

Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	21 January 2025
Report By:	Ruth Binks Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/09/2025/AS
Contact Officer:	Adam Stephenson Education Officer	Contact No:	
Subject:	Update on Senior Phase Curriculum Consultation		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

1.1 For Decision For Information/Noting

1.2 The purpose of this report is to update the Education & Communities Committee on the Senior Phase Curriculum consultation that was undertaken recently.

1.3 Following the Education and Communities Committee on 9 September 2024, a consultation was undertaken with stakeholders to gather views on making the Senior Phase Curriculum more flexible to suit the individual learning pathways of pupils in S4-6. The consultation was undertaken online and ran from 21 October – 6 December 2024.

1.4 A total of 651 responses were received from the following stakeholders:

Stakeholder	Number of responses	Percentage of total
Pupil	331	51%
Parent	215	33%
Teaching Staff	96	15%
Non-teaching Staff	7	1%

1.5 A copy of the questions asked in the consultation survey is included as Appendix 1.

1.6 An overview of the responses received in included as Appendix 2.

1.7 The majority of the respondents felt that having a more flexible approach to the Senior Phase would have a positive impact on young people leaving school. 89% felt this would have a positive impact for those who leave at the end of S4 and 88% felt this would have a positive impact for those choosing to leave at the end of S5 or S6.

1.8 When asked about the approach taken in S4, where pupils generally select six subjects to study, 55% felt that this was not the correct approach. On further analysis, a number of respondents selected it was the correct approach and then went onto say that only selecting six courses has a negative impact on young people.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Approve the recommendations in this report to allow amendments to the Senior Phase timetable model to begin from 2025/26

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities & Organisational Development

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 Following the Education and Communities Committee on 9 September 2024, it was agreed to move forward with a stakeholder consultation on the Senior Phase Curriculum. A survey was created and made available to complete online from 21 October to 6 December 2024. A copy of the survey questions is provided as Appendix 1.
- 3.2 An overview of the responses provided can be found in Appendix 2. 651 responses were received in total. The majority of responses came from pupils, followed by parents and then teaching staff. A small number of responses were received from non-teaching staff and other stakeholders.
- 3.3 The survey presented stakeholders with potential pathways that a pupil may take if a more flexible approach to timetabling in the senior phase was in place. A summary of the responses provided by the different stakeholder groups is provided below:

Pupils

- Appreciate the variety of pathways and the ability to choose options that align with their career goals.
- Concerned about the pressure of choosing a pathway at a young age and the potential for making the wrong choice.
- Worry about the inflexibility of pathways and the difficulty of switching if they change their minds.
- Value practical and valuable experiences provided by pathways to employment and apprenticeships.
- Concerned about the potential stigma associated with certain pathways, particularly those perceived as less academic.

Parents

- Appreciate the flexibility and variety of pathways, which cater to different student needs and aspirations.
- Concerned about the rigidity of pathways and the difficulty of switching if students change their minds.
- Worry that some pathways might limit future opportunities, especially for higher education.
- Believe that pathways to employment and apprenticeships are beneficial but worry about the quality and availability of placements.
- Feel that pathways might pigeonhole students too early.

Teaching Staff

- Appreciate the flexibility and variety of pathways, which cater to different student needs and aspirations.
- Concerned about the rigidity of pathways and the difficulty of switching if students change their minds.
- Worry about the quality and availability of work placements and whether they will provide meaningful experiences.
- Believe that pathways will help reduce pressure on final exams and provide clear directions for students.
- Concerned about the logistical challenges of implementing the pathways, including timetabling and coordination with external partners.

Responses from non-teaching staff and other stakeholders are reflected in the responses above and have not been included as a separate group due to the low number of responses.

3.4 When Curriculum for Excellence was introduced, different approaches were taken to the Senior Phase and the number of subjects offered in S4 can differ from authority to authority and even school to school. Allocating more time to fewer subjects in S4 allowed for maximum use of option columns over the senior phase and gave a good progression rate to Highers. However, this was predicated on pupils being secure in their initial choices and did not always allow for the increased prevalence of different types of qualifications. In the consultation we asked if the general rule of having all S4 pupils' study six subjects is still the best approach. 54% of respondents felt it was not the right approach and a further breakdown by stakeholder can be below:

Stakeholder	No	Yes
Parent	58%	42%
Pupil	44%	56%
Teaching Staff	82%	18%
Grand Total	54%	46%

The number of responses from non-teaching staff and other represented less than 1% of responses and so are not included above.

