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# Secondary Teachers' Perceptions of Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland in an Era of Continuing Curricular and Assessment Development

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctorate in Education (EdD)

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# ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of a group of secondary teachers regarding the curricular reform policy, *Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland (*the *Plan),* which was introduced during an indefinite period of comprehensive change to the Scottish qualifications system. The changes to the qualifications system represented the final stages of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and impacted the Senior Phase, while the *Delivery Plan* impacted the earlier Broad General Education Phase. The catalyst for the reform policy was Scotland's decline in ranking in Literacy, Mathematics and Science as measured by the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2015. The introduction of the *Plan* after the new qualifications seemed to increase teachers' perceived pedagogical dilemmas and heighten existing tensions regarding the curriculum. This study was intended to support understanding of these tensions and curricular contradictions. Rarely, since the National Debate of 2002, has teacher voice been canvassed regarding curricular and assessment reform. This study sought to combine critical analysis of extracts from the reform policy with interviews conducted with a small group of secondary teachers to further comprehension of top-down policy solutions and systemic change. Stimulating the conversation regarding the future challenges facing the Curriculum for Excellence and how these challenges are understood provided the motivation for the study.

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My family encouraged me from the outset and coped admirably with their busy and demanding lives. To all of them, for their unflinching support, I dedicate this submission.

**AUTHOR'S DECLARATION**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

Printed Name  Rona E. MacFarlane

# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Motivation for this Study

This Dissertation grew out of my professional observation that, in 2016, approximately six years after the introduction of Scotland's new curriculum, *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), secondary teachers' concerns arising from its implementation were exacerbated by a raft of guidance documents and policy reforms. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the executive, non-departmental public body which carries out administrative, commercial, executive and regulatory functions on behalf of the Scottish Government[1]. The SQA was responsible for exit examinations for pupils aged between 15 and 16 in Secondary 4 (S4) and 17 and 18 in Secondary 6 (S6) and the SQA initiated the dismantling and replacement of the previous qualifications system in 2014, one year before this profusion of initiatives began in 2015.

Ostensibly, the SQA's aim was to align the outcomes of the new curriculum with a new national qualifications system. In Secondary 4 (S4), National 4 and National 5 qualifications replaced Standard Grade (Credit, General and Foundation levels). In Secondary 5 (S5) the new Higher qualification replaced the old Higher and the new Advanced Higher was introduced to replace the previous Advanced Higher in Secondary 6 (S6). Arguably conducted on a trial and error basis, this replacement process took place over several years, spanning the period from 2014 to 2016, and ended in 2018. In 2015, curricular guidance entitled *Significant Aspects of Learning* was published by Education Scotland (ES)[2], followed by the introduction of a government initiative entitled the *Scottish Attainment Challenge* and, subsequently, a policy reform, the *National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan* (NIF). In 2016, yet another policy reform, namely*, Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland,* (hereafter, the *Plan)* was published by the

[1] http://www.parliament.scot/S4_EducationandCultureCommittee/Publc%20bodies/SQA.pdf

[2] Education Scotland (ES) is a Scottish Government executive agency responsible for supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education. It was created in 2010 as a merger of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIe) and Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS).

Scottish Government. From discussions with colleagues, I sensed and heard explicitly expressed, profound confusion regarding the tension between the original principles of CfE and the ongoing changes to the new qualifications, and the frequent initiatives and reforms which had been introduced by the Scottish Government.

Having undertaken an EdD at around the time of the changes to the qualifications system and having reached the pre-Dissertation phase at the height of the period of policy reforms from 2015 to 2016, I was motivated to better understand these tensions and to explore possible curricular contradictions. Much teacher talk seemed to reveal professional anxiety in secondary schools which appeared to heighten in the period from the beginning of the replacement of the old qualifications through to the introduction of policies and initiatives and which culminated in the *Plan.* My motivation for this study was premised on the belief that an exploration of secondary teachers' understanding of the *Plan* at a time of ongoing changes to the new national qualifications would be professionally relevant and might contribute meaningfully to professional conversations and teacher talk about key educational issues in schools. Elliot and Sarland (1995:372) support such a view, suggesting that when teachers engage in professional enquiry this can improve the quality of professional discourse in schools about educational problems and issues. In the spirit of practitioner enquiry, I wanted to explore how and if the tensions I perceived, which seemed to be underlying teachers' views expressed informally but frequently in schools, were experienced similarly or differently by teachers.

At the outset, I was aware that critical reflection is ingrained in professional practice by both employers and regulatory bodies such as the General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS). Cranton (1996) viewed critical reflection as the process by which teachers identify the assumptions governing their actions, locate the historical and cultural origins of their assumptions, and develop alternative ways of acting. According to Brookfield (1995), part of the critical reflective process is to challenge the prevailing social, political, cultural, or professional ways of acting. Following Donaldson's 2011 review entitled, *Teaching Scotland's Future*, a re-conceptualisation of what it means to be a teacher in Scotland emerged. Developing teachers as reflective and enquiring professionals with the capacity to engage fully with the complexities of education and to be key actors in shaping and leading educational change (2011:4) became a principal focus of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes in Scotland. Additionally, the Donaldson Report, as this review is most often known, represented a rebranding of practitioner enquiry based on Donaldson's claim that

professional enquiry is pivotal to many of the world's most successful education systems. Following this landmark report, practitioner enquiry was rebranded and relaunched in Scotland using the GTCS' Professional Standards for existing professionals and through ITE programmes for student teachers.

As a reflective, enquiring professional with skills of critical literacy developed over the course of the EdD, my Dissertation study sought to better understand teachers' views and understandings of what felt, to me, to be an environment of tension and discomforting confusion. Perhaps my own perceptions were not those of other teachers and perhaps, if they were or were not, talking to teachers could start to clarify for me what was going on at a time of significant curricular change. I chose the *Plan* as the focus of my study because, as noted above, it was then the most recent specific policy initiative intended to improve CfE and it coincided with the ongoing development of the new National Qualifications. Moreover, its timing coincided with the start of my Dissertation and, crucially, there appeared to be little research underpinning its proposals. I therefore considered it to be opportune for enquiry. On the surface, it appeared to be a spontaneous response to a decline in Scotland's PISA results in 2015 and I elaborate on this and PISA in Chapter 2.

In approaching my topic, it became clear there was a paucity of both professional enquiry and research into how teachers were encountering policy recommendations and guidance. This led me to the possibility that, until there is an understanding of how teachers in secondary settings engage with policy and guidance, policy would continue to be made and guidance introduced by 'implementers' without adequate attention to teachers as major stakeholders in the process. Such a view was expressed by Hargreaves (1996) who summed up the frequent omission of teacher voice from policy decisions as follows:

> … as a principle of democracy within research and policy, the voices of those whose lives are managed and assigned meaning by others deserve to be heard with attentiveness and sincerity, lest researchers 'mis-assign' meanings to their actions, and policymakers mismanage their lives (Hargreaves, 1996:16).

My perception of a lack of secondary teachers' professional input to curricular reform and exit examinations' change processes in the period 2014 to 2016 positioned teachers' collective voice as neglected, if not omitted. The importance of including all stakeholders in such reforms has long been acknowledged by educationalists and yet, it seems, the voices of policymakers and international organisations continue to dominate the scene (Gozali et al.,

2017). Given the pivotal role of teachers in interpreting and mediating policy, I was motivated to critically engage with their viewpoints and to hear their voices. It appeared that the last time primary and secondary teachers had been asked to actively contribute to educational debate in Scotland was in a cross-party national debate which took place in 2002. After the granting of devolution by the UK Government to the new Scottish Parliament in 1999, a national debate on schools for the 21st century was opened to teachers, pupils, parents, employers, academics and anyone with an interest in education. According to Munn et al. (2004), the discussion focussed on what schools in the future should be like, what pupils should learn, how pupils could learn more effectively, the best and worst things about the system, and priorities for improvement. The result of this broad, deliberative consensus was the new curriculum, *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), published in 2004.

Reflecting on the possible reasons for the omission of teacher voice from reform policies to improve CfE and to restructure the qualifications system, I wondered whether increased accountability since that new curriculum's implementation in 2010, and the evolution thereafter of a system of seemingly opaque educational governance, could go some way towards an explanation. This problem of lack of clarity in educational governance became the focus of governmental scrutiny in 2018 following an enquiry by the Scottish Government's Education and Skills Committee[3] into subject choice in secondary schools. During the five-year implementation period of the new qualifications, a phenomenon designated 'narrowing of the curriculum' had been observable. Britton, a member of the committee, described the Scottish system as one of 'deep-rooted structures of governance…. distributed responsibilities and therefore quite opaque accountabilities' (Britton, 2018: np). Such a system, Britton recognised, created tension between autonomous organisations and central control and had given rise to unintended consequences in the past which, he felt, had never been resolved. The experience of the narrowing of the curriculum was, according to Britton (2018: np), yet another unintended consequence of 'a lack of clarity over accountabilities' and I discuss the problem of the narrowing of the curriculum further in Chapter 2.

Returning to the problem of teachers' increased accountability and the possibly consequent omission of teacher voice from policy and qualifications reform, Robertson (2000) suggested that teachers' work, in the context of globalisation, was being reshaped in similar ways

[3] The Education and Skills Committee was established by a resolution of the Scottish Parliament on 1 June 2016. The Committee's remit is to consider and report on matters falling within the responsibility of the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

around the world by performativity and de-professionalisation. Helsby (1999) argued that it is rational management, systems-based approaches and efficiency that are rewarded, whilst traditionally 'soft' qualities and values, such as intuition, caring and people-based orientations, are often belittled or ignored. Extending Helsby's argument, in an increasingly globalised and advanced capitalist world, I suggest that teachers are expected to be skilled but compliant technicians rather than humanistic and independent moral agents. Scotland's system of educational governance, arguably a system of 'opaque accountabilities' (Britton, 2018: np), appears to value data and measurement of pupils over the humanistic principles of CfE and teachers' judgement. Against this background, such a system of governance could also be a significant factor in the devaluation of teacher voice. In sum, historic, deep-rooted structures of educational governance which have resulted in unintended consequences, combined with processes of de-professionalisation, characterised by performativity in an era of advanced capitalism, could all have played a part in the neglect of teacher voice. An exploration of these interrelated and possibly contributory factors to the omission of teacher voice from curricular policy decisions could, in my opinion, be a worthwhile starting point for more purposeful research regarding teacher voice and its relationship to curricular policy. I re-visit this point in Chapter 6.

In summary, my motivation for this study was three-fold, as outlined below:

1) The research topic

   CfE was the biggest transformational change in Scottish education for over thirty years and teachers' engagement with it was the focus of much professional discussion. Implementation proved difficult, however, and the final phase of replacing the exit qualifications coincided with frequent guidance and policy reforms to improve CfE. I felt motivated to better understand what was happening and, in so doing, to enquire about teachers' understanding of curricular reform policies, such as the *Plan*, amidst changes to the qualifications system.

2) Contribution to the field of research

   I was aware that there was little research in the field of teachers' engagement with guidance documentation and policy reform, with teacher voice noticeably absent from research and policy relating to CfE. Although, as noted, CfE had been the most significant change in Scottish education for more than three decades, in spite of its magnitude in scale and scope, there were very few studies which explored its

implementation, and even fewer which explored its impact from the perspective of teachers. I hoped that my study could be professionally relevant and occupy a space in this gap.

3) Personal interest

When I decided to embark on an EdD, I was aware that professional doctorates are 'designed for experienced educational professionals who are committed to extending their understanding through researching and theorising policy and practice' (Hyatt, 2013:833). In the first three years of the doctoral programme, I appreciated developing my critical understanding. By the start of the dissertation phase, I felt that I had become a committed researcher and I was keen to engage with questions regarding Scottish education.

I began the doctoral programme in 2014, four years after the introduction of CfE in 2010, at the juncture of two distinct change processes. The first was the final phase of CfE's implementation process and entailed a complete overhaul of the exit qualifications by the SQA. The second was, as indicated above, a raft of policy reforms and a profusion of guidance documentation published by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland, respectively, to bolster and improve CfE.

I was profoundly struck by teachers' professional dilemmas regarding the implementation of the new curriculum, the subsequent curricular reforms to improve it, and the simultaneous development of new qualifications. Moreover, I had two children going through the change processes as learners in schools. At the time, my elder daughter was about to experience the new National Qualifications in the Senior Phase and my younger daughter was about to experience the *Plan* and the Benchmarks it introduced in the lower secondary Broad General Education (BGE) phase. My personal experience and involvement were, therefore, strong motivating factors in initiating this study.

This motivation for my study led to many ideas for research questions but I tried to limit these ideas to three research questions as outlined below.

1) How do some teachers perceive the *Plan's* Benchmarks, combined with the new National Qualifications, to have influenced CfE?

2) Do some teachers perceive curricular tensions between the curriculum and the exit qualifications?

3) Do some teachers believe that policy is being made, and guidance introduced, without adequate attention to all stakeholders, especially teachers?

I return to address these research questions in Chapter 5. The structure of this Dissertation is provided at the end of this introductory chapter and I now turn to discuss the wider background to the introduction of the *Plan* in 2016.

## 1.2 Historic Background

According to Gadamer (1977), understanding comes from the fusion of our past and present horizons. As a precursor to any meaningful discussion regarding teachers' understanding of the *Plan* in an era of substantial changes to the qualifications system, it struck me that the evolution of CfE in the context of Scotland's historic educational distinctiveness and the history of the qualifications system in the last forty years required further investigation. In this section I will document the evolution of CfE and in Chapter 2, I will describe Scotland's previous exit qualifications system, the Standard Grade system.

The political impetus for CfE can be traced back to the transfer of powers from the UK Government to the new Scottish Parliament in 1999. Prior to devolution, however, the provision of education in Scotland had already long been distinctive from the rest of the UK and this distinctiveness contributed to Scotland's national identity. Even before devolution in 1999, education policy in Scotland had developed separately and apparently in accordance with a set of beliefs about the 'democratic intellect' (Davie, 1961), although these beliefs are debateable and have been contested by academics such as Robert Anderson and Lindsay Paterson. Traditionally, these beliefs took the form of a story or 'myth' shaped by history, but this was not always supported by historical evidence, to the effect that Scottish society is relatively egalitarian and meritocratic. According to this 'myth,' ability and achievement, not rank, determine success in the world. Public, rather than private, institutions should be the means of bringing about a good society and, even where merit does justify differential rewards, there are certain basic respects, — arising from the common humanity of all men and women — in which human beings deserve equal consideration and treatment (Humes and Bryce, 2008).

Devolution marked a new chapter in educational policy reform in Scotland. Britton (2013) observed that the transfer of significant legislative powers and functions to the Scottish Parliament from the UK Parliament represented the biggest constitutional transformation for three centuries. According to Paterson (2008), following four decades of unceasing pre-devolution educational reform under the political regimes of Prime Ministers Thatcher and Major, there was a heightened expectation that a Scottish Parliament could be instrumentally more effective than the UK Parliament in Westminster. In addition, there was a belief that a Scottish Parliament could consult more democratically, command greater expertise and allow the debate of Scottish education in a more in-depth manner. Many parents, teachers, educationalists, and academics believed that 'a Scottish parliament could make better policy for education' (Paterson, 2000a:1).

According to Munn et al. (2004), in 2002 the post-devolution stage was set for a cross-party, national debate on the state of school education in Scotland which was to be open to pupils, teachers, parents, employers, academics and anyone with an interest in education. The topic of the National Debate was schools for the 21st century: what schools in the future should be like, what pupils should learn, how pupils could learn more effectively, what were the best and worst things about the existing system and what were the priorities for improvement (Munn et al., 2004). Civic participation and the education community highlighted support for comprehensive education and a high level of trust in the quality and professionalism of teachers (Munn et al., 2004). However, a desire and a need for improvement was also highlighted, according to Cassidy (2008). The result of the National Debate was *A Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE), published in 2004 and, arguably, the single most significant and transformational educational reform in the period since devolution. CfE was the product of a broad, deliberative consensus which afforded it some degree of democratic legitimacy. It was Scotland's new curriculum for children and young people aged 3 to 18 and, at the time, it epitomised post-devolution policymaking for the public good. Many teachers regarded it as transformational because it afforded them flexibility regarding what and how they taught. According to Priestley and Humes (2010), CfE represented a significant transformation for the educational community. It was

> … a serious attempt to provide a coordinated approach to curriculum reform for the full age range 3 to 18, building on earlier reforms targeted at more restricted stages (for example, Standard Grade, 5-14, Higher Still) and taking account of anticipated future needs deriving from economic, technological and social changes … a move

> away from central prescription of curriculum towards a model that relies upon professional capacity to adapt curriculum guidance to meet the needs of local school communities drawing upon the arguably successful experience of prior initiatives such as Assessment is for Learning (Priestley and Humes, 2010:2).

