills (including higher-order thinking skills), and the attributes and capabilities of the four capacities?
- How well do we provide opportunities for young people to revisit and build on their learning so that they can apply and extend their learning in more challenging contexts and achieve the best they can from their BGE?
- How well do courses and programmes in S3 provide a continuum of learning from the BGE into a range of flexible progression routes through different levels of qualifications in the Senior Phase?
- How well are we planning to ensure that all young people achieve the best possible level of qualifications, including those in literacy and numeracy, to maximise their success and assist in achieving positive and sustained destinations?
- How well do we work with partners, including those from other schools, colleges or CLD providers, to plan and evaluate young people's programmes of learning?
- How well do we support parents in developing their understanding of the relationship between the BGE and the Senior Phase and engage them in planning for change?
- How clearly have we explained to parents the pivotal role of the S3 experience, as described in the entirety of this paper?