3.5 An overview of comments received about this question, by stakeholder, is provided below:

Pupils

- Pupils appreciate the idea of having more flexibility in their subject choices, with some suggesting that studying fewer subjects would reduce stress and allow for better focus.
- There is a desire for more vocational and practical subjects that align with career goals and interests.
- Concerns are raised about the pressure of studying more subjects and the potential negative impact on mental health.
- Some pupils believe that having more subjects would provide better opportunities and keep options open for the future.
- The importance of having a variety of subjects to choose from is highlighted, with some pupils feeling that the current model is too limiting.

Parents

- Many parents believe that the current model of studying six subjects is too rigid and does not cater to the diverse needs of all students.
- There is a strong preference for a more flexible approach that allows students to focus on subjects they are interested in and that align with their career goals.
- Concerns are raised about the pressure and stress associated with studying six or more subjects, particularly for students with additional support needs.
- Some parents feel that fewer subjects with more focus would be beneficial, while others believe that more subjects would keep options open for future decisions.
- The need for a tailored approach that considers individual student needs and aspirations.

Teaching Staff

- Teaching staff recognise that the current model of six subjects does not suit all students and advocate for a more flexible approach.
- There is support for offering more subjects to provide a broader education and better prepare students for future pathways, including better preparation for S5/6.
- Concerns are raised about the logistical challenges of implementing a more flexible model, including timetabling and coordination with external partners.
- The need to balance academic rigor with practical and vocational options is emphasised.
- Teaching staff highlight the importance of considering individual student needs and providing tailored support to ensure success.

Non-Teaching Staff and other

- Non-teaching staff support the idea of a more flexible approach that caters to the diverse needs of students.
- There is recognition that the current model may not be suitable for all students, particularly those who struggle with academic subjects.
- Concerns are raised about the quality and availability of work placements and the need for meaningful experiences.
- The importance of reducing pressure and stress on students is emphasised, with a focus on mental health and well-being.
- Non-teaching staff highlight the need for a tailored approach that considers individual student needs and aspirations.

3.6 On analysis of the responses received from stakeholders, where some have responded YES to the question about the number of courses to take in S4, their comments then go on to specify that this narrows options for future pathways. This suggests that the number who would be in favour of changing the number of courses in S4 would be higher than the figures above.

3.7 The key theme from the comments received are surrounding the limiting of choice at an early stage and selecting six courses means young people are making a decision when they are not certain of what their future pathway may be. The majority of comments made this assertion. Some parents and young people were concerned that increasing the number of courses would increase the stress and pressure on them and that a smaller number of courses can be more manageable and allow greater depth of study. Some teachers commented that they were concerned that increasing the number of courses for young people would mean that there was less teaching time available. Across all groups, comments were made that it was essential that the individual young person had to be taken into account and one size would not fit all. This was particularly highlighted in reference to young people who have additional support needs.

3.8 When asked about whether a more flexible approach for S5 and S6, 88% of those responding felt it would have a positive impact. A breakdown by stakeholder is below:

Stakeholder	Negative	Positive
Pupil	13%	87%
Non-teaching staff	0%	100%
Parent	12%	88%
Teaching Staff	7%	93%
Grand Total	12%	88%

3.9 An overview of comments received about this question, by stakeholder, is provided below:

Pupils

- Pupils appreciate the flexibility to focus on subjects they enjoy and find useful for their future.
- A flexible model can reduce stress by allowing more targeted learning.
- Pupils feel that a flexible model can help them better prepare for life after school.
- Some pupils worry that a flexible model might limit their subject choices and impact their readiness for university.
- There is a concern that increased flexibility might lead to less discipline and structure.