Nevertheless, in the six year period between the publication of CfE in 2004 and the implementation phase which began in 2010, the broad cross-party and community consensus which had contributed to the National Debate appeared to have fractured and been replaced by a widespread view that implementation of CfE was fraught with problems. I will discuss the factors which contributed to these implementation difficulties further in Chapter 2. In this landscape of perceived post-implementation dissatisfaction, enactment of CfE continued. Following the last diet and certification of Standard Grade examinations in 2012/2013, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) began a process of systemic change to replace the exit qualifications and align them to CfE. The Standard Grade system was replaced by new National 4 and 5 qualifications, and the Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications were replaced by the new Higher and new Advanced Higher. Following criticism of the SQA's handling of the new National Qualifications, Scott (2019) argues that the changes to the examination system had been carried out without adequate consultation. He also argues that, while the curriculum for ages 3-15 had been the subject of a great deal of work during the development of CfE, the Senior Phase for pupils aged 16 to 18 had been left to the SQA, 'a qualifications body rather than a curricular agency' (Scott, 2019:3). Britton, as noted, a fellow contributor to the Scottish Government's Education and Skills Committee, agreed with Scott, highlighting significant differences between the level of input to the Broad General Education (BGE) phase, S1 to S3, and the Senior Phase, S4 – S6. In a presentation to the Education and Skills Committee in 2019, Britton stated:

> The post-BGE phase did not receive the same pedagogical consideration as the earlier levels and the strong messages about the need to revisit aspects of teaching and learning from the CfE review in 2015 were not addressed to the same extent (Britton, 2018: Note 4).

In the midst of these changes to the exit qualifications by the SQA, in 2015, a 'crisis' occurred in the form of the tri-annual results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Scotland suffered a decline in reading, mathematics and science

scores in the PISA rankings and an independent review of CfE by the OECD was commissioned by the Scottish Government. The OECD is an intergovernmental organisation, founded in 1961 and comprising 37 member countries, its ‘raison d’être’ being to stimulate economic progress and world trade. PISA results, reported every three years and based on tests taken by more than half a million 15 year-olds in approximately 80 countries, are highly influential because the UK and Scotland rankings in the PISA league table allow for national and international comparison. Since its introduction in 2000, PISA has been the most visible form of cross-border comparison in Europe and I will discuss its implications further in Chapter 2. In the fallout from the publication of the 2015 PISA results, with Scotland ranked behind England and Northern Ireland, and even further behind the top performers such as Singapore, Japan, Canada, Finland and Estonia, questions arose regarding this downturn and whether it could have been attributable to CfE. Paterson (2016), a persistent critic of CfE, argues that the new curriculum’s emphasis on vague life skills at the expense of intellectual rigour had dumbed down educational demands. Due to Scotland’s disappointing PISA results in 2015, Paterson argues that the curricular proposition of CfE was failing pupils.

> What has changed that might explain this dismaying Scottish performance? The main policy change in the decade is Curriculum for Excellence. When the PISA 2012 results were released in 2013, the beginning of this decline was evident, but the policy response was that it would take time for Curriculum for Excellence to bed in, it now has. The students who sat these PISA tests have been educated under Curriculum for Excellence since they were age 10. Students in England in the same period have not suffered the same decline and yet they share an economic and social context that is broadly similar, except in policy on schooling. If Curriculum for Excellence is not the explanation of Scottish decline, then what is? (Paterson, 2016: np).

Although this appears a reasonable question to ask, no research had been carried out since CfE’s implementation and the PISA results were arguably only a snapshot of performance measurement. I return to this point in Chapter 2. In 2016, the Scottish National Party (SNP) was re-elected, albeit as a minority government with 63 MSPs, 2 seats short of a second consecutive overall majority. They formed a government in partnership with the Scottish Green Party and a flurry of new educational policy was introduced, all of which was underpinned by the SNP flagship strategy of closing the attainment gap between pupils from low-income and high-income households. According to the social epidemiologists, Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), the attainment gap measures how unequal a society is. According to an

annual report commissioned by the Scottish Government entitled *Child Poverty Strategy: Annual Report 2016,* approximately one in five people in Scotland had been living in relative poverty and overall poverty rates since the economic downturn of 2008 had increased. The Scottish Government eschewed socio-economic explanations for Scotland's decline in PISA scores, however, and attributed the decline instead to a collective failure to monitor the new curriculum's implementation and performance. The recommendations from the OECD review of CfE in 2015 were accepted without question by the Scottish Government, resulting in the publication of *Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland (*hereafter, the *Plan).* According to Priestley (2016), the *Plan* marked a turning point for CfE because it ushered in 'assessment benchmarks' (np).

In sum, the *Plan* and its Benchmarks arguably changed CfE's direction of travel. They impacted the middle secondary years of S1-S3, known in the terminology of CfE as the Broad General Education (BGE) phase, but, like CfE itself, they appeared to have no research basis. They relied on rhetoric and persuasion which, I decided, made them ideal for some Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and I explain this in Chapter 3. In addition, they were introduced during the overhaul and replacement of the previous exit examinations by the SQA which impacted the Senior Phase from S4-S6. So, the *Plan* and its Benchmarks, the new National Qualifications and teachers' understanding of the impact and implications of these significant changes, are all intrinsic elements of this study and influenced my methodology. I decided to use CDA to analyse two relevant extracts from the *Plan* and to combine this analysis with semi-structured teacher interviews. Unpicking the issues surrounding the implementation of CfE and the new National Qualifications was not straightforward because, as noted above, there was little empirical research regarding CfE's implementation nor was there any literature regarding the philosophical underpinnings of the new qualifications. I therefore drew on curricular theory to cast light on CfE's design and a body of literature regarding the history and philosophy of the Scottish qualifications system and the development of qualifications frameworks.

### 1.3 The Structure of the Study

This Dissertation is structured into six chapters and, below, I provide a brief outline of the content and purpose of Chapter 2 through to Chapter 6. My research begins from the supposition that, in order to better understand, firstly, the concepts of reform of CfE within

the *Plan,* and, secondly, the new qualifications system, I needed to understand the design of CfE and the design and philosophy, if I could discern it, of the new qualifications and of the previous qualifications, the Standard Grades. Hence, in Chapter 2, I explore the design of CfE, the design of the new National Qualifications and the history and philosophy of the previous Standard Grade system. Here I raise questions about who, or which organisation is maintaining oversight of the philosophical, sociological, and psychological alignment of the new qualifications with the curriculum. In addition, as I suspect the influence of neoliberal ideology in the rhetoric of the reform and the qualifications, I explain neoliberalism as an ideology and how it influences education in general and Scottish educational policy and practice, in particular.

Chapter 3 provides details of the methodological approach and of the methods and techniques employed to address the research questions. The rationale for choosing a qualitative, interpretive approach, with a critical slant, is explained and justified and I then show how the methods were translated into practice. In Chapter 4, I critically analyse two extracts from the *Plan* using Critical Policy Discourse Analysis, a form of Critical Discourse Analysis, specifically fashioned for policy analysis. In Chapter 5, the data is analysed and the findings are presented in relation to the research questions. Chapter 6 moves the study towards a conclusion. Initially and briefly, the research story is summarised. The research questions established in this first Chapter are re-stated and the findings summarised. The findings are then discussed in relation to my own reflections as I wanted to explore how, and if, the tensions I perceived were experienced similarly or differently by other teachers. I also note the limitations of this study including reference to lessons learned. Finally, I discuss the implications of my study for practice and for future research.

# CHAPTER 2

# THE DESIGN OF CfE AND THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections. Initially, I explore the factors which influenced the new curriculum, the subject of the *Plan*, and so, in the first section of this chapter, I describe the background to CfE's introduction, its initial reception, and the challenges of implementation. I examine CfE's design, drawing on theories of product and process curricula. As the concepts of competence and competences are prominent characteristics of product, outcomes-based curricula, I consider definitions of these concepts and how they are employed. Comparing characteristics of CfE with product and process curricula, I highlight CfE's conceptual mix of both and suggest that the balance, the hybridity, appears to be weighted in favour of an outcomes-based product curriculum rather than a process curriculum. In section two, I examine the new National Qualifications which replaced the Standard Grades in 2013/2014 for examination in 2014/2015. I then outline the history and the philosophy of the Standard Grade qualifications, the transition from the Standard Grade system to the new National Qualifications, and the rationale for the overhaul of the qualifications system. The argument I advance is that, despite the rhetoric from the SQA regarding the increased democratising force of the new qualifications, there appears to be no explanation of what makes them more democratic. Neither does there appear to be an explanation of how the qualifications were formulated, on what research they were based, nor any information of who, if anyone, is maintaining an overview of the relationship between the new qualifications and the curriculum. In addition, I suggest that a phenomenon of narrowing of the curriculum, that is, a reduction in the number of subjects being selected for study in the Senior Phase, has arisen which, I argue, is antithetical to the democratic rhetoric of the new National Qualifications. In section three, and on account of the global trend in education policy and practice towards an acceptance of neoliberal doctrine (Patrick, 2013), I discuss neoliberal ideology and explain my interest in applying a Foucauldian perspective to a critical analysis of the discourse of the *Plan.*

### 2.2 Background

It could be argued that the new curriculum had arrived on Scotland's educational scene at a complex political moment, both nationally and internationally. Humes (2013) explained that the review group set up in 2003 to consider its form and content was in a recently devolved political position which made it possible for greater divergence from educational provision in other parts of the United Kingdom. The curriculum policy parameters had been set by the provisions of the *Education (National Priorities) (Scotland) Order* (2000), which had established the five national priorities for education as follows*:*

- Achievement and Attainment
- Framework for Learning
- Inclusion and Equality
- Values and Citizenship
- Learning for Life (Scottish Executive, 2004:6).

At the same time, according to Humes (2013), in the late 90s and early 2000s, there were global pressures which influenced education systems in the direction of greater convergence, most notably the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

PISA is a worldwide study conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) every three years to compare and evaluate education systems and had been introduced internationally in 2000, one year after Scottish devolution. Arguably, comparative studies of educational achievement in reading, mathematics, and science increased political leaders' sensitivity regarding their country's position in internationally published league tables. Moreover, according to Humes (2013), global economic forces linked to technological developments and changes in patterns of employment had led to an emphasis on skills, enterprise, and adaptability. Sahlberg (2011) referred to this phenomenon as a Global Education Reform Movement, influencing the thinking of politicians in many countries and driving education policy in uniform directions. Humes (2013) explains that in this new global trend, traditional conceptions of knowledge were regarded as too narrow and rigid to cope with the demands of rapidly changing work environments. In addition, management of the public sector emphasised improved efficiency, defined targets and clear lines of accountability and pushed educational systems towards convergence (Bush, 2003; Seddon, 2008). According to Humes (2013), Scottish education was trying to continue to set

a distinctive agenda during a period when countervailing forces were pushing education systems in a uniform direction.

Implemented in the 2010/2011 session after six years of planning, CfE was hailed by the Scottish Government (2008a:8) as 'one of the most ambitious programmes of educational change ever undertaken in Scotland'. Priestley and Biesta (2013) argue that it provided central guidance for schools and maintained national standards while, at the same time, allowing schools and teachers flexibility to take account of local needs when designing programmes of education. According to Priestley and Humes (2010), CfE combined the best features of top-down and bottom-up approaches to curriculum development. In addition, Priestley and Biesta (2013) claim that it provided an indication of the broad qualities that school education should promote rather than a detailed prescriptive account of curriculum content. Priestley et al. (2012) explained that this new type of curriculum emphasised the role of teachers as agents of change and reaffirmed the importance of school-based curriculum development. A radical departure from existing ways of both defining the curriculum and from prevailing practices in Scottish schools, CfE, according to Priestley and Humes (2010), represented a shift from the prescriptive culture of the previous 5-14 curriculum[4] towards a more developmental approach which positioned students at the centre and teachers as agents of change and developers of the curriculum. Positioning teachers explicitly as professional curriculum developers typified an emerging tendency in curriculum policy in the UK and elsewhere in the Anglophone world (Priestley et al., 2012; Nieveen, 2011). According to Priestley and Humes (2010), the *New Zealand Curriculum* and England's *National Curriculum* provided parallel examples of this emergence of a set of common trends in curriculum prescription.

Nevertheless, despite this apparently innovative and pedagogically appealing shift to learner-centred, school-based curriculum development, CfE's implementation was noticeably less than straightforward and I witnessed critique and confusion amongst teachers. Traditionally, the reception and translation of curriculum policy into classroom practice has been recognised as inherently difficult because it often produces what Supovitz and Weinbaum (2008) describe as an implementation gap between policy intentions and classroom practice.

[4] The former 5-14 curriculum was introduced as 'guidance' in the early 1990s. Its impact was most pronounced in primary schools where the assessment demands of the curriculum were particularly influential in framing practice.

The American educationalist, Cuban, described the unintended ‘status quo’ effect of education reform on classroom practice metaphorically as follows:

> Hurricane winds sweep across the sea tossing up twenty-foot waves; a fathom below the surface turbulent waters swirl while on the ocean floor there is unruffled calm (Cuban, 1984:2)

True to the difficulty in translating prescribed policy reform into enacted classroom practice, criticism emerged regarding the conceptual coherence of CfE. Priestley and Humes (2010) point out that the way in which CfE was managed, the complexity of the assessment system, the quality of staff development and initial teacher education, and the resources for the new curricular approaches all came under critique. There was general criticism of the under-theorisation of the original proposals which were perceived to rely too much on common sense notions of best practice, according to Priestley and Humes (2010). Additionally, Humes (2013) argues that the limited extent to which CfE was informed by insights from research meant that aspirations for CfE to become a model of sustained change, with schools and teachers as co-constructors of the curriculum, were unrealistic. Paterson (2018: np) questions CfE’s child-centred philosophy and constructivist ideology, claiming it was a revivification of the ‘standard ideology of the academic left in the 1960s, supported by OECD advisers’. He further argues that ‘narrative knowledge’ in CfE was being neglected and downgraded, effectively dumbing down learning and over-emphasising skills, particularly those required for the workplace (Paterson, 2018: np). Criticism, widespread confusion, and professional frustration prevailed during CfE’s challenging implementation phase. Teachers with whom I interacted became mired in what felt like often sterile debate and some schools adopted superficial, first-order changes to systems and paperwork, behaviour which had been observed and documented previously by Cuban (1984). According to Priestley and Minty (2012), established structures, beliefs and practices of schooling remained substantially unchanged. To better understand the factors which affected CFE’s demanding implementation, I now explore its design.

## 2.3 The Design of CfE

> A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice (Stenhouse, 1975:4).

Lawrence Stenhouse, the eminent British curriculum theorist of the 1960s and 1970s, held the view that a curriculum should be capable of being translated into practice. According to Sheehan (1986), Stenhouse's view should be the acid test for any educational proposal. Priestley and Humes (2010) critically examined CfE's design using well-established curriculum theory (for example, Dewey, 1938; Stenhouse, 1975; Kelly, 1999) and suggested that the new curriculum was an uneasy mixture of at least two archetypal curriculum models resulting in a product curriculum dressed up in the language of a process model. CfE, they argue, was not the innovative, process-based curriculum it purported to be, but rather was an essentially product curriculum in which the retention of curriculum disciplines supported the status quo in schools (Priestley and Humes, 2010). Arguably, the design structure of CfE may have been flawed from the outset on account of what Priestley and Humes (2010) identified as incompatible features from competing curriculum design models. If this were the case, a lack of internal coherence could have been at the root of many of the subsequent issues of workability experienced by teachers in the implementation phase.

In a product curriculum, the emphasis is on the outcome of a learning experience. Sheehan (1986) claims that behavioural objectives provide the foundation on which product models of the curriculum are built with the intended outcome, the product of a learning experience, prescribed beforehand. Teachers take responsibility for making sure that pupils learn and for assessing pupils' outcomes, with the key elements of a product model comprising objectives, knowledge, experience, and evaluation, according to Sheehan (1986). The underpinning theoretical perspective of a product curriculum is outcomes-based education which has its roots in scientific management theory, developed in the nineteenth century by Frederick Taylor, an American mechanical engineer, to enhance worker productivity. It was intended to enhance economic efficiency, control, and accountability by breaking work processes into sub-tasks or the smallest possible units in order to evaluate the most efficient method for accomplishing a particular task.

Stenhouse (1975) argues that an outcomes-based approach, which at first looks like a shortcut to effective action, is too simplistic as a curriculum design. He argues that education is a matter of process rather than the achievement of prescribed objectives and that a curriculum is itself an object of enquiry that is tested in the classroom by both teachers and pupils (Stenhouse, 1975). As already stated earlier in this chapter, CfE's shift towards framing education in terms of learners and their development, or their outcomes, rather than in terms of content, could have been influenced by international trends such as the development of EU

competency frameworks, according to Priestley and Biesta (2013). For example, the European Commission published a strategy document in 2012 entitled, *Rethinking Education,* which exemplifies this shift in approach as follows:

> Our new strategy document, ‘Rethinking Education,’ calls for a fundamental shift in education, with more focus on 'learning outcomes' — the knowledge, skills, and competences that students acquire. Merely having spent time in education is no longer sufficient. In addition, basic literacy and numeracy still needs to be significantly improved, and entrepreneurial skills and a sense of initiative need to be developed or strengthened (European Commission, 2012:1).

Knowledge of certain facts, mastery of specific skills and competences and acquisition of ‘appropriate’ attitudes and values characterise a product curriculum. The focus on outcomes and competences, or the knowledge, skills, and competences that students acquire, appear paramount in an outcomes-based curriculum but definitions of ‘competence’ and ‘competences’ are varied. In the following section, I outline the history of the term ‘competence’ and explain its current use in the context of outcomes-based education.

### 2.3.1 Competence and Competences

Historically, the human quality ‘competence’ was first defined in 1959 as a concept for performance motivation in an article authored by R.W. White, an American psychologist, who specialised in personality research. The concept of competence gathered momentum throughout the 1960s and managerial competency research led to another eminent American psychologist, David McClelland, writing a paper entitled, *Testing for Competence Rather than for Intelligence.* In this paper, McClelland questioned the validity of aptitude and intelligence testing which, he argued, only predicted grades in school and were only minimally related to success in life (McClelland, 1973). McClelland’s scepticism regarding intelligence testing and its correlation with life success was shared by T.F. Gilbert (1978) and Richard Boyatzis (1982) who popularised the concept of competence and used it in relation to improvement of performance at work.

More recently, around the time of devolution in Scotland, European definitions of competences were exemplified in a European project entitled, *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, as follows:

> Competences represent a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills and abilities. Fostering competences is the object of educational programmes (Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, 2000:9).

The Tuning Project described three types of generic competences:

- Instrumental competences: cognitive abilities, methodological abilities, technological abilities, and linguistic abilities
- Interpersonal competences: individual abilities like social skills (social interaction and co-operation)
- Systemic competences: abilities and skills concerning whole systems (a combination of understanding, sensibility, and knowledge; prior acquisition of instrumental and interpersonal competences) (Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, 2000:9).

Examples of generic competences described in the Tuning project were cited as the capacity for analysis and synthesis; the capacity to learn and problem-solve; the capacity for applying knowledge in practice; the capacity to adapt to new situations; concern for quality; information management skills; ability to work autonomously; capacity for organising and planning; oral and written communication in native language, and interpersonal skills. The relationship between competences, objectives and learning outcomes is discussed by Hartel and Foegeding (2004:69) who define competence as 'a general statement detailing the desired knowledge and skills of students graduating from our programme'. Regarding 'competence,' in their specialist area of food engineering and processing, they give the following example: 'the student should be able to use the mass and energy balances for a given food process' (Hartel and Foegeding, 2004:70). From this competence, Hartel and Foegeding derived two objectives and four learning outcomes, as follows:

**Objectives:**

- Understand scope of mass balances in food processing systems
- Understand appropriate use of mole fractions and mass fractions in mass balances

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Describe the general principles of mass balances in steady state systems
- Draw and use process flow diagrams with labels on flow streams for mass balance problems
- Solve mass balance problems associated with food processing operations

- Design and solve mass balances for complex process flow systems including batch mixing problems, multiple stage flow problems, problems with multiple inflows and outflows, recycle streams and multiple components, and processes where chemical reactions take place (Hartel and Foegeding, 2004:70).

These learning outcomes specify precisely what is expected. They specify what the students will be able to do to demonstrate that they have acquired this specific competence. Relating this specific example to full outcomes-based education theory, both start with:

> … a clear specification of what students are to know, of what they are able to do and what attitudes or values they should be able to demonstrate at the end of the programme (Killen, 2005:77).

Neary (2000), discussing teaching for competence in the health sector, points out that the challenge for the teacher is to select appropriate learning outcomes which will lead to achieving the competences, specifying evaluation indicators and developing a functional delivery system. Clearly, in the education sector, some subject disciplines, for example, Mathematics and Science, lend themselves more readily to an outcomes-based approach than others (for example, Art, Music and Languages) because the knowledge and learning involved is more easily adaptable to achieving competences, specifying evaluation indicators and developing a functional delivery system. Eisner (1967) argues that some subjects, including the Arts, do not lend themselves to behavioural specificity. One further issue of an outcomes-based approach which I witnessed in the classroom in the roll-out stage of CfE, was the additional onus placed on teachers to implement what seemed like hundreds of learning outcomes and to evaluate them constantly in terms of pupil learning. And so, I now turn to the learning outcomes of CfE and compare those and other characteristics of CfE to the design features of product and process curricula.

### 2.3.2 Features of CfE in Common with Product and Process Curricula

Due to its extensive array of objectives, known as the 'Experiences and Outcomes,' CfE appeared to demonstrate key characteristics of an outcomes-based product curriculum. CfE's Outcomes appeared to be relatively loosely defined, using 'I can' statements to evidence learning. Nevertheless, for each experience, the Outcomes can be perceived as prescriptive because they predetermined the learning and prevented any scope for 'off plan' learning. For example, in the Experiences and Outcomes for Literacy and English within the *Listening and Talking* category, and the *Finding and Using Information* sub-category:

Experience

- When listening to, watching, and talking about texts with increasingly complex ideas, structures, and specialist vocabulary

Outcomes (for Early, First, Second, Third and Fourth levels)

- Early — I listen or watch for useful or interesting information and I use this to make choices or learn new things. LIT 0-04a
- First — As I listen or watch, I can identify and discuss the purpose, key words, and main ideas of the text, and use this information for a specific purpose. LIT 1-04a
- Second — As I listen or watch, I can identify and discuss the purpose, main ideas and supporting details contained within the text, and use this information for different purposes. LIT 2-04A
- Third — As I listen or watch, I can:
    - identify and give an accurate account of the purpose and main concerns of the text and can make inferences from the main statements
    - identify and discuss similarities and differences between different types of text
    - use this information for different purposes. LIT 3-04a
- Fourth — As I listen or watch, I can:
    - clearly state the purpose and main concerns of a text and make inferences from key statements
    - compare, and contrast, different types of text
    - gather, link, and use information from different sources and use this for different purposes. LIT 4-04a

The Experiences and Outcomes divided the curriculum into several hundred discrete objectives, spread over five levels and covering schooling for the full primary and secondary age range from 3-18. The traditional structure of subject disciplines, the so-called Hirstian forms of knowledge (Hirst, 1974) continued to be the basis of the new curriculum, with eight curricular categories as follows: Health and Wellbeing, Languages, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Expressive Arts, Technologies and Religious and Moral Education. To the best of my knowledge, no philosophical rationale was offered by the architects of CfE, either

verbally or in writing, for the maintenance of this status quo. With no questioning of the traditional Hirstian forms of knowledge, the decision to maintain subject disciplines inevitably meant a continuation of the superior or inferior subject status inherited from the 5-14 curriculum. Patrick (2013) points out that disciplinary forms of knowledge had become credited with differing economic and practical value, for example, the applied sciences and information and communication technologies underwent an elevation of their 'assumed economic utility' (p.3).

In a process curriculum model, by contrast, Sheehan (1986) explains that the emphasis is on learning acquired from and designed to support experiences of work and life, that is, from experiential learning. A process model comprises open-ended pupil activities intended to develop capacities with an emphasis on the quality of learning as it unfolds rather than on predetermined outcomes (Sheehan, 1986). Open-ended intentions are used, whereas in a product model, behavioural objectives are predetermined, and, as noted above, according to Sheehan (1986), mastery of these objectives is required. The implementation phase of the process curriculum is based on the notion that learning is an active, continuous process on the part of the learner and that it is concerned with solving meaningful problems (Sheehan, 1986). This means, of course, that the student either chooses the problem herself/himself or at least negotiates and co-constructs the choice with the teacher using a range of teaching and learning strategies to promote independent and individualised learning. All of these characteristics of learner-centredness were present in CfE, expressed in terms of design features such as personalised learning and choice, breadth, relevance, challenge and enjoyment, which suggests that the new curriculum possessed key elements of a process curriculum. The Scottish Government's guidance documentation demonstrates this and states:

> Personalised learning focuses on the individual learner from the earliest level through to lifelong learning. It represents best practice in learning and teaching and includes: recognition that all learning matters; building on prior learning; learning that actively involves learners; engaging and enterprising learning; ensuring a variety of contexts for learning; involving learners in planning and being responsive to their needs and interests; experiences where learners benefit from assessment that is integral to and informs assessment. Personalisation means ensuring appropriate progression pathways for different groups and learners through their Broad General Education and into the Senior Phase (Scottish Government, 2012: 2).

According to A.V. Kelly, another eminent curriculum theorist of the 1990s, a process curriculum is fundamentally a curriculum based upon democratic values, comprising a set of structured activities enabling students to practise citizenship, to develop reflexivity and the capacity to question (Kelly, 1999). It is a curriculum, argues Biesta (2005:62), to enable students to 'come into presence' as unique individuals. Such a curriculum could promote Dewey's (1910) claim that a democratic society of informed and engaged inquirers is the best means of promoting human interests and human flourishing. At first glance, CfE, with its 'four capacities,' designed to create successful learners, effective contributors, responsible citizens, and confident individuals, appeared to possess characteristics of a process curriculum. In addition to the four capacities, CfE promoted learner-centredness as an emancipatory and holistic approach across the life course, according to Britton (2018) and referenced skills development and active and interdisciplinary learning. When CfE was first introduced, it resonated with the Scottish egalitarian educational traditions which I referred to in Chapter 1. The values and principles expressed in the four capacities, together with CfE's overarching generalist approach which favours interdisciplinary study and promotes cross-curricular themes of literacy, numeracy, and citizenship, were consistent with democratic and egalitarian ideals. The four capacities represented the desired outcomes of schooling, namely, that children would be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors. Despite this initial boldness, however, during the implementation phase the four capacities were reduced to little more than mantras, according to Humes (2013).

A number of critics disparaged the four capacities because, they agreed, according to Patrick (2013) that the capacities had 'no more claim as the end of schooling than any other set of dispositions or skills but had everything to do with shaping the individual as economically responsible and entrepreneurial' (p.3). Priestley and Humes (2010) argue that the architects of CfE had made no attempt to unpack the concepts underpinning the capacities which could equally have been effective learners, responsible individuals, successful citizens, and confident contributors or any other possible combination of the key terms. In the many and various CfE documents published by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland, there was hardly any mention of the 'big philosophical and sociological matters which are a necessary precursor to planning a curriculum,' according to Priestley and Humes (2010:353). Similarly, Humes (2013) expresses deep concern that there was no extended philosophical justification for the values implicit in the capacities and he views them as a top-down

imposition, 'asserted rather than argued for' (p. 8). Concern was also expressed in academic circles regarding the kind of knowledge required to produce successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors — knowledge which some critics felt 'had been conceptualised as skills for (knowledge intensive) work and for life in the knowledge economy' (Patrick, 2013:3). Watson (2010) argues that the tendency to formulate curricula in terms of capacities and competences signals a shift from what children are expected to know to how they should be. She questions the philosophical concepts underpinning CfE's values and capacities, noting that:

> … to criticise such laudable aims would be like giving motherhood and apple pie a good kicking, but whose values underpin this? Who says what counts as a responsible citizen? An effective contributor? Despite the veneer of self-evident goodness, these are not unproblematic constructions of self-hood (Watson, 2010:99)

In spite of mounting academic scepticism regarding the entirety of CfE's curricular proposition, Priestley and Minty (2012) cite evidence of a high level of first-order engagement with the main ideas and general founding principles but suggest that there was less evidence of second-order engagement. In effect, there was a lack of congruence between theories of learning and teaching sympathetic to CfE's aims and teachers' pedagogical beliefs and abilities. Priestley et al. (2012) summarised the findings of two small-scale research studies undertaken by Baumfield et al. (2010) and Priestley and Minty (2012) and highlight the following observations:

- teacher anxiety about CfE, especially with respect to assessment and the new National Qualifications
- highly variable approaches to implementation
- a lack of fit between teachers' implicit theories about knowledge and learning and the new curriculum
- considerable tensions in policy and practice, particularly between the putative developmental thrust of CfE and a culture of accountability still prevalent in Scottish schools (Priestley, Minty and Eager, 2012:2).

Issues of workability may have led teachers to think that the predominant tension in CfE was the assessment-driven nature of the outcomes in an otherwise apparently non-traditional and less prescriptive curricular framework. No amount of dressing the new curriculum up as a process model and a vehicle for teacher autonomy, school-based curricular development, critical thinking, constructivism, learning for sustainability, implied by the four capacities,

could, I suggest, disguise the imbalance in CfE's conceptual mix. This mix seemed more strongly weighted in favour of an outcomes-based product model of curriculum. On its discursive surface, CfE differed markedly from its predecessor, the 5-14 curriculum, primarily because the 5-14 framework was a highly prescriptive product curriculum which focused on behaviourist objectives and knowledge acquisition. CfE could be described as an example of a hybrid 'product-process' curricular model with less prescriptive objectives than its predecessor. It represented a move away from the detailed specification of content to be taught towards a significant shift to school and teacher autonomy in terms of what should be taught, according to Priestley and Humes (2010), albeit within the parameters of an extensive array of outcomes-based objectives.

At the outset, on account of CfE's perceived hybridity, Yates and Collins argue that CfE was 'a fascinating rapprochement - child-focused developmentalism and economic instrumentalism' (2010:92). But Wheelahan (2010) argues that CfE was not what it seemed and that neoliberal discourses had assimilated and recontextualised apparently oppositional discourses such as progressivism whilst maintaining technical-instrumental goals for education. I return to neoliberalism towards the end of this chapter but now continue the narrative of CfE's development. By 2015, and Scotland's apparent decline in the PISA rankings, it is possible to ask if the design structure of CfE was flawed on account of incompatible characteristics of a product and process curricular model. To return to Stenhouse (1975:4), CfE may not have been 'capable of being translated into practice' without modifications. A similar situation had occurred in Australia in the 1990s. Critics of Australia's system, including Donnelly (2007), considered that outcomes-based education was not the best curricular model to strengthen pupils' learning, nor to support teachers in the classroom. During the 70s and 80s, Donnelly (2007) claims that school-based curriculum development had been widely adopted in the belief that it was wrong to impose centrally developed curriculum documents and that teachers had to be free to design the curriculum at the local level. The reality, he claims, given the demands of teaching, was that many teachers did not have the time to do this and they were not curriculum experts (Donnelly, 2007).

Australia's experience, according to Sinnema and Aitken (2013), was part of a wider global trend in curriculum reform policy of outcomes-based education using a discourse of educational improvement and aimed at improving outcomes for all learners. This policy trend appeared coherent and relevant for the future with its emphases on competences, pedagogy, values, student agency, partnerships, and reduced prescription. According to Young (2009),

such curricula exemplified a set of inter-related and parallel trends, namely, a shift to learning outcomes, a move from subject-specific to generic curriculum criteria (for example, digital competence, learning to learn, social and civic competences) and the introduction of national qualifications frameworks. Before providing an overview of Scotland's national qualifications framework and its place in the overhaul of the previous qualifications system to align the new National Qualifications to CfE, I now outline the introduction of the new National Qualifications and their features.

### 2.4 The Introduction of the New National Qualifications

2012 to 2013 was the last session of the differentiated, three-tier Standard Grade examinations before the introduction, in August 2013, of the new National Qualifications (NQs) covering seven levels, 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher, for examination in May/June 2014 (Scott, 2019). In the overhaul of qualifications, Access 1 and 2 qualifications were updated and renamed National 1 and 2. The National 3 qualification was supposedly the equivalent of the old Standard Grade Foundation level. National 4 and 5 were intended to be the equivalent of the old Standard Grade General and Credit levels and were to be studied over one school year with courses comprising various contributing units and coursework. Only qualifications of National 5 and above were to have an element of external assessment but all qualifications were to be subject to moderation by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) through sampling of coursework and units. National 4 courses were to be assessed by teachers through coursework assessment and there was to be no external assessment or grading at National 4 level. According to the SQA, the new qualifications demonstrated more focus on skills development compared to the previous qualifications and they placed a greater emphasis on deeper learning by helping learners to think for themselves and to apply and interpret the knowledge and understanding they had developed (SQA, nd). As well as tangibly replacing the Standard Grade examinations, the new National Qualifications represented an adjustment of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications framework (SCQF), introduced in 2001, which I now describe. As stated in the previous section, the introduction of national qualifications frameworks was characteristic of a global trend in curriculum reform policy.

### 2.4.1 The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

The replacement of the Standard Grade examinations was part of a major overhaul of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the national credit transfer system for all levels of qualifications, which had been launched in 2001. Purportedly, the overhaul of qualifications in 2013/2014 represented the final stage of CfE's implementation. The SCQF is owned by the SCQF Partnership which was incorporated in 2006 as a private, not-for-profit company limited by guarantee and governed by a Board of Directors drawn from the College Development Network, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the SQA and Universities Scotland. According to Raffe (cited in Allais et al., 2009), the SCQF is substantially driven by the SQA and by higher education, and the Scottish Government has been careful not to assume sole or even principal ownership.

A levels ladder system was initially presented by the SCQF as a way of comparing the wide range of qualifications available in Scotland. In other words, it was a system for equating courses from different institutions and uniting different levels of vocational and academic qualifications in order to make it easier for employers and educational institutions to understand the level of qualifications a person had attained. A secondary aim of the framework was purportedly to remove prejudice against vocational and non-traditional qualifications. Young (2009) argues that it is in making qualifications more portable and transferable, with the hope that this will lead to the overcoming of skills shortages, that most claims are made for national qualifications frameworks. However, he counters the case in favour of national qualifications frameworks because:

> The evidence, such as it is, suggests that it is partnerships between educational institutions and between institutions and employers, not qualifications frameworks, that are most crucial for achieving transferability and progression (Young, 2009:26).

Allais et al. (2009) support this view, arguing that a qualifications framework may support seamless access, credit transfer and progression, but in practice, participation and progression continue to be determined by educational institutions and the wider social context.

Regarding the operational detail of the SCQF, it has twelve levels spanning Access at Level 1 to Doctoral Level 12. Every qualification or unit placed in the framework is benchmarked against its level descriptors and awarded a level and corresponding credit points. 1 credit point equates to 10 notional learning hours with the level of a qualification indicating the learning challenge. The new National Qualifications cover levels 1 to 7 and are based on a

unit structure. According to the SCQF Partnership, they are built on qualifications developed over the course of the previous four decades although with a more simplified structure and, according to the SQA, with a greater focus on skills and opportunities for the demonstration of skills acquired (SQA, np). The SCQF level descriptors give broad, general indicators of the characteristics of learning outcomes at each SCQF level. Each SCQF level descriptor has five characteristics:

- knowledge and understanding
- practice/applied knowledge
- generic cognitive skills
- communication/ICT/numeracy
- autonomy/working with others (SCQF, np).