Parents

- More flexibility can reduce pressure on pupils, allowing them to focus on subjects beneficial for their future.
- Flexibility helps pupils who are not on a university pathway, providing alternative options like college.
- A flexible model can help pupils stay in education longer and build confidence.
- There is a risk that pupils may leave school with fewer qualifications and less support compared to staying in school.
- Some parents worry that a flexible model might not give pupils enough balance if they change their minds about their future paths.

Teaching Staff

- A flexible model might help young people sustain a course at college or university.
- It caters to their needs, providing more appropriate courses and increased engagement.
- More flexibility allows pupils to choose subjects identified for future study or employment.
- A flexible model would enhance the overall journey through the senior phase.
- Parity in workload based on the number of subjects being studied is still an issue.

Non-Teaching Staff and other

- A flexible approach can provide pupils with more personalised learning experiences.
- It can help pupils who struggle academically by offering alternative pathways.
- Flexibility can support pupils in making better decisions about their future careers.
- Ensuring that all pupils have equal access to opportunities and support is crucial.
- There might be resource implications for schools to diversify in this way.

3.10 Key messages from the comments received express that a more flexible approach would benefit young people no matter what pathway they wish to take post school. Many suggested that the flexible approach would better prepare young people looking to move into training, employment or further education. A small number of comments from parents and teaching staff raised concern about those young people wanting to move to University and a flexible approach may reduce the time and rigour in achieving the necessary Higher and Advanced Highers.

3.11 The general consensus is that a more flexible approach to the senior phase curriculum would be welcome. Feedback from stakeholders has highlighted that this will better prepare young people for life post school at the point they choose to leave school. There are opportunities to make sure that young people's options remain open by adjusting the option structure in S4 to give a wider range of choice. At the same time across S4-6, there are opportunities to provide more opportunities working with partners, to ensure that the needs of the individual can be catered for. This could include more opportunities for work based learning and vocational study.

3.12 Consideration needs to be given to the concerns raised. These covered:

- Stress and workload on young people from any increase to number of courses taken.
- Sufficient time available to deliver the courses and consideration of the logistics involved.
- Equity of opportunity for all young people, no matter what pathways they choose.

4.0 PROPOSALS

4.1 Amend the S4 option structure to allow young people to take up to seven courses, as opposed to the current six.

4.2 Develop in conjunction with West College Scotland and our other partners; including employers, and third sector, programmes that can be built into the timetable to allow young people to have more flexibility across S4-6.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial		X
Legal/Risk		X
Human Resources		X
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing	X	
Environmental & Sustainability		X
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
N/A					

5.3 Legal/Risk

N/A

5.4 Human Resources

N/A

5.5 Strategic

This paper specifically meets the aim of theme 2 of the Inverclyde Partnership Plan "Working People".

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

X	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required, a copy of which will be made available on the Council website: https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/council-and-government/equality-impact-assessments
	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

X	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

X	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children's rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

Summarise any environmental / climate change impacts which relate to this report.

N/A

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
X	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
X	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 Senior Phase Curriculum consultation undertaken from 21 October to 6 December 2024.

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 Appendix 1 – Senior Phase Curriculum Review Questions
Appendix 2 – Senior Phase Curriculum Review Responses Overview

Appendix 1

Senior Phase Curriculum Review

It has been a number of years since Inverclyde reviewed its Senior Phase model. When this was last completed this resulted in all schools agreeing to a common timetabling model including the provision of consortium arrangements and ensuring consistency of provision across the authority. This arrangement resulted in all S4 pupils being required to select six courses to study.

The landscape of the senior phase has changed over the last 5 to 10 years. We now see young people undertaking a variety of qualifications over the course of their senior phase. Many of these remain traditional, for example English and Mathematics, and subjects which require a final exam to be sat in the exam diet in April/May each year. We now see an increase in qualifications that do not see a final exam, but which contain ongoing assessment including National Progression Awards, Skills for Work and Foundation Apprenticeships. Courses are also offered through West College Scotland as part of the School/College Vocational Programme.

Our schools have already begun to explore different models for individual pupils. However we feel the time is now right to review the previous arrangements and ensure that the offer across all our schools continues to deliver the best outcomes for all pupils.