The new National Qualifications may be a better design fit with the architecture of the SCQF because they are unit based. Nevertheless, the new National 4 qualification, which broadly equates to the previous Standard Grade General/Foundation level, may be at odds with Scotland's tradition of 'certification for all' because there is no external assessment at National 4 level. This raises questions regarding the underlying philosophy of the new qualifications and leads me to an exploration of the previous Standard Grade system and its philosophy of 'certification for all' (Dunning, 1977).

### 2.4.2 The Previous Standard Grade System

As noted above, according to the SQA, the new National Qualifications are more democratic and inclusive than the previous Standard Grade system and will lead to greater social justice and equity (SQA, np). However, there appears to be no published research basis for such claims. By contrast, Standard Grade examinations, introduced in 1984, were designed to assess a two-year course for students aged 14-16 and were Scotland's qualifications for pupils reaching the school leaving age. They replaced the previous, highly restrictive Ordinary Grade (O Grade) qualification, following the publication of the report often known as the Dunning Report, *Assessment for All: Report of the Committee to Review Assessment in Third and Fourth Years of Secondary Education in Scotland* (Dunning, 1977). According to Allais et al. (2009), the Ordinary Grades had been designed for only 30 percent of the school population and were unsuitable for the large numbers staying on at school until the age of 16

after the raising of the school leaving age in 1973. Pupils were only allowed to study Ordinary Grade if their teacher in S2 thought that they had a reasonable chance of achieving it. The philosophy of the Standard Grade system was therefore to increase pupils' chances of a qualification.

Dunning's Standard Grade system was one of differentiated levels designed to ensure a more inclusive and satisfactory experience for all students, according to McVittie (for SQA 2008). The system enabled students from a broader ability range to achieve qualifications which were recognised and valued by the national business community looking to recruit students into highly prized apprenticeships (Allais et al., 2009). Both the Munn (1977) and Dunning (1977) reports had been commissioned to address weaknesses in the provision of courses and qualifications to meet the needs of the full ability range and to ensure appropriate progression to Higher Grade. The Dunning Committee recommended that:

- all students should have the opportunity to take courses leading to the Scottish Certificate of Education
- external examinations and internal assessment by teachers should both contribute to awards
- all students should be assessed in a way that enabled them to demonstrate positive achievement (Dunning, 1977, summarised from McVittie for SQA, 2008:2).

Howieson et al. (2017) argue that the Standard Grade examinations can be viewed as emblematic of comprehensive democratic principles in Scotland with young people attending the same school, studying largely the same diet of subjects, and receiving the same (differentiated) certification. In the Standard Grade qualification, according to Gamoran (1996), the philosophy of assessment and certification for all pupils aged 16 was central. Students typically studied seven or eight subjects and were assessed against performance standards for three levels of award: Credit, General and Foundation (Allais et al., 2009). Examination papers were differentiated, with one set leading to qualifications at Credit Level (1 and 2), another to General Level (3 and 4), and another to Foundation Level (5 and 6) (Allais et al., 2009). Students generally took examinations covering two adjacent levels as a 'safety net' and it was not entirely unheard of for some students to achieve Credit level from a starting point of Foundation or General level. The qualification assessment was norm-referenced, which meant that it was based on the achievements of the individual measured against those of other students, rather than how her or his achievements compared with a set

standard (criterion-referenced) (McVittie for SQA, 2008). Scotland had thus rejected the notion of a different type of examination for different young people (academic or vocational), instead offering all young people access to what Howieson et al. (2017) describe as a liberal or general education.

Detailed quantitative studies of the Standard Grade system demonstrated its positive impact on the participation and achievement of disadvantaged pupils in national qualifications between 1985 and 1991 (Gamoran, 1996). Gamoran (1996) found an increase in attainment among low socio-economic status pupils by virtue of improved access to academic courses. This research concluded that, at the end of compulsory schooling, 'disadvantaged students were not as far behind in academic subjects as they were under the Ordinary Grade system' (Gamoran, 1996:5). While Gamoran's (1996) research found a greater increase in attainment among low socio-economic status pupils, it also demonstrated that those from high socio-economic status backgrounds maintained their advantage with respect to the top levels of examination scores. Croxford (2009) argues that all social classes shared in increased levels of attainment between 1984 and 2002 but the gap between them narrowed only slightly, so the overall gradient of social class inequalities in attainment at the end of the compulsory school stage remained fairly persistent over the period.

Howieson et al. (2017) argue that if education is conceived as primarily of intrinsic value, then Scottish society benefitted from increased attainment but if it is essentially regarded as a positional good, it appeared that middle-class parents and pupils had been able to maintain their positional advantage through the comprehensive system and the Standard Grade reform. Howieson et al. (2017) further assert that whilst comprehensive education and reforms, such as the Standard Grade system, had some levelling effect on social inequalities at the end of compulsory schooling because the majority of young people were able to achieve national qualifications at that stage, the value of these qualifications as credentials had declined. By the end of the 1990s, Standard Grades had become the subject of widespread criticism. In the 2007 OECD report entitled *OECD Review of the Quality and Equity of Education Outcomes in Scotland,* the review group found that:

> When measured at the end of S4, the overall trend in the quantity and quality of examination results achieved by Scottish pupils presented for National Qualifications (Standard Grade) has tended to be relatively flat over recent years (OECD, 2007:38).

Unlike the introduction of the Standard Grade reform following the Munn and Dunning Reports in 1977, however, no formal research process nor independent inquiry was visibly undertaken to establish the best way forward to reform the qualifications system. Guidance regarding the new National Qualifications was published by the SQA for parents and carers and this stated the following in the introduction by Dr Janet Brown, then SQA's Chief Executive:

> The new National 1 to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications are designed to give your child the knowledge and skills they will need to succeed in the 21st century. The world is becoming ever more competitive. For future generations, it will be essential to have the right skills, knowledge and experience if they are to make the most of the many opportunities on offer. At SQA, we understand the challenges young people face when they leave school or college, and that is why we have developed the new National Qualifications. We aim to nurture the skills and expertise your child needs whether applying for a job, an apprenticeship, or a place at college or university. It is our responsibility to give learners the best start through qualifications that are challenging, relevant and meet national standards. The new qualifications support Curriculum for Excellence, which is transforming the way young people learn, and they reflect the skills, knowledge and experience that your child has gained during their courses. This will help them to demonstrate what they know and what they can do. We want to give Scotland's young people the best possible chance, when they go out beyond the classroom, to fulfil their potential and take their place in a modern society and economy (SQA Guide for Parents and Carers, 2015:2).

As highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, the SQA did not explain how the qualifications had been formulated, on what research they had been based, nor which organisation, if any, was maintaining oversight of the relationship between assessment and the curriculum. The SQA, a quango, and the SCQF Partnership, a private company, appeared to be in sole charge of the new National Qualifications and the revisions to Higher Grade and Advanced Higher. This situation raises questions about the oversight of the alignment of the underpinning philosophical, sociological, and psychological foundations of the qualifications system with the curriculum. The 'fit' of the new qualifications with CfE is the subject of the following section.

### 2.4.3 The Alignment of the National Qualifications to CfE

The outcomes-based design features of the new National Qualifications appear to resemble the design features of CfE which, I contend, demonstrates some characteristics of a process curriculum but its overall thrust is weighted in favour of an outcomes-based, product curriculum. Spady (1994) claims that outcomes-based education focuses on 'what we want our students to be able to do successfully at the end of their learning journey in school' (p.49). Specifically, CfE represented a move away from the previous 5-14 model of highly prescriptive, uniform curricular content to a model of greater curricular diversity. Secondary education was restructured into two phases. First year (S1) to third year (S3) became a period of Broad General Education (BGE) and the Senior Phase covering fourth (S4) to sixth years (S6) was the juncture at which pupils made curricular choices and studied for exit qualifications. The new curriculum encouraged innovation at the local level by schools and teachers in response to the needs of their pupils. Consequently, there was much greater flexibility in how schools designed and structured the six years of secondary education and especially in their approach to the Senior Phase (Raffe in Allais et al. 2009; Scott, 2015). Scott (2015) identifies significantly different approaches being adopted across Scotland to the implementation of the S4 curriculum and associated qualifications, with some local authorities mandating only five or six courses in S4 instead of the previous eight associated with the Standard Grade system. In addition, Scott (2015) highlights the problems which some local authorities have experienced in providing courses in Modern Languages, ICT, Art, and STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics). As a result, Scott (2015) claims there is evidence of curricular narrowing and significant curricular distortion, as suggested earlier in this chapter.

Scott (2015) concludes that pupils in different schools could experience significant differences in the number and range of subjects offered and in the number of examinations undertaken in their fourth year (first year of the Senior Phase). He argues that this would impact opportunities for attainment and progression in later school years and post-school. One of the most troubling of his findings is that these differences impact differentially across the ability range. Pupils from deprived households who may demonstrate lower attainment in literacy and numeracy appear to be differentially disadvantaged, a situation which could 'compound Scotland's existing problems of social justice and equality of opportunity' (Scott, 2015:2). This finding contradicts the SQA's claims regarding the democratising force of the new National Qualifications and reinforces the findings of Croxford's (2015) study which highlights that

narrowing curriculum choice in upper secondary leads to reduced opportunities of access to higher education.

The risk associated with a narrowing of the curriculum, or a decrease in the number of subjects studied by pupils in S4, is increased stratification. In addition, as the new National 4 qualification is not externally assessed, it lacks parity of esteem with National 5. Without parity of esteem, the new National 4 forms part of a two-tier, stratified qualifications system which appears to condone unequal access to the curriculum and risks a return to the alienation and marginalisation of non-certificate students akin to the situation in the pre-Standard Grade era of the Ordinary Grade qualifications. Gow and McPherson's (1980) study highlights the negative effects on student motivation of Ordinary Grade certificate and non-certificate classes. It could be asked if the creation of a stratified two-tier examination system is related to the philosophy of outcomes-based education. Killen (2000) explains that outcomes-based education emphasises the importance of criterion-referenced assessment in which the intended outcomes provide benchmarks against which student achievement can be judged. If students' achievement matches or exceeds these standards or criteria, they are said to have achieved a level of mastery or a level of competence. In the absence of a written statement of purpose by the SQA regarding the philosophical foundations of the new National Qualifications, their alignment of to CfE appears to draw on competency and mastery-based features of an outcomes-based approach, using criterion-referenced assessment.

With no independent review body to scrutinise the process, quality, and impact of changes to the qualifications by the SQA, the new National Qualifications may be driving CfE. Jessup (1991) points out that a shift to an outcomes-led system of education and training means a qualifications-led or assessment-led system. One of the four principles of outcomes-based education, according to Spady and Marshall (1991) is to design the curriculum back from where you want students to end up. Could the Benchmarks which were introduced by the *Plan* represent the designing back from the new National Qualifications? This is a question to which I will return in Chapter 5. In the following final section, I explain neoliberal ideology and its significance to education and to Scottish education in particular.

## 2.5 Neoliberalism and a Foucauldian Perspective

### 2.5.1 Neoliberalism

In section 2.3.2 of this chapter, I cited Wheelahan (2010) who argues that CfE was not what it seemed and that neoliberal discourses had assimilated and recontextualised apparently oppositional discourses such as progressivism whilst maintaining technical-instrumental goals for education. In section 2.4.3, I advanced the argument that outcomes-based education chimes with current global, neoliberal trends. Patrick (2013) claims that neoliberalism is now a globalised agenda that underpins educational strategy and policy in many nations. Joseph (2010) claims that neoliberalism is a political discourse concerned with governing individuals from a distance. As a starting point to an exploration of my research questions, I shall briefly discuss neoliberalism as a globalised ideology and consider how it influences societies, individuals, and education.

Olssen, Codd and O'Neill (2004:5) explain that one way of thinking about neoliberalism is as a 'transnational pressure to release economic activity from state regulation.' Davies (2017: xiv) uses the definition of neoliberalism as 'the elevation of market-based principles and techniques of evaluation to the level of state-sponsored norms.' Generally regarded as a doctrine which privileges the market as the driver of both political and economic decision making, Kuttner summarises its philosophy as follows:

> Unfettered markets are deemed both the essence of human liberty and the most expedient route to prosperity (Kuttner, 1996:3).

Ball (2012) claims that neoliberalism refers to a 'family of ideas associated with the revival of nineteenth-century economic liberalism' (p. 18), including the school of Austrian economics associated with von Mises, Hayek and Schumpeter, the Chicago school of economists, and monetarist economist Milton Friedman (p. 18). Although neoliberalism emerged primarily as an economic philosophy and as a relatively coherent intellectual project in the 1920s, it only became prevalent in its current form in the 1970s as a result of the crisis of capitalism in western countries. It is characterised, Ball (2012) claims, by 'a strong commitment to methodological individualism and the principles of private property, alongside an antipathy to centralised state planning' (p. 18). Competition is seen as the defining characteristic of human relations. According to the writer and journalist, George Monbiot (2016), neoliberalism redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling, a process that rewards merit and punishes inefficiency.

Relatedly, Brown (2015) argues that 'neoliberal rationality configures human beings as market actors, always, only and everywhere as *homo economicus*' (p. 31).

The term 'neoliberal,' however, has not yet made its way into most voters' vocabulary (Kuttner, 1996). Ironically, neoliberalism is still scarcely recognised as an ideology, and yet, Monbiot (2016) claims that it has played a major role in most of the global political and economic crises in the last twenty to thirty years. These include, for example, according to Monbiot (2016), the financial meltdown of 2007/2008, the offshoring of wealth and power, the slow collapse of public health and education, resurgent child poverty, the collapse of ecosystems and the rise of populism and Donald Trump. Miller (2018) suggests that neoliberalism operates on the premise that human beings should both be conducted by and conduct themselves according to a form of life that reflects the form of capital itself with infinite quantitative expansion (ever increasing employability and income prospects) through indefinite qualitative transformation (continual acquisition of knowledge and capacities in reaction to the demands of the market).

Most Western economies, including Scotland's, have already undergone processes of neoliberalisation to varying degrees. Neoliberalisation processes can include the rolling back of the state and the sub-contracting of its functions to private enterprise. There can often be a preoccupation with educational quality resulting in increased accountability and performativity. Whilst it is the case that some of the more extreme elements of neoliberal governance experienced in England have not made the journey north, the differences are of degree rather than type. For example, unlike England, Scotland has not had Foundation Hospitals or City Academies. However, like other Western economies, it has experienced marketisation in health and education and an increase in the role of business in the governmental apparatus. Grek (2009) argues that Scotland's continued participation in the OECD's PISA programme every three years is an example of participation in a neoliberal technology of 'governance by numbers' (p.23). Patrick (2013) contends that any education system which is discursively dominated by neoliberal ideology promotes the commodification of education and the commodification of learners.

In Scotland's distinctive, predominantly comprehensive education system, based historically on democratic principles of entitlement for all, without any advice to the contrary from the Scottish Government or from Education Scotland, neoliberal ideology could be the underpinning ideology of the new curriculum and the new qualifications. This is a possibility

which merits discussion as there are visible markers of neoliberalism in the new National Qualifications, in the outcomes of CfE and in Scotland's continued participation in the PISA programme and I will discuss these issues in greater detail in Chapter 6. In trying to uncloak neoliberal ideology in the discourse of the *Plan* and the Benchmarks, I knew that a Foucauldian perspective could assist and so, in the following section, I outline my rationale for adopting such a Foucauldian perspective.

### 2.5.2 A Foucauldian Perspective

In Chapter 4, I will analyse two extracts from the *Plan* using a form of Critical Discourse Analysis, namely, Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA). Wooffitt (2005: p. 137) points out that research using CDA varies in style and focus and may reflect diverse theoretical or philosophical orientations of individual researchers. At the outset, I favoured Foucauldian Discourse Analysis, however, the framework which I selected was designed by Hyatt (2013), specifically to analyse policy, and draws on Fairclough's analytical methods. My intention was to use the framework of Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA) to analyse the text extracts and, where appropriate to the study's overall interpretive approach, to employ a Foucauldian perspective. By adopting such a Foucauldian perspective, I acknowledge that, like Bonnet (2009:54), I am 'influenced by Foucault's view that individual subjectivities are heavily and continuously constituted by discourse.'

The concept of 'governmentality' is a neologism introduced by Foucault in the 1970s in his investigations on modern forms of political power (Rose et al., 2009). The term combines 'government' and 'rationality' and is used to refer to a distinctive way of exercising power, one which seeks to shape the governing of people's conduct by positive means (Rose et al., 2009). According to Foucault, governmentality

> was understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour. Government of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state or of oneself (Foucault, 1997:82).

In his 'governmentality lectures' in the 1970s, Foucault argued that, under neoliberalism, the 'market' would become the 'organising principle of society,' acting as an effective mechanism for regulating the extent, purpose and reach of government (Foucault, 2008:30) and creating a 'specific form of governmentality'  and a new 'regime of truth' for governing

human beings (Foucault, 2008:30). According to Fraser (2018), Foucault framed neoliberalism, not only in terms of a set of economic policies based on monetarism, deregulation and privatisation, but also as a productive power which arguably, marked the beginnings of a new paradigm in the governance of human beings. Lemke (202) argues that Foucault's work on governmentality provides a means of understanding the relationships between knowledge, strategies of power and technologies of the self that can usefully augment narratives of neoliberalism. From this perspective, neoliberalism is understood as

> a political rationality that tries to render the social domain economic and to link a reduction in (welfare) state services to the increasing call for personal responsibility and self-care (Lemke, 2001:203).

Larner (2003) and Barnett (2005) argue that Foucault's notion of governmentality became an important reference point in debates about neoliberalisation. Barnett et al. (2008) suggest that if there is such a thing as a neoliberal project, then it is assumed that it must work by seeking to bring into existence neoliberal subjects.

In the field of education, Simons and Masschelein (2008) argue that learning has become a matter of both government and self-government. In other words, we regard learning as that which at the same time guarantees self-government and that which renders us and society governable. Simons and Masschelein consider the governmentalisation of learning to be a phenomenon of neoliberal governmental regimes and claim that the concept of learning has become disconnected from education. Learning has come to refer to a kind of capital, to something for which the learner is personally responsible, to something that can and should be managed, and to something that must be employable. What is at stake, they argue, is a 'capitalisation of learning' and what has emerged is 'learning as a force to produce added value' (Simons and Masschelein, 2008:391). Simons and Masschelein question how this shift has come about and draw on Foucault's concept of governmentality which, they argue, does not function by directly imposing rules or norms upon a person, but through a series of apparatuses, whether discursive, institutional or techniques of self, which require people to become a certain type of person.

Ball (1998) argues that the dominant discourses of neoliberalism or the ideology of the market which encourage school improvement, managerialism, the cult of excellence, performativity and the stitching together of competing discourses in policies (for example, excellence and equity) are all technologies of governance in a new orthodoxy of public

governance. Similarly, Ozga, Grek and Lawn (2009) suggest that, since the late 1990s, governing knowledge in the UK has been based on performance management which drives knowledge production. Performance is made visible in the form of indicators and targets that can be constantly scrutinised and teachers and learners are rendered visible and calculable (Ozga, Grek and Lawn, 2009). Lawn (2006) argues that measuring units, quality assurance processes, indicators, benchmarks, and standards represent a technology of soft governance and serve to depoliticise policy. The *Plan*, and the Benchmarks which it introduced, arguably represent an imposition of standards to measure pupils more effectively than CfE's Outcomes and to generate performance data. As such, following Lawn (2006), they appear to represent a technology of soft governance. Employing CPDA and Foucault's concept of governmentality as an analytical tool, my intention is to uncloak neoliberal ideology in the discourse of the *Plan* and the Benchmarks.

Finally, in acknowledgement of the limitations of the concept of governmentality as an instrument of social analysis, Joseph (2010) argues that Foucault is useful in pointing us away from conscious intervention by highlighting techniques and practices of discipline and control but the issue to address should be how the techniques of governmentality can operate — in which societies, which instances and occasions, through which institutions and organisations? For governmentality to be a useful concept, Joseph (2010) argues, it must be part of a wider social ontology. Rose et al. (2009) argue that one of the attractions of governmentality has been to render neoliberalism visible in new ways. Power (2000) shows that the technologies of budgets, audits, standards, and benchmarks were crucial for the operationalisation of programmes of governing at a distance that characterised the forms of new public management taking shape under rationalities of advanced liberalism. As an explanation of the appeal of an analytic of governmentality, Rose et al. (2009:22) state that 'the emergence of post-social governance involves the contingent coalescence of a wide array of criticisms of social forms of governance.' According to Rose et al. (2009), an analytic of governmentality, seeks to identify different styles of thought in the art of governing as each formulation of the art of governing embodies the following questions: Who or what is to be governed? Why should they be governed? How should they be governed? To what ends should they be governed? (p. 3). Further, this perspective recognises that a variety of authorities govern in different sites which gives rise to a second set of questions: Who governs what? According to what logic? With what techniques? Toward what ends? They conclude that an analytic of governmentality is far from a theory of power, authority, or

governance but rather is a technique which asks questions of the phenomena it seeks to understand, questions which are amenable to precise answers through empirical enquiry (Rose et al., 2009:3). Applying this to my study, I acknowledge that, in adopting an analytic of governmentality, questions are raised which would require further empirical study. The intention of my approach, however, is merely to stimulate debate.

### 2.6 Conclusion

To summarise, this chapter began with some background to the introduction of CfE, the subject of the *Plan*, and an exploration of its design. I advanced the argument that CfE appears to be a mix of product and process curricula, but that the mix is weighted more strongly in favour of a product, outcomes-based model. I then introduced the renewal of the qualifications system by the SQA and I discussed the differences between the new system of National Qualifications and its predecessor, the Standard Grade system. I questioned the lack of a research basis for the new qualifications and I questioned claims made by the SQA regarding the new qualifications as more democratic and inclusive than the previous Standard Grade qualifications. I drew on research which highlights a narrowing of the curriculum in the Senior Phase of many schools and highlighted that such a phenomenon signals increased stratification and differentiation in school and beyond to higher education. I noted the absence of an independent review body to scrutinise the process, quality, and impact of changes to the qualifications by the SQA and suggested that the new National Qualifications appear to be driving CfE. I raised the question whether the Benchmarks introduced by the *Plan* are an attempt to refresh CfE by taking the outcomes of the new National Qualifications as a new starting point and working backwards.

Finally, I explained neoliberalism as a global narrative which discursively influences education policy and practice. I posed the question whether neoliberal doctrine is the underpinning philosophy of CfE, the *Plan* and the new National Qualifications. With respect to uncovering neoliberal ideology in the discourse of the *Plan*, I explained my interest in Foucault’s concept of governmentality as an analytical dimension of Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA) but also noted the limitations of such an approach. In the following chapter, I describe the methods used in my study including the use of CPDA.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODS

## 3.1 Introduction

Having situated this study in the context of the introduction of the *Plan,* the perceived hybridity of CfE*,* and the alignment of the new qualifications to CfE, in this chapter, I describe the rationale and procedures I followed in relation to the two main strategies for data collection and analysis. I conducted interviews with a participant group of teachers and employed Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA), a form of CDA, to analyse two relevant extracts from the *Plan*. As a precursor to this project, I used one of the Research Methods courses in the EdD programme to trial and evaluate various interview techniques. I built on these experiences in planning this Dissertation study, although I have not reported this trialling here as it has already contributed to the taught assessed component of the EdD and to discuss it here would constitute 'double-counting'. Given the centrality of teacher voice to my study and to ensure the integrity of my research, I provide a detailed account of the data collection and analysis processes and their associated ethical considerations. This chapter begins in section 3.2 with a justification for the overall interpretive approach I decided to use. Section 3.3 evaluates the two methods of data collection I used. Section 3.4 describes the interview procedures and the associated ethical considerations. This section also explains the transcription procedures and how themes were identified for data analysis. Section 3.5 discusses teacher voice and explains the operationalisation of CPDA.

## 3.2 Justification for Interpretivism

From an early stage in the planning of this Dissertation study, I decided that a qualitative approach using interviews would the most appropriate method of data collection, sitting within the overall interpretive approach I had decided to use. That interpretivist approach would allow me to focus on meanings and help me answer my research questions by allowing data to emerge from interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). I decided that my research and the participants' views could not be objectively viewed from the outside; rather, seeking views from the inside would be necessary to hear the direct experiences and attitudes of the teacher participants. Objectivity was not my aim as I wanted to explore what each participant thought and believed and that would inevitably mean focussing on subjective views and not

only acknowledging, but actively seeking, multiple interpretations and understandings. I recognised that interpretation of data from interviews would entail making meaning of that information using subjective analysis. I had become interested in interpretivism during my EdD programme trial study in which I had used semi-structured interview techniques. Crotty (1998) argues that researchers can choose at which stage to begin, be that ontological, epistemological, methods or methodology. But according to Grix (2004), research is best conducted by:

> … setting out clearly the relationship between what a researcher thinks can be researched (her ontological position), linking it to what we can know about it (her epistemological position) and how to go about acquiring it (her methodological approach) (Grix, 2004:68).

As a qualitative, interpretive researcher, I was interested in what it is possible to know and how to obtain this knowledge, or perhaps better expressed, I was interested in understanding. Following from this, I wanted to know how people make sense of their lives, experiences and perceptions of the world using information influenced by their cultural surroundings. I knew that by using an interpretivist paradigm, I was aiming to 'understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants' (Cohen et al., 2007:19).

Kvale (1996) described qualitative research interviewing, a research instrument often used in interpretive research, as an attempt to understand the world from the subject's point of view and to unfold the meaning of people's experiences. My purpose was to learn from the teachers I interviewed. I did not assume that I knew what they were thinking, and I wanted to unfold the meaning of their experiences and views. My main aim was to explore how a small group of secondary teachers encounter policy recommendations and guidance in an era of curricular and assessment change. I considered various other options, such as focus groups, but semi-structured, one-to-one interviews seemed most suitable for collecting rich data about secondary teachers' lived experiences in a period of change. Focus groups, I reflected, might be compromised by issues of disagreement, inhibition and irrelevant discussion. Engaging teachers in conversation can be an excellent way of gathering information and accessing the story and the context behind the participant's experiences, according to McNamara (1999). I considered that a semi-structured interview framework would allow me, as the researcher/interviewer, to encourage focussed discussion about specific topics yet also allow the teacher participants to talk freely about these topics. Within this framework, I recognised

that a degree of fluidity in interviews would allow me to explore avenues of spontaneous conversation which could potentially offer unexpected insights.

My positionality regarding the *Plan* was as a questioner and, at least partly, as an insider. As a practising teacher, I was sceptical about the *Plan* because it lacked a basis in research and because of its timing in relation to previous reform initiatives and to the new National Qualifications. I was aware, prior to conducting the interviews, that the positionality of the participants could be similarly sceptical or, alternatively, they could have been more positively disposed than I was towards the reforms. Additionally, I was aware that their own views could have been discursively shaped by historic, top-down guidance issued by Education Scotland (ES) or its predecessor, Learning and Teaching Scotland. Hardy and Phillips (2002) claim that:

> … the things that make up the social world – including our very identities – appear out of discourse – without discourse there is no social reality and without understanding discourse we cannot understand social reality, our experiences or ourselves (Hardy and Phillips, 2002:2).

According to Burr (2003:84) 'reality is not a constant, but an ever-changing realm that is both discursively and practically constructed by people'. I therefore decided to incorporate elements of a critical approach. The kind of understandings I was attempting to uncover were subjective and co-constructed, but I was also motivated to question the status quo. A critical approach, in common with an interpretivist approach, recognises that research is not value free and the goal of the critical researcher is to actively challenge interpretations and values to bring about change. The idea of challenging discursively imposed interpretations and values appealed to me, but not in a grand change-oriented way, rather in a way that reflected the small-scale nature of my study, as a means of initiating dialogue and encouraging discussion between all stakeholders.

As the *Plan* and secondary teachers' understanding of it were the foci of my study, I also required a tool to analyse relevant extracts of the policy. I had selected two relevant extracts from the *Plan* as the entire policy document was lengthy and ran to 26 pages. Qualitative research, within an interpretive approach, allows for multiple methodological practices and so, in line with my critical approach, I opted to use a form of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), known as Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA). According to Hyatt (2013), CPDA is interdisciplinary and offers a systematic framework for analysis, uncovering how

language works in the discursive construction of power relations. It seemed, therefore, a reasonable choice for a hermeneutic analysis of relevant extracts of the *Plan*. The CPDA framework focusses on macro semantic and societal levels and on micro lexico-grammatical aspects of discourse. These macro and micro levels enable 'a principled shunting back and forth between analyses of the text and the social' (Luke, 2002:102). I employed the framework's five criteria to examine elements of the policy text as follows:

- modes of legitimation
- interdiscursivity and intertextualisation
- evaluation
- presupposition/implication
- lexico-grammatical construction.

These five criteria are explained and exemplified in Chapter 4.

My aim was to explore the *Plan's* rationale by focussing on two relevant extracts and analysing the linguistic representations used to see if that helped reveal the substance and ideology they inscribed. Moreover, because I suspected that teachers' opinions may have been discursively shaped by top-down guidance, I would be able to draw on some of the insights gleaned from this discourse analysis to inform my analysis of the interview data.

In sum, I used an interpretive approach which sought to explore a small group of secondary teachers' experiences and their views or perspectives of these experiences. In this study, my participants were fourteen secondary teachers whose experiences and views I sought to reveal in relation to a specific curricular reform policy, namely, the *Plan*, in a period of continuing curricular change. My research instruments of choice were semi-structured interviews and CPDA which I elaborate upon below, after a section in which I consider ways of ensuring that my study could be deemed 'good research'.

## 3.3 Good Research?

### 3.3.1 The Interviews

The challenges to qualitative research are many. The work of qualitative researchers is often described by critics as unscientific, only exploratory, or subjective and, as noted above, my overall interpretive approach was undeniably both exploratory and subjective. In direct

contrast to quantitative research traditions which view objectivity as a goal, qualitative researchers acknowledge that the very nature of the data gathered and the analytic processes in which they engage are grounded in subjectivity (Morrow, 2005:250). It is a mistake, however, to equate all qualitative research with subjectivity and all quantitative approaches with objectivity (Scriven, 1972). All research is subject to researcher bias; qualitative and quantitative perspectives have their own ways of approaching subjectivity and are very much influenced by the paradigms guiding the research (Morrow, 2005:254) as well as by the claims they make.

As I was aware of this qualitative versus quantitative debate, I knew that selecting an interpretive approach and using data from a relatively small selection of interviews would be open to criticism, especially by those who continue to embrace a positivist quantitative approach as the only way to conduct 'good research'. I fully acknowledge that the kind of knowledge created in this study is not scientific, experimentally verifiable or generalisable and at no point do I claim that my small participant group is representative of secondary teachers across Scotland, or even locally. However, to try to ensure that my research was 'trustworthy,' in relation to the interviews, I used Guba's (1981) four criteria of trustworthiness, namely, credibility (corresponding to internal validity), transferability (corresponding to external validity/generalisability), dependability (corresponding to reliability) and confirmability (corresponding to objectivity).

The concept of 'rigour' in interpretive research is viewed in terms of systematic and transparent approaches to data collection and analysis. With respect to Guba's criterion of credibility, I used verbatim extracts from the interview transcripts and, in so doing, I provide a 'true' account of what the participants said during the interviews. The data, I understand however, is merely a snapshot of the interviewees' views at the time of each interview and could change were I to interview the teacher participants again today. Regarding transferability, I tried to include sufficient detail regarding how the data was collected and analysed but, at no point, do I claim that the study is generalisable. Producing findings generalisable to other studies of education policy is not the aim of this study. Nor do I think that another researcher would necessarily want to 'repeat' my study, although I have endeavoured to be as transparent as possible regarding my methods and what I did at every stage of the research. With respect to confirmability, and by that I mean a degree of neutrality which reflects the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the interviewees, I sought to limit any verbal intrusion on my part during the interviews and to remain as neutral

and distanced as possible with respect to my own views throughout the process. I also sought to represent participant viewpoints equitably and accurately. Confirmability is based on the acknowledgement that research is never objective (Morrow, 2005) and addresses the core issue that:

> … findings should represent, as far as is (humanly) possible, the situation being researched, rather than the beliefs, pet theories or biases of the researcher (Gasson, 2004:93).

In this respect, I worked reflexively to listen to the data so that the participants' voices, thoughts, and perceptions and not my voice, thoughts, and perceptions, were reproduced in this study. Similarly, I avoided a narrow focus on seeking what I hoped to find to confirm my own views and experiences. In the next section, I outline my use of CPDA and try to be similarly aware of its limitations.

### 3.3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

In choosing CDA, I was aware that two of the most common criticisms levelled against it are that the approach too easily allows for a researcher to uncover the findings that she expects or wants to find, and that the approach lacks methodological rigour. Some scepticism regarding CDA's place as a theoretically grounded analytical and methodological tool for social science research undoubtedly remains, even though CDA appeared in 2002, to be showing 'some signs of maturity, if not late adolescence' (Luke, 2002:100). Reflecting widely held criticisms of CDA, Widdowson (2005) argued that it is a biased, unprincipled, decontextualized cherry-picking of linguistic features, closer to impressionistic commentary, which supports interpretation and yields simplistic findings. Critics have also focussed on its lack of generalisability although, as noted above, generalisability was not my aim.

Drawbacks notwithstanding, CDA is often seen as an attractive methodological tool for doctoral students from a wide range of social science disciplines who, according to Bukhari and Xiaoyang (2013:9), 'are interested in carrying out research on the relationship between superstructures and social issues.' My choice of CDA stemmed from my interest in the relationship between education policy (emanating from government, arguably a superstructure) and teachers' understanding of policy/guidance into practice (mediating curricular issues). The adventure of CDA, I argue, lies in its potential as a tool to explore how

discourse shapes or constructs teachers with allegiances to the collective and how this discursive shaping of identity allows teachers to mediate the issues which arise from the discourse. In other words, I use CDA to allow me to gain an increased understanding of the effects of discourse on teachers' views and actions because, following Breeze (2011), CDA might identify and interpret the way ideology functions in and through discourse.

The most important aspect of qualitative rigour in CDA is a clearly articulated analytical framework and, in this respect, I opted to deploy the framework of Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA). One of the benefits of CPDA is its ability to bring together social and linguistic analyses of discourse, integrating analysis at the macro level of social structure with analysis at the micro linguistic level. Luke (2002) argues that CDA requires the overlay of 'social theoretic discourses for explaining and explicating the social contexts, concomitants, contingencies and consequences of any given text or discourse' (p. 102), accompanied by 'a principled and transparent shunting back and forth' (p. 100) between the micro and macro. To ensure trustworthiness, a transparency of CPDA's framework was crucial and I provide details of this framework in Chapter 4. I next turn to my interview procedures and the ethical considerations in the study.