We welcome your thoughts on the senior phase offer and invite all our stakeholders to complete this survey.
The survey will close on **Friday 6 December 2024**

* Required

Which group do you represent? *

- Pupil
- Parent
- Teaching Staff
- Non-teaching staff
- Other

2

Which school are you associated with? *

- Clydeview Academy
- Craigmarloch
- Inverclyde Academy
- Lomond View Academy
- Notre Dame High School
- Port Glasgow High School
- St Columba's High School
- St Stephen's High School
- Local Authority role
- N/A

3

The table shows possible pathways pupils may take under a more flexible model. These pathways will only be possible if a more flexible approach is taken to timetabling in the senior phase. These are only three examples and many other options would be possible. Some of our schools have already started to provide this type of model to best meet the needs of pupils. Please comment with your thoughts on these different models that could be offered. *

Pupil A	Pupil B	Pupil C
<i>Pathway to University</i>	<i>Pathway to College</i>	<i>Pathway to employment</i>
<i>Selects seven courses that are offered all within their school in S4.</i>	<i>Selects five courses that are offered within their school and selects one course that is offered at college in S4.</i>	<i>Selects three courses that are offered within their school, selects one course that is offered at college and undertakes an extended work experience placement and gains work base learning qualifications eg First Aid at Work, Employability, Work Experience, Customer Service in S4.</i>
<i>Selects five courses to study at their school in S5.</i>	<i>In S5 continues to study the college course at the next level and selects three courses that are offered within their school.</i>	<i>At the end of S4 is offered a full-time position at a local firm.</i>
<i>Selects three courses to study at their school in S6.</i>	<i>Moves on to study full time at college at the end of S5.</i>	<i>Remains at school until S4</i>
<i>Moves on to further study at university.</i>		
<i>Remains at school until S6</i>	<i>Remains at school until S5</i>	

4

Do you think a more flexible model would positively or negatively affect pupils who decide to leave school after S4? *

- Positive
- Negative

5

Comments

6

Do you believe that general rule of having all S4 pupils' study six subjects is still the best approach? *

- Yes
- No

7

Comments:

8

Do you think a more flexible model would have a positive or negative impact on pupils who choose to stay on for S5 or S6? *

- Positive
- Negative

9

Comments *

Appendix 2

Responses Overview

Closed

Responses

651



Average Time

08:40



Duration

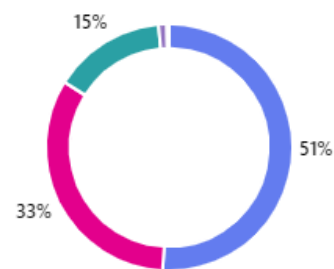
72 Days



1. Which group do you represent?

[More details](#)

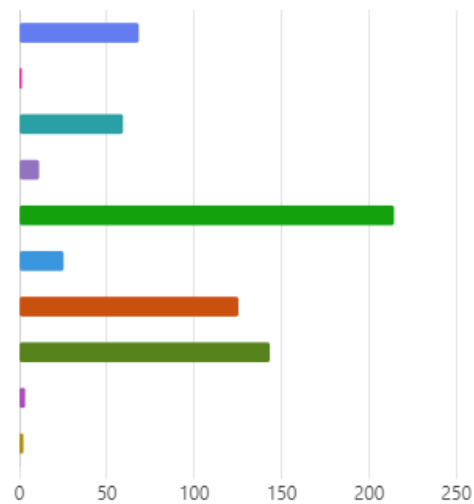
Pupil	331
Parent	215
Teaching Staff	96
Non-teaching staff	7
Other	2



2. Which school are you associated with?

[More details](#)

Clydeview Academy	68
Craigmarloch	1
Inverclyde Academy	59
Lomond View Academy	11
Notre Dame High School	214
Port Glasgow High School	25
St Columba's High School	125
St Stephen's High School	143
Local Authority role	3
N/A	2



3. The table shows possible pathways pupils may take under a more flexible model. These pathways will only be possible if a more flexible approach is taken to timetabling in the senior phase. These are only three examples and many other options would be possible. Some of our schools have already started to provide this type of model to best meet the needs of pupils. [More details](#)

Please comment with your thoughts on these different models that could be offered.