### 3.4 Interview Procedures and Ethical Considerations

#### 3.4.1 Participant Selection

As a single researcher, from the outset I was aware that the number of participants in my study would be limited both by wanting to gather rich data from each of them and by my personal restrictions of time and resource. In this respect, my study resembles practitioner enquiry in that it reaches a determinate sample of the current body of Scottish secondary teachers. I chose to interview secondary teachers because I am a teacher of Modern Languages in the secondary sector and my study focuses on the changes introduced by the *Plan* in the lower secondary Broad General Education (BGE) phase (ages 11 to 15) and the overhaul of the exit examinations in the upper secondary Senior Phase (ages 15 to 18).

The maximum number of participants I decided I could reasonably interview was fifteen. Hence, I aimed to recruit a participant group of twelve to fifteen secondary teachers of different subject disciplines with more than three years of experience. I decided that my study required teachers with more than three years of experience because, to address my research

questions, their lived experience had to span at least three years of guidance and policy reform regarding CfE, as well as the imposed changes to the exit examinations. In addition, I decided that the participant group, as far as possible, should specialise in different subject disciplines to reflect the interdisciplinarity of CfE. CfE was arguably conceptually progressive in its aspiration to transcend disciplinary divides and embrace interdisciplinary learning; it embodied the viewpoint that interdisciplinarity is real life, has been with us for a long time in all facets, and was created to address both real-world problems and academic needs (Strathern, 2005:69).

Furthermore, while my small-scale study was not aiming for generalisability or representativeness, from a personal perspective, I was interested in the mixed demographic of comprehensive education in Scotland's varied geographical and geopolitical landscape. More importantly, I realised early in the recruitment process that, by widening the net to different local authorities, I could increase my chances of achieving the desired level of participation. Political responsibility for education at all levels is vested in the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Government's Education and Lifelong Learning Department. State schools, however, are owned and operated by local authorities which act as education authorities. Since 1996, when Scotland's 9 regional councils and 53 district councils (and 3 unitary council for the islands) were condensed into 32 unitary councils or local authorities, these 32 education authorities have been responsible for ensuring that statutory requirements are met and that they are diligent in taking forward nationally agreed policies and guidelines from the Scottish Government and Education Scotland. They are also responsible for spending and are accountable for educational funding. Comprehensive secondary schools are for pupils in the age range 11/12 to 18 and are co-educational institutions that largely serve a local geographical community or catchment area (Howieson et al., 2017). The demographic of each community can be significantly shaped by location (urban, mixed urban/rural, rural) and contexts of economic development (industrial, de-industrialised, agricultural, rural). Exceptions occur, however, and whilst disadvantaged children can live in affluent areas, not all children in poor areas are deprived (Humes, 2019). Mindful of these details from a personal interest perspective, I recruited participants from three local authorities, one urban, one mixed urban and rural, and one rural.

Although fifteen was my planned optimum participation, the recruitment process was relatively challenging and resulted in fourteen volunteers. Access to teacher participants was mainly via a well-established, two-step process. This involved seeking permission in writing

from each local authority in the first instance and, subsequently, if successful, via a direct written request to individual headteachers detailing the purpose of the research and providing written invitations to teachers to participate. Two local authority applications and two requests to headteachers were rejected. On reflection, possible reasons for some less than enthusiastic responses to my initial research applications from some local authorities and schools could have resided in the increasingly political nature of teacher voice. As education has become increasingly politicised, so have expectations of schools and teachers (MacBeath, 2008). The risk of the possibility of professional labelling may have militated against acceptance of the study in some cases. However, I provided guarantees regarding appropriate safeguards of confidentiality and, for the fourteen teachers who participated, these safeguards were respected at all stages of the study. Conversely, the character of Scottish teaching professional life which is buttressed by the General Teaching Council Scotland's (GTCS) Professional Standards and the commitment of all local authorities to practitioner enquiry, undoubtedly assisted the recruitment process. The culture in Scottish schools supports this study's style of investigation and encourages teachers to be active agents in the generation of professional knowledge and critical insight.

The fourteen participants were, therefore, essentially a naturally occurring group, an emergent selection of participants comprising five from urban settings, five from mixed urban/rural settings and four from rural settings. Owing to the voluntary and challenging nature of the recruitment process described above, I decided not to limit participants in the event of duplicated subject disciplines and duplicated subject disciplines did arise. For purposes of confidentiality, at the point of transcription, the participants were given number identifiers and were referred to as participants 1 to 14 from the transcription phase onwards. Interviewees 1, 5, 8, 10 and 13 were recruited from urban schools, 4, 6, 7, 11 and 14 from mixed urban/rural schools, and 2, 3, 9 and 12 from rural schools. The participants' subject disciplines and local authorities (urban, mixed urban/rural and rural) were as follows:

Participant 1 History and Modern Studies (urban)

Participant 2 English (rural)

Participant 3 Biology (rural)

Participant 4 Physics (mixed urban/rural)

Participant 5 History (urban)

| | |
|---|---|
| Participant 6 | Geography and ASN (mixed urban/rural) |
| Participant 7 | Geography (mixed urban/rural) |
| Participant 8 | Maths (urban) |
| Participant 9 | Modern Languages and Drama (rural) |
| Participant 10 | Biology (urban) |
| Participant 11 | Biology (mixed urban/rural) |
| Participant 12 | ASN (rural) |
| Participant 13 | Modern Languages (urban) |
| Participant 14 | English (mixed urban/rural) |

In summary, duplication of subject disciplines occurred in History (2), English (2), Biology (3), Geography (2), Modern Languages (2). Participant 4 specialised in Physics, Participant 8 specialised in Maths and Participant 12 specialised in Additional Support Needs (ASN). Subject disciplines not represented therefore were, for example, Chemistry, P.E., Religious Education, Art, ICT, Economics, Music, Accounting, Health and Food Technology, among various others. Ten of the participants were female and four were male, and all fourteen of them had more than ten years of experience.

### 3.4.2 Participant Group

In this section, I provide a brief description of each of the fourteen participants, their schools, and the communities they serve.

**Urban Schools**

Participant 1 is a teacher of History and Modern Studies with over ten years of experience. His school is an urban comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 5 is a teacher of History with over thirty years of experience. Her school is an urban comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 8 is a teacher of Maths with over ten years of experience. His school is an urban comprehensive serving a community that comprises predominantly low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 10 is a teacher of Biology with over twenty years of experience. Her school is an urban comprehensive serving a community that comprises a large proportion of low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 13 is a teacher of Modern Languages with over twenty years of experience. His school is an urban comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

**Mixed Urban/Rural Schools**

Participant 4 is a teacher of Physics with over ten years of experience. His school is a mixed urban/rural comprehensive serving a community that comprises a large proportion of low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 6 is a former Geography teacher. She has over ten years of experience. Her school is a mixed urban/rural comprehensive serving a community that comprises a large proportion of low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 7 is a teacher of Geography with over ten years of experience. Her school is a mixed urban/rural comprehensive serving a community that comprises a large proportion of low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 11 is a teacher of Biology with over ten years of experience. Her school is a mixed urban/rural comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 14 is a teacher of English with over thirty years of experience. Her school is a mixed urban/rural comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

**Rural Schools**

Participant 2 is a teacher of English with over twenty years of experience. Her school is a rural comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 3 is a teacher of Biology with over twenty years of experience. Her school is a rural comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 9 is a teacher of Modern Languages and Drama. She has over twenty years of experience. Her school is a rural comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income working and non-working families.

Participant 12 is an ASN teacher and a part-time Principal Teacher of Equity with over twenty years of experience. Her school is a specialised ASN, rural comprehensive serving a community that combines higher income and low-income and non-working families.

### 3.4.3 The Interview Process

The teacher participants were invited and consented to take part in a face-to-face, one-to-one recorded interview lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The normal and rigorous ethics procedures of the University of Glasgow were followed prior to the commencement of interviews. In preparation, I submitted a detailed Ethics Application, including draft interview questions, to the University's Ethics Committee. Prior to meeting, the participants were sent a Plain Language Statement (see Appendix 1) detailing the aims of the study and the nature of participation. In this statement, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time in the event of perceived obtrusive questioning and assurances were given regarding privacy and confidentiality of data. It should be noted that none of the participants refused to answer any of the questions I posed. A Consent Form was signed by each participant at the time of the interview (see Appendix 2) and all participants consented to having the entire conversation recorded electronically using a portable digital Dictaphone. Approximately half of the fourteen interviews took place during the day in school settings and were carefully planned and timed in advance. The remaining interviews took place after school in public settings.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews meant combining clear primary questions with flexible follow-up questions in response to the participants' answers. As a teacher talking to other teachers, I felt culturally in tune with the participants. This meant I felt comfortable adapting the schedule of questions depending on topical trajectories in the conversation. According to Morrow (2005), it is crucial to the authenticity of interview research that the

researcher is able to support the ‘voice’ of the participants using a range of methods designed to facilitate the expression of their opinions and discussion of their experiences. For the purposes of confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), I worked reflexively to limit the impact of my presence on the participants’ responses. The use of a recording device, although generally normal practice in order to capture the entirety of conversations, allowed me to develop a rapport with the participants which, in turn, encouraged fruitful interviews and plentiful rich data about the participants’ lived experiences without the need to take notes.

### 3.4.4 Transcription Process and Preparing the Data for Analysis

All of the interviews were transcribed individually by me using a word processor and back-up copies were made. During the transcription process references to participants’ names and other possible identifiers were removed and each interviewee was allocated a number from 1 to 14. Each interview file was assigned a unique identifier which was cross-referenced separately to each participant’s Consent Form and thus to their name. These steps ensured that the ethical issues of confidentiality and security of data were addressed, and participants could not be identified from their responses.

In preparation for analysis, I listened and re-listened to the recorded interviews as a precursor to transcribing them verbatim from the recordings. Every time I re-listened to the data, it helped me make sense of it. As a solo researcher, full engagement with the data was important to identify themes and I adopted a naturalised approach which entailed transcribing every utterance in as much detail as possible. Making sense of the data meant drawing upon the principles of Template Analysis (King, 1998). Theme identification was central to the analysis of the transcripts. Themes are, according to King (1998: np), ‘pragmatic tools to help the researcher produce their account of the data,’ and arise from engagement with the text as the researcher attempts to ‘address a particular research question’. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is the method used most commonly in qualitative data analysis approaches for identifying, describing and interpreting themes to offer ‘thick descriptions’ of lived experience (Braun and Clarke, 2006:79).

With my transcripts in mind, I decided to blend aspects of thematic analysis with reflective analysis. Reflective analysis ‘relies primarily on intuition and judgement in order to portray or evaluate the phenomenon being studied’ (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007:472). I was able to segment questions and answers from the different transcripts as a first step towards looking

for ‘patterns, themes, categories, and regularities’ (Cohen et al., 2007:461). Ryan and Bernard (2003) recommend ‘pawing’ through transcripts and marking them with different coloured highlighter pens as one of the best ways to begin hunting for patterns in qualitative data. I followed this advice and pawed through the data manually and, although I found it laborious, it enabled me to retain proximity to the data. I was concerned with addressing the specific research questions in Chapter 1 and I analysed the data with these in mind. As my analysis was driven by the research questions, I segmented the transcripts into five salient themes:

- the perceived weaknesses of CfE
- the perceived rigour of the Benchmarks
- the perceived over-use of assessment in general and the perceived pedagogical challenges encountered on account of the new National Qualifications.
- the perceived success of the Benchmarks and the National Qualifications in raising attainment
- the omission of teacher voice from curricular reform

A segmented table supported my exploration of intersecting themes and enabled an understanding of the homogeneity of responses within the group and this table is included in Appendix 3. These themes are discussed in terms of their importance to this study’s research questions in Chapter 5. I turn now to describe my approach to analysis of the interview data and the *Plan*.

## 3.5 Teacher Voice and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as Method

### 3.5.1 Teacher Voice

As already stated in Chapter 1, my perception of a noticeable lack of teachers’ input to curricular and qualifications change processes in the period 2014 to 2016, positioned teacher voice as neglected, if not omitted. Gyurko (2012) defines teacher voice as:

> … the expression by teachers of knowledge or opinions pertaining to their work, shared in school or other public settings, in the discussion of contested issues that have a broad impact on the process and outcomes of education (Gyurko, 2012:4).

Kirk and MacDonald (2010) argue that it is teachers’ immersion in the local context of implementation from which they derive their ‘authoritative voice’ (p. 558). Authoritative voice, they claim, is derived from teachers’ knowledge of pupils, their available resources

and the 'obdurate practicalities of their work' (p. 558). By virtue of their authoritative voice teachers, Kirk and MacDonald (2010) argue, should be elevated from mere receivers and reproducers of curriculum to collaborators with other partners in the production of curriculum reform. Anderson and Herr (1999) suggest that academics and practitioners should find better ways to work together. They reject categories like 'academic' and 'school practitioner' because they perceive them to be monolithic and suggest that epistemological, political and material differences between academics and teachers need to be grappled with in order to advance the dissolution of an embedded discourse which regards bottom-up and top-down approaches to curriculum reform as polar opposites (Anderson and Herr, 1999).

The need to include teacher voice in curricular reform and decision-making has long been recognised by educational researchers (Gozali et al., 2017). Ozga (2000) argues that policy is not a product to be openly and naively received but involves a process of 'negotiation, contestation, or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy-making' (p.2). Smit (2005) argues that teachers' voices provide valuable local knowledge that 'offers substance and deeper nuanced understandings of the complexities at the various levels of policy implementation' (p. 294). Nevertheless, public and policy conversations about teaching are often driven by 'those who do not do the work themselves' (Hansen, 2004:120). Hansen (2004) argues that:

> There always exist multiple ways of accounting for the work of teachers that are fashioned by those who do not do the work themselves. This political and often public condition generates tensions, ambiguities and confusion. It triggers debates that all too often devolve into either cheerleading for the profession or throwing mud in its face (Hansen, 2004:120).

Hansen's claim that teacher voice has been constrained by 'those who do not do the work themselves' (2004:120) highlights a problem of acculturation. Fairclough (1989) argues that teacher talk, like all conversations, is shaped, or discursively constructed, by the social, historical, political and cultural contexts at the time and location of its production and reflects the beliefs and social practices of not only the teacher-speakers, but also the larger society in which they have become acculturated. According to Liefshitz (2015), no matter how unstructured the interview, how unobtrusive the observation, how self-reflective the researcher or how active the teachers are in co-designing the research, teacher's talk about teaching is mediated by the researcher's presence. Teachers are almost always positioned as

respondents and objects of observation, teachers' words are data to answer the researcher's pursuit (Liefshitz, 2015). Reflecting on the interviews, my sense is that the participants were spontaneous and sought to answer all my questions as openly as possible, however, I acknowledge that their responses may have been mediated by my presence. As the researcher and instrument of interpretation, I recorded the participants' voices, listened to them, transformed them into text, analysed them and summarised them. The research relationship was mutually constructed, predicated on me listening to, and the participants talking about, their lived experiences. The interviews were intended to hear the teacher participants' voices and deepen my understanding of their experiences of perceived top-down curricular change. One of the most striking contributions of teacher voice inherent in my interviews, which I will discuss in greater detail in Chapters 5 and 6, is the collective, professional affirmation of the humanistic principles and values of CfE. My positionality regarding the *Plan* was as a questioner, as I have already stated. As an interpreter of data and co-constructor of knowledge, my position with respect to the interview data was to explore areas of voiced and shared scepticism but also to question values and experiences perceived to be mediated by discursive construction.

### 3.5.2 The Operationalisation of Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA)

The whole policy document of the *Plan* runs to a total of 26 pages and a complete critical discourse analysis would have run to several hundred pages. I therefore selected two relevant extracts and analysed them using close reading techniques and the specific framework of CPDA. This analysis appears in the following chapter. Lewin-Jones (2014:77) contends that it could be argued that a close reading of a small number of texts by an individual researcher is an obsolete methodology in these times of big data and sophisticated digital tools. However, within the education research community, there is still widespread support for an approach involving scrutiny of a text or a small sub-set of texts. Baker and Levon (2015) point out that, by adopting this approach, the researcher

> … can identify more subtle social and linguistic patterns in the texts and situate interpretation of these patterns within a multi-level understanding of the broader ideological context (Baker and Levon, 2015:233).

Adopting CDA as method, language becomes a form of social practice; language as a reality-producing force, a force which brings reality into existence (Cruickshank, 2012). Taylor (2004) sees the value of CDA in

> … documenting multiple and competing policy discourses in policy texts, in highlighting marginalised and hybrid discourses and in documenting discursive shifts in policy implementation processes (Taylor, 2004:433).

Arnott and Ozga (2010) argue that policy is constructed as discourse and that policy texts carry definitions of problems, reference carefully selected evidence and argument and produce a specific kind of knowledge to guide the implementation of policy solutions. Policy texts, according to Ozga (2000:94), are 'a resource for analysis in terms of the messages they convey'. Although the literature and commentary on CDA is extensive, there is still no universally agreed definition of the field (Humes, 2017). However, Wodak (2011a) offers this general description:

> CDA can be defined as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research programme, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods or agendas. What unites them is a shared interest in the semiotic dimensions of power, identity politics and political-economic or cultural change in society (Wodak, 2011a:38).

The general method of CDA is to identify a discourse, which is seen as part of the perceived problem, and then adopt discourse analysis as a way of addressing the problem through interpretation and explanatory critique. The policy discourse I chose is the reform policy, the *Plan*, and specifically, two relevant extracts from it. The specific framework I selected is Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA). In framing the arguably neoliberal issues surrounding the *Plan,* I sought inspiration from Foucault and his concept of governmentality. Ball (1995:267) reminds me that theory in educational research should be to 'engage in struggle, to reveal and undermine what is most invisible and insidious in prevailing practices' and discourse analysis that draws on the work of Foucault is well placed to do this, according to Graham (2005). Foucault (1994) was clear, however, that he disliked prescription, stating, 'I take care not to dictate how things should be' (p. 288). My aim was not to seek a definitive account, no absolute truth; my aim was merely to interpret two extracts of the *Plan* using a Foucauldian lens for the purpose of stimulating debate.

### 3.6 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I presented the methodology of this study and evaluated the effectiveness of the methods I used. I described the conceptual foundation of my study as interpretivist with a critical slant. I engaged with relevant literature to inform a discussion around issues arising from the interview process. Efforts to derive meaning from the interview data centred on searching the interview transcripts for recurring themes and analysing them as they related to the *Plan* and the new National Qualifications. Ahead of analysing two extracts from the *Plan* in Chapter 4, I explored how critical discourse analysis is operationalised. CPDA of two extracts from the *Plan* is the subject of the following chapter and analysis of the interview data is the subject of the subsequent chapter, Chapter 5.

# CHAPTER 4

# CRITICAL POLICY DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CPDA)

## 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I focus specifically on an analysis of the discursive dimensions of two extracts from the *Plan*, using the framework of Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA). My aim, as I explained in Chapter 3, was to explore the *Plan's* rationale by focussing on two relevant extracts and analysing the contextual and linguistic references to see if that helped reveal the substance and ideology they inscribed. I opted to used CPDA and an analytic of governmentality in the service of uncloaking neoliberal ideology in the *Plan's* discourse.

The *Plan* is divided into two principal sections. The first extract I selected is the third sub-section of the first principal section following the Foreword and is entitled, *A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers*. The *Plan* begins with a Foreword by John Swinney, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, and continues under four sub-sections as follows:

- *Introduction*
- *A Relentless Focus on Closing the Attainment Gap*
- *A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers*
- *Empowering our Teachers, Headteachers, Practitioners, Parents, Communities and Children and Young People*

The second principal section is entitled, *A Clear Focus on Improvement*, and details actions to be taken to continue the implementation of a previous reform policy, namely, *The National Improvement Framework*, introduced by the Scottish Government in 2015. The second section focuses on the *National Improvement Framework's* four priorities and its six key drivers for improvement, namely, school leadership, teacher professionalism, parental engagement, assessment of children's progress, school improvement and performance information. Although the details of the *National Improvement Framework* are beyond the scope of this Dissertation, the interdiscursivity of the *Plan* with the *National Improvement Framework* is used as a cogent discursive strategy to legitimate the *Plan's* reforms.

My analysis focuses on the sub-section entitled, *A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers* (pp.10-12), in which the term 'benchmarks' is introduced under the heading, *What we will do to deliver*, as follows:

- By August 2016, Education Scotland will provide clear, practical advice on assessing achievement in literacy and numeracy – making clear the expected benchmarks for literacy and numeracy, for each level of CfE (p. 11).

- By the end of 2016, Education Scotland will provide similar advice on the achievement of curriculum levels in every curriculum area across the Broad General Education. This will allow teachers to make sure their learners are on track, with a firmer, clearer understanding of their next steps. It will also ensure that learners are developing the range of skills required to progress smoothly through the broad general education, and on into the senior phase (p. 11).

The full text of this sub-section, *A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers,* is included in Appendix 4. I chose this sub-section because, more than any other, it pertains directly to the work of teachers and practitioners. In addition, following the publication of the *Plan* in 2016, the lengthy Benchmark documents which were subsequently published, initially for Literacy and English, then for Numeracy and Mathematics, and later for each of the subject disciplines, share the same three-page introduction entitled, *Guidance on using Benchmarks for Assessment*. This three-page guidance text will also form part of the critical discourse analysis of this chapter and is included in Appendix 5. In Section 4.2, I describe the five criteria of CPDA within the framework's overarching strands of contextualisation and deconstruction. I then apply two of these criteria, namely, modes of legitimation and interdiscursivity, within the contextualisation strand of CPDA, to the chosen extracts. In Section 4.3, I discuss the findings of this analysis using a Foucauldian lens. In section 4.4, I apply the remaining three criteria, namely, evaluation, presupposition, and lexico-grammatical construction, within the deconstruction strand of CPDA, to the chosen extracts.

### 4.2 The CPDA Framework

Hyatt's (2013) CPDA framework adopts a set of five criteria to examine text from macro societal perspectives (text-external) and from micro lexical-grammatical perspectives (text-internal), as follows:

- Modes of legitimation
- Interdiscursivity and intertextualisation
- Evaluation
- Presupposition/implication
- Lexico-grammatical construction

I now explain these five criteria. 'Modes of legitimation' refer to the processes by which policies are justified to their audience 'by attachment to dominant norms and values' (Hyatt, 2013:839). Modes of legitimation include authorisation, rationalisation, and moral evaluation, three important concepts by which to investigate texts. They are explained as follows:

- Authorisation — reference to tradition, authority, custom, law, institutional authority, or individuals as justification, with authority seen as unchallengeable.

- Rationalisation — reference is made to the value or usefulness of a social action and cognitive and face-validity of a particular action, which may or may not represent a 'naturalised' ideological position.

- Moral evaluation — an appeal to a value system around what is good or desirable, ideological and linked to discourses, for example, a neoliberal discourse that asserts the desirability of educational measurement, comparison and the surveillance of teachers (Hyatt, 2013:840).

Hyatt (2013) explains that all three of these strategies of legitimation can be explicit but are more likely to involve implicit assumptions.

Interdiscursivity refers to the diverse ways in which discourses permeate each other, for example, the discourse of improvement of the *National Improvement Framework* (2015) and the discourse of raising standards inscribed in the *Plan* in 2016. Interdiscursivity is defined by Candlin and Maley (1997:212) as 'the use of elements in one discourse and social practice which carry institutional and social meanings from other discourses and social practice'. Bhatia (2010a) notes that interrelationships between and across texts, focusing primarily on text-internal properties, are viewed as intertextual in nature, whereas interrelationships across and between genres, resulting from text-external properties, are regarded as interdiscursive in

nature. Intertextuality refers to identifiable borrowings from other texts, either as direct quotations or citations, or as references to key academic figures.

Evaluation is an appeal to a value system and refers to the 'the expression of the speaker's or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the propositions that he or she is talking about' (Hunston and Thompson, 2000:5). Martin (2000) explains that evaluation can be divided into inscribed or evoked evaluation. In the inscribed category, the evaluation is carried by a specific lexical item which overtly displays the attitudinal judgement of the text producer, for example, 'excellent' or 'terrible' (Martin, 2000). In the evoked category, the evaluation is covertly constructed lexically and grammatically to evoke judgemental responses from the reader. For example, in policy texts, terms such as 'reform', 'liberalisation', 'deregulation', 'decentralisation', 'innovation' appear, on the surface, to be neutral descriptive terms. They are used, however, to construct a positive image of the change described, even though, as Hyatt (2013) points out, whether such change will be positive or not depends on the circumstances of the individual or group impacted by the policy. Similarly, negative evaluation can be evoked. Hyatt (2013) observes that positive and negative evaluation are techniques to project a notion of 'common sense' by appearing as descriptive statements when they are judgements representing specific value positions.

Presuppositions are tacitly held assumptions which help to represent discursive constructions as convincing realities. According to Hyatt (2008), they are presented in a persuasive way to construct a specific ideologically loaded view of the policy text. There are a number of lexico-grammatical means by which this can be achieved, for example, the use of negative questions which presuppose a certain answer, the use of factive verbs, the use of adjectives and adverbs that describe entities and processes they presuppose, the use of hedging or cautious or vague language, the use of change of state verbs which presuppose the factuality of a previous state, the use of invalid causal links presupposing that if one fact is true then the next is also true, among many others. Lexico-grammatical construction also refers to the use of pronouns, voice, and tense in the construction of reality. Hyatt (2008) points out that the selection of voice between active or passive can be motivated by the desire to elide agency. Simpson (1993:87) describes passivisation as the 'doer' having been excised completely from the process, a situation in which there is no agency transparency.

The CPDA framework comprises these five criteria within two strands; one concerned with contextualising the policy and the other with deconstructing the lexical content and grammatical structures of the text. The contextualisation strand of the framework focuses on

the first two criteria, namely, modes of legitimation and interdiscursivity. The second strand is concerned with the deconstruction of language and focuses on evaluation, presupposition, and lexico-grammatical construction. Firstly, I will consider contextualisation.

### 4.2.1 Contextualisation: Modes of Legitimation and Interdiscursivity

The contextualisation element of the CPDA framework focuses on modes of legitimation and interdiscursivity and comprises three parts: temporal context, policy drivers and warrants. Temporal context was explained in Chapter 2. Policy drivers are defined by Hyatt (2013:838) as 'the expression of the intended aims or goals of a policy'. Hyatt (2013) notes that a discussion of drivers is important to understand

> … the evolution of a policy … how it develops and is interpreted in different contexts through the nuanced interaction of various actors, at different times, at different levels, within local ecologies or contexts, leading to its interpretation and recontextualizations by and within institutions (Hyatt, 2013:838).

Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) describe warrants as

> … the justification, authority, or 'reasonable grounds' … established for some act, course of action, statement or belief (p. 4).

Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) divide the notion of warrant into three categories — the evidentiary warrant, the accountability warrant, and the political warrant. The evidentiary warrant derives conclusions based on evidence and is invariably presented as undisputed fact. Hyatt (2013) contends, however, that evidence is not a neutral entity and portraying it as such can be misleading. He points out that evidence is the production of selections, omissions, and interpretations, and that these decisions are imbued with values and embedded in ideology (Hyatt, 2013). The accountability warrant, and its associated rhetoric of performativity, invokes grounds for action based on results or outcomes, in other words, to improve standards or results. The political warrant refers to the way in which a policy is justified in terms of the public good and is usually 'couched in general, evocative and positively evaluated terms, such as equity, freedom, social justice, social inclusion, social cohesion, and family values' (Hyatt, 2013:839).

In the Foreword to the *Plan*, Mr Swinney invoked all three warrants. He led with the evidentiary warrant in the form of the OECD review of CfE in 2015 commissioned by the

Scottish Government, followed by the accountability warrant invoked by the rhetoric of excellence and finished with the political warrant, the greater public good, enshrined in the discourse of equity. He said:

> There are many strengths in Scottish education, reflecting the hard work and commitment of teachers, parents, and young people across Scotland. This was confirmed by the recent OECD review, *Improving Schools in Scotland: An* OECD *Perspective*. Scotland has been bold, innovative, and collaborative in its approach. However, there is further important work to do, to deliver both excellence and equity. (Scottish Government, 2016:1).

I will examine the warrants of the *Plan* after a section, firstly, about its drivers.

### 4.2.2 Policy Drivers

The present SNP-led government has an explicit commitment to raising attainment in education. In a parliamentary address in 2015, Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, said 'Improving school attainment is arguably the single most important objective in this programme for Government' (cited in McCluskey, 2017). Levels of academic attainment increasingly became a focus for government intervention on account of research which showed that children living in the most deprived areas in Scotland 'are 6 to 13 months behind their peers in problem-solving at age 5, and around two years of schooling behind their peers at age 15' (Scottish Government, 2014b:5). According to the OECD's review of CfE in 2015, the link between educational disadvantage and low levels of attainment is well documented in many countries but is particularly troubling in the United Kingdom where, 'despite national academic attainment levels above OECD averages, there are declining levels of relative and absolute achievement' (OECD, 2015:82).

Demonstrating its resolute commitment to raising attainment in education, the Scottish Government introduced a series of initiatives, approaches and strategies over the course of its successive terms as a majority SNP government beginning in 2007 such as:

- collaboration in early years' education and the introduction of the *Read, Write, Count* programme for children in the first three years of primary school,

- an emphasis within the curriculum on the links between attainment and health and wellbeing and the restructuring of teacher education following the Donaldson Review (Donaldson, 2011),

- an initiative entitled *Raising Attainment for All* (Scottish Government, 2014b) which has a national network of attainment advisors to help schools tackle the *Attainment Challenge.*[5] More recently, six months before the publication of the *Plan* in 2016, the *National Improvement Framework* was introduced which seeks improvements in attainment overall.

These initiatives and policies were supported by a drive to increase the use of data in support of tackling poverty and improving life chances. For example, the largescale longitudinal study *Growing Up in Scotland* collated data from birth for 5,000 children from 2005. It is funded by the Scottish Government and carried out by ScotCen Social Research in collaboration with the Medical Research Council at Glasgow University. The Scottish Government also supports the use of evidence and data specific to education through participation in PISA, although it withdrew from TIMSS (Trends in Mathematics and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) in 2011. The annual Scottish survey of literacy and numeracy (SSLN) was discontinued in 2016 because of the introduction of the Benchmarks and their requirements for teachers to provide data on children achieving curriculum levels in literacy and numeracy in P1, P4, P7 and S3 by school, local authority, deprivation breakdown and gender. Prior to its discontinuation, the final SSLN had found that less than half of children in the 13 to 14 age group were performing well at writing.

The *Plan* was driven, therefore, by the ideology of an ambitious SNP-led government committed to raising attainment through frequent policies and initiatives, combined with a context of decline in Scotland's PISA results in 2015. In addition, there was an atmosphere of critique surrounding CfE and, arguably, there was also pressure to generate data regarding attainment more economically than participation in expensive national and international surveys such TIMSS and PIRLS. The problems were discursively framed as a steady downswing in standards of literacy and numeracy. The solution, according to the Scottish Government, lay with the OECD. In a televised interview with Andrew Marr in 2017, in which

[5] The Scottish Attainment Challenge was launched in 2015 to help achieve equity in educational outcomes. Its objective was to ensure that every child has the same opportunity to succeed, with a particular focus on closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

the topic of Brexit and Scotland's future relationship with Europe was discussed, Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's First Minister, admitted that measures were being taken to address the decline in PISA scores in mathematics, science and literacy and she confirmed that the OECD had been communicating with her government to address concerns as follows:

> Right now, we've got a new national improvement framework, we have an attainment challenge, we have an attainment fund putting significant extra resources into education … but we have had some advice that we need to have more of a focus in our curriculum on literacy and numeracy and that's exactly what we're doing right now, so we've introduced new benchmarks for the teaching of literacy and numeracy … (Sturgeon, Interview, 2017).

The OECD review of CfE which had been commissioned by the Scottish Government was the main evidentiary warrant for the *Plan* and its Benchmarks and I now consider all three warrants — the evidentiary warrant, the accountability warrant, and the political warrant.

### 4.2.3 Warrants

As stated in section 4.2 of this chapter, Mr Swinney invoked all three types of warrant in the Foreword to the *Plan* — the evidentiary warrant, the accountability warrant, and the political warrant —which served to demonstrate their interconnection and interdiscursivity.

#### The Evidentiary Warrant

The evidentiary warrant for the *Plan* is the OECD's review of CfE, commissioned by the Scottish Government in 2015, following Scotland's decline in PISA scores in reading, mathematics, and science. As noted in Chapter 1, the OECD is an inherently political, supranational organisation. According to its website, the OECD's goals are listed as shaping policies that foster prosperity, equality, opportunity, and wellbeing for all, drawing on almost 60 years of experience and insights to better prepare the world of tomorrow. The purpose of the OECD review of CfE in 2015 was ostensibly to inform the development of Scottish education policy, practice, and leadership by providing an independent review of the curriculum and any emerging impacts seen in quality and equity in Scottish schooling (OECD, 2015). The review focuses on the Broad General Education phase, with the remit being to:

- highlight key impacts of the approach taken to developing the curriculum to date
- analyse key aspects of education policy and practice in Scotland, and integrate insights from PISA and other evidence from different countries/regions
- highlight areas where further change or development could add value to an ongoing programme of educational improvement (OECD, 2015:3).

In the Foreword of the OECD review, it is explained that:

> The (OECD) reviews are based on in-depth analysis to arrive at recommendations, using diverse available sources of data such as policy documents and evaluations in the country in question, PISA and other internationally comparable statistics, and research findings (OECD, 2015:3).

The findings of the review highlight significant challenges regarding attainment in Scottish schools, drawing on data from the PISA surveys, as follows:

> There have been declining relative and absolute achievement levels in mathematics based on international data. In the most recent 2012 PISA survey, Scotland's average was comparable to the international average, after having been one of the leading countries in maths achievement a decade before (OECD, 2015:10).

Having identified a pattern of declining literacy and numeracy levels dating from 'a decade before' and positioned this downturn as a significant problem, the review concluded that CfE was at a 'watershed' moment (OECD, 2015:10) and that, after 'a decade of patient work to put in place the programme,' (p.10), it was time to 'boldly enter a new phase' (p.10) and 'create a new narrative' (p.15). The problems with CfE, according to this review, were:

> … insufficient use of assessment information to support children's learning progress and curriculum development. Too many teachers are unclear what should be assessed in relation to the Experiences and Outcomes, which blurs the connection between assessment and improvement. Beyond existing terms, current assessment arrangements do not provide sufficiently robust information, whether for system-level policymaking, or for local authorities, or for individual schools or across CfE domains for learners and their teachers. The proposed National Improvement Framework has the potential to provide such a robust evidence base. It will be essential to maintain the dual focus - on the formative function while improving evidence on learner outcomes and progression (OECD, 2015:11).