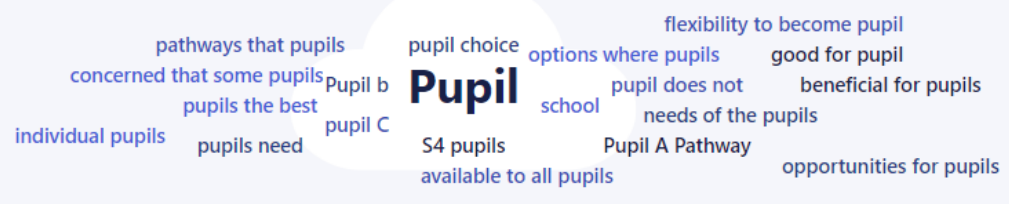
639
Responses

Latest Responses

"A range of models better meets the needs and skillsets across a broader ran... "
 "positive for pupils to have choice and flexibility, unsure about the demands ... "
 "Pathway to University: Seven courses in S4 would be too difficult for most of... "
 ...

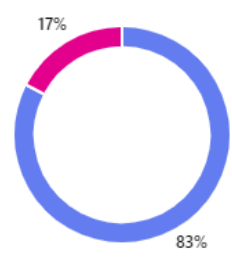
249 respondents (38%) answered Pupil for this question.

[Update](#)



4. Do you think a more flexible model would positively or negatively affect pupils who decide to leave school after S4? [More details](#)

- Positive 538
- Negative 113



5. Comments

[More details](#)

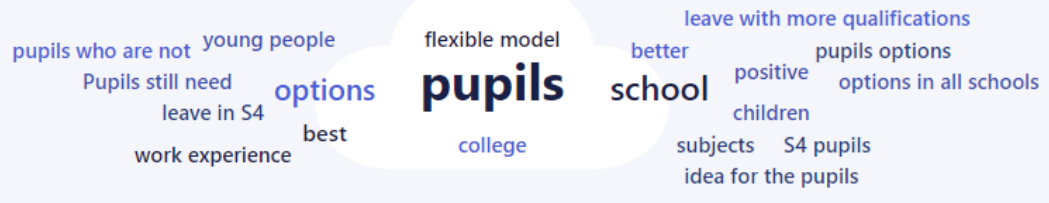
379
Responses

Latest Responses

"Often students struggle to gain employment due to a lack of practical work ... "
 "More work experience would prepare them better for leaving school and m... "
 ...

73 respondents (19%) answered pupils for this question.

[Update](#)



6. Do you believe that general rule of having all S4 pupils' study six subjects is still the best approach?

[More details](#)

● Yes 295
● No 356



7. Comments:

[More details](#)

404
Responses

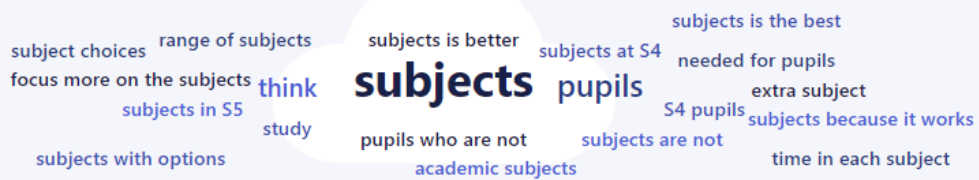
Latest Responses

"My daughter wanted to study 7 subjects but was limited to 6. Not all pupils ..."
"Pupils find coping with the workload stressful as it is at the moment with six ..."

...

135 respondents (33%) answered subjects for this question.

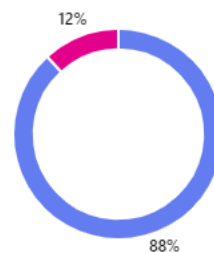
[Update](#)



8. Do you think a more flexible model would have a positive or negative impact on pupils who choose to stay on for S5 or S6?

[More details](#)

● Positive 574
● Negative 77



9. Comments

[More details](#)

629
Responses

Latest Responses

"I think someone planning to leave after S5 should still have the option of 7 s..."

...

"Pupils should be able to specialise in S6 more in music to be able to practise..."

...

93 respondents (14%) answered pupils for this question.

[Update](#)