Interdiscursivity with the *National Improvement Framework* is used, however, at the heart of the evidentiary warrant are the OECD review group's opinions that 'current assessment arrangements did not provide sufficiently robust information' (p. 11) and that vague Experiences and Outcomes 'blurred the connection between assessment and improvement' (p. 11). These claims, made by the authors of the OECD review, are arguably nothing more than opinions expressed as facts. Hyatt (2013) points out that the evidentiary warrant is premised on the establishment of the credibility and trustworthiness of the evidence and is highly persuasive. The way in which the opinions of the review group are framed serve to make them appear undisputed because their legitimacy is based upon evidence, namely, data from the PISA surveys since as far back as 2002. According to Pons (2012:206), PISA is an 'evidence-based regulation tool' and it represents, I and other commentators contend, a formidable mode of legitimation. I will next examine the accountability and political warrants.

**The Accountability and Political Warrants**

The accountability and political warrants invoked by Mr Swinney in the Foreword of the *Plan* are linked to the evidentiary warrant by the ideological interconnection of assessment and monitoring as a tool to improve education systems. Mr Swinney states, 'there is further important work to do, to deliver both excellence and equity' (p. 2). His statement invokes both the accountability warrant ('further work to do, to deliver excellence') and the political warrant ('equity'). Examining firstly the accountability warrant and its tensions in practice, the OECD's review of CfE acknowledged these tensions:

> Both developmental and accountability purposes are inherent in any assessment and evaluation frameworks … many education jurisdictions have sought to resolve the tension this brings through developing parallel assessment systems: one that emphasises formative purposes to inform teaching and learning, with another that allows for easy aggregation of data to make judgements about quality of provision by a school or an educational jurisdiction. This latter purpose is usually met by some type of standardised test or benchmarking of learners' progress and achievement. The tension that arises under these circumstances is that the latter sources of assessment evidence may come to be seen as having greater importance than the former, particularly under circumstances that bring strong accountability pressures to bear (OECD, 2015:152).

Increased accountability is generally known to lead to a phenomenon of 'teaching to the test.' The academic research which the OECD review drew upon to justify increased accountability without high-stakes assessment or a 'teaching to the test' phenomenon taking priority over formative assessment, was a privately-funded report written by Herman and Gribbons (2001) and a study undertaken by Timperley, Kaser and Talbert (2014). The report by Herman and Gribbons (2001) was supported by a grant from the Stuart Foundation, an organisation founded in 1985 by the Carnation Company, to the University of California's Centre for the Study of Evaluation. Both reports advocate increased accountability. According to Timperley, Kaser and Talbert (2014), for a system of balanced accountability to ensure high quality and equity, there has to be a strong foundation of evidence so all key players at each layer of the system are able to answer the question, 'Are we making enough of a difference?' (p. 17). The inclusion of the word 'enough' in this question, according to Timperley et al. (2014:19), means that student progress needs to be monitored against some benchmarking system so that everyone in the system could have confidence in their judgements and could assess their own contribution towards achieving individual and system goals. It would appear that increased accountability, target setting, benchmarking, and achieving visible, measurable outcomes may, arguably, be the direction of travel for CfE for the foreseeable future and I discuss this point again in relation to my findings in Chapter 6.

Turning to the political warrant, the interlinking of political justification (equity) with the accountability warrant (delivering excellence) is immediately evident in the *Plan's* title, namely, *Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland.* In the first sentence of the Foreword, it is explicitly stated that the review of CfE 'was commissioned by the Scottish Government' (OECD, 2015:3), which arguably demonstrates an undemocratic imposition. In the first paragraph, Mr Swinney references the First Minister's 2016 electoral pledge to ensure that education is the defining mission of the Scottish Government. Mr Swinney details the government's overriding political aim to further the public good as follows:

> There can be no greater responsibility than working to improve the life chances of our children (p. 1).

Humes (2017) points out that education was always high on the political agendas of all political parties in Scotland throughout the post-devolution period and, although there were differences of emphasis and substance, there was general agreement that a successful education system

was vital to the nation's future. The objective of closing the attainment gap emerged as a growing political concern following the OECD's review of Scottish education in 2007 which highlighted a marked gap between outcomes for socially 'advantaged' and 'disadvantaged' pupils and concluded that:

> Children from poorer communities and low economic status are more likely than others to underachieve, while the gap associated with poverty and deprivation in local government areas appears to be very wide (OECD, 2007:15).

Since then, the poverty-related attainment gap, and closing it, has been at the forefront of the SNP's period in government and is referenced in the third paragraph of the Foreword. As Mr Swinney had just been appointed as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, following a snap general election in May 2016, in this third paragraph, he personally assures his readership regarding the commitment of his party to raising attainment as follows:

> I am committed to raising attainment and making demonstrable progress in closing the gap in attainment between our least and most disadvantaged young people over the lifetime of this Parliament (p. 1).

The SNP's 2016 electoral manifesto had already given the same commitment, stating:

> Ensuring excellence for all and closing the gap in attainment between young people from our most deprived and least deprived communities will be the defining mission of the SNP in the next parliament (SNP, 2016, Part 2:8).

Equity and closing the attainment gap were clearly at the heart of the political warrant. Jones and McBeth (2010:346) observe that the political world 'is increasingly about policy marketing and narratives'. Policy narratives are made up of four elements: first there is a setting, or a context. Secondly, there is a 'plot that introduces a temporal element,' drawing on notions of progress, decline and reform (Jones and McBeth, 2010:346). Thirdly, there are characters who are 'fixers' of the problem, for example, Nicola Sturgeon, John Swinney, the SNP. Then there are 'villains,' for example, poverty, inequity, deprivation, and even a 'villainous' curriculum with an extensive array of Experiences and Outcomes and a perceived inefficacy in closing the poverty-related attainment gap. Finally, there are 'victims,' namely, Scotland's pupils and teachers.

In sum, the predominant evidentiary justification for the *Plan* was the OECD's review of CfE which drew on data from the PISA project, but the persuasiveness of this evidence was increased by the interdiscursivity of authoritative and rational economic and political

arguments relating to educational improvement. I will now discuss the findings of this first stage of the analysis.

### 4.3 Discussion

Edling and Frelin (2013) argue that a reform effort that is directed towards continually improving learner grades and higher order thinking skills through evidence-based methods of data collection and analysis, undermines teachers' responsibilities in developing the whole class as a democratic space for wellbeing. They suggest that overplaying cognitive outcomes means underplaying everything else (Edling and Frelin, 2013). Biesta (2012) argues that, in the light of the recent tendency to focus discussions about education almost exclusively on the measurement and comparison of educational outcomes, there is a need to reconnect with the purpose of education. The *Plan* and its Benchmarks, as an intrinsic initiative in the Scottish Government's programme of prolific policy enactment to raise attainment, bear a resemblance to the initiatives of other nations, such as the Republic of Ireland, in the direction of legitimating evidence-based practices and new public management[6] across all education sectors (Hislop, 2012, 2014; Lynch et al., 2012; Quinn, 2013). Mooney Simmie (2014) argues that policy directed at increasing measurement is about changing governance and repositioning the curriculum and assessment which echoes Lawn's (2006) study, referred to in Chapter 2, in which he argues that increased measurement of standards is a technology of soft governance which serves to depoliticise policy.

Applying a Foucauldian analytic of governmentality to the OECD review of CfE which relied on data from PISA, leads me to question the legitimacy of PISA and the opinions reflected in the review. Sjøberg (2015) describes the PISA behemoth as a well-funded, international, technoscientific machine and the world's largest empirical study of schools and education, with estimated annual costs of $80 million. Its size and importance, Sjøberg (2015) claims, have turned it into a social phenomenon which has to be understood in the wider social, political, and cultural context as a normative instrument of educational governance. Hopfenbeck et al. (2018) explain that the tests themselves have a strong focus on literacy but the test content is independent of the participating countries' school curricula. They highlight that the tests have been shown to correlate highly at student level with intelligence tests (Hopfenbeck et al., 2018). Nyborg (2007) compares the OECD's definition of cognitive

[6] New Public Management (NPM) is a term to describe approaches developed initially during the 1980s as part of an effort to make public services more efficient using private sector management models.

literacy to Spearman's (1904) definition of intelligence, a definition which is widely contested as reductive due to its presumption of one quantifiable factor governing human intelligence. The focus of PISA, Hopefenbeck et al. (2018) claim is in assessing whether 15-year-old learners can apply what they have learned in school in real life situations by the time they have finished their compulsory schooling. PISA measures the knowledge and skills of 15-year-old students in three main domains, namely, reading, science and mathematics, every three years. In each cycle, one of the domains is in focus: for example, reading in 2000 and 2009, mathematics in 2003 and 2012, and science in 2006 and 2015. According to Hopfenbeck et al. (2018), reading was the main domain for the third time in 2018, giving researchers the ability to analyse trend results and patterns from three cycles in which reading had been the main focus, and thereby making the analysis more robust. In addition to the three principal domains, problem solving was included in some of the cycles, as well as financial literacy, and the new domain of global competency was introduced for the first time in 2018 (Hopfenbeck et al., 2018).

Data from PISA is known to be used in education policy formation in many countries and is disseminated predominantly in grey literature as opposed to academic journals (Baird et al., 2016; Lindblad, Pettersson, & Popkewitz, 2015; Ozga, 2012). As a result, new international entrepreneurial organisations have emerged in the field of edu-business specialising in interpreting and producing educational data and making recommendations for educational improvements. According to Carvalho (2012:183), these edu-businesses operate in 'grey zone' spaces where educational data is interpreted and mediated, and 'facts' can be fabricated. Delvaux (2008) argues that what is circulated about PISA is not the gross data, but arguments and knowledge based on these data. He claims that this a double chain of production, a two-stage process of translation from data to knowledge firstly, and then from knowledge to arguments or normative utterances which either define problems or propose recommendations (Delvaux, 2008). The most salient edu-business agencies which have emerged in the western world are Pearson and McKinsey but another example operating outside is Twaweza in East Africa. In December 2014, it was announced that Pearson had won a competitive tender to develop the frameworks for PISA 2018. Pearson's Chief Executive, John Fallon, stated in the press release, 'We are developing global benchmarks that, by assessing a wider range of skills, will help young people to prosper in the global economy' (Pearson, 2014: np.).

The OECD promotes a competitive, global free market economy in which high scores in reading, mathematics and science are regarded as predictors of a country's future economic competitiveness, whilst poor rankings in PISA tests are assumed to be negative indicators for the future of the country, according to Sjøberg (2015). These beliefs, Sjøberg (2015) argues, combined with the status and authority of the OECD, are part of the explanation for the public and political obsession with PISA. Nevertheless, the snapshot approach of PISA cannot explain the cause, nor the effect, of a decline in one cohort's tri-annual scores in literacy, numeracy, and science. The solutions offered by the OECD's review of CfE, based on selective PISA evidence, instigated the Scottish Government's introduction of the *Plan* to raise literacy and numeracy attainment levels and to provide more robust data for assessment and monitoring. Questions ought to be asked, I contend, regarding the lack of critical scrutiny of selective evidence from PISA surveys to legitimise policy reform and the introduction of increased assessment and monitoring. Ercikan et al. (2015) caution against the over-use of international assessments of achievement to generate insights for policy and practice based on PISA's methodological limitations. Their research concludes that it is highly questionable to use reading score rankings as a criterion for adopting educational policies and practices of other jurisdictions (Ercikan et al., 2015).

Another aspect of the discursive force of PISA lies in a neoliberal economic argument. At the root of this argument, is the crisis of the welfare state, within which, according to Hopmann (2008), PISA is cast as a tool for the management of expectations in an age of accountability. Hopmann's study suggests that, confronted with a growing expansion of identified needs, a shrinking purse, and a citizenry worried about the sustainability of their social supports, the modern state now manages the expectations of its citizenry with benchmarks, standards of delivery and performance. Murphy (2010) argues that PISA fits well into this pared-down welfare state paradigm but that larger social purposes of education are at stake in this much narrower educational discourse which focuses predominantly on performativity, data, and statistical indicators. He further argues that the influence of PISA jeopardises the democratisation of education policy insofar as it allows elites to pursue their own agendas with little public input (Murphy, 2010).

Data and statistical indicators are traditionally part of the language of the economy, but accountability has come to dominate contemporary education policy discourses with terminology such as 'quality,' 'excellence' and 'best practice.' Lynch et al. (2012) argue that

accountability has caused a repositioning of teachers and school leaders as managers and facilitators, with sole responsibility for the learning achievements of young people irrespective of their socio-cultural background and context. Mooney Simmie (2014) highlights the effect of new educational policy discourses which contrast starkly with previous political discourses of education as a state-centred investment for the public good, invoking instead an audit culture. Teachers and schools, she argues, participate in a distinctive new way of being and acting which requires them to continually engage in target-setting and provide evidence of having achieved and surpassed learning outcomes for their students (Mooney Simmie, 2014). The emphasis, Mooney Simmie (2014) claims, has become making learning visible, using an evidence-based paradigm, and ensuring that learners know how to learn, solve problems, and take responsibility for their learning. The OECD's review of CfE recommended the creation of 'robust evidence based on learner progress and achievement to inform all other parts of the system' (OECD, 2015:154). According to Ball (2003:215), policy technologies which encourage increased accountability sacrifice older concepts such as professionalism and the distinctiveness of the comprehensive school system is diminished in order to align it to the methods, culture and ethical principles of the private sector. In addition, measuring success based solely on outputs or outcomes runs the risk of the 'terrors of performativity' alluded to by Ball (2003) and the redefinition of teachers as mere educational technicians rather than autonomous professionals.

To sum up, the contextualisation strand of the CPDA framework, reveals the significant influence of the OECD and its controversial PISA survey on the introduction of the *Plan* and its Benchmarks. Uljens (2007) observes a shift in educational policy in countries which participate in PISA, a shift which, he claims, reflects a neoliberal understanding of the relationship between the state, the market and education. I turn next to consider the deconstruction strand of the framework.

### 4.4 Deconstruction of Text Extracts from the *Plan*

The second strand of the CPDA framework concerns the deconstruction of language and engages with the text of the two selected extracts by applying the criteria of evaluation, presupposition, and lexico-grammatical construction. Fairclough, one of the founders of CDA as applied to sociolinguistics, argues that language constructs and is constructed by society (Fairclough, 1993). According to Hyatt (2013), part of the role of language involves the shaping

of knowledge, be that through maintaining existing positionalities or creating new ones. Fairclough (1989) regards an understanding of power relationships as crucial and, particularly relevant to the deconstruction of these power relationships, is an awareness of the process of naturalisation. Naturalisation, according to Hyatt (2013), allows language to act as a social control agent and represents language practices as common sense, inevitable and beyond challenge. McKenzie (1992) considers the key aim of a critical approach to discourse analysis as an attempt to uncover this process of naturalisation and to show how 'meaning, because it is socially constructed, can be deconstructed and reconstructed' (p. 226).

#### 4.4.1 *A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers (Appendix 4)*

Humes (2017) points out that an emphasis on delivery has become a regular feature of policy statements. Priestley (2013) traces the language of delivery back to the 1990s and comments that it speaks volumes about the extent to which the discourse of business, expressed as outcomes, results, responsibility and accountability have penetrated education in recent years. Referred to in the *Plan's* title, is the metaphor of delivery. The title of the third sub-section (see Appendix 4), *A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers*, suggests that CfE does the opposite, the implication being that CfE does not deliver for children and teachers. There is no shortage of the imagery of delivery throughout the entire 26-page policy document. However, this study shares the view of Bruner (1960), that education is not a product, it is a process and, as such, it follows that it cannot be delivered. A curriculum on its own cannot deliver specified outcomes. Reification is a discursive technique which attributes existence, abilities, and agency to a concept, in this case, CfE.

#### 4.4.2 *Our Ambition*

The first heading in each sub-section is entitled *Our Ambition*, followed by a second entitled *What we will do to deliver*. The use of the possessive pronoun 'our' in *Our Ambition* references the Scottish Government and the SNP. *Our Ambition* is a deliberately positive statement of purpose which ties in with the SNP's widely publicised intention to put education at the forefront of the nation's priorities, underpinned by the stated goal of closing the attainment gap. The text begins by expressing bold and sweeping, but unsubstantiated, opinions as follows:

> The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), Scotland's approach to learning and teaching, has been a positive development in our schools. Scotland's children and young people are now much more confident, resilient, and motivated to learn (see Appendix 4).

No longitudinal research was conducted between CfE's introduction in 2010 and the publication of the *Plan* in 2016 and, therefore, the Scottish Government has no empirical evidence upon which to base its claim that, on account of the introduction of CfE, 'young people are now much more confident, resilient and motivated to learn'. Adjectives such as, 'confident', 'resilient' and 'motivated,' belong to a clinical discourse which, Mooney Simmie (2014) argues, is closely aligned to the global education reform movement, and largely directed towards individual learners from disadvantaged backgrounds. Resiliency research is rooted in psychology studies from the 1970s, when resilience was defined as bouncing back from adversity. However, since the 1990s, according to Martineau (1999), resilience has become an ideological code for social conformity and academic achievement. Martineau (1999) argues that resiliency research now focuses less on traumatised and more on disadvantaged populations and, as a result, teaching resilience to socio-economically deprived children engenders conformity to the discourse of the dominant society and fails to challenge systemic inequalities.

The OECD's PISA programme measures resilience, defined as high attainment amongst 15-year-old learners from disadvantaged backgrounds, and publishes comparative data. The OECD report entitled, *PISA in Focus* (OECD, 2011), draws the following conclusions:

> Resilient students in the 2006 and 2009 PISA surveys displayed high levels of academic achievement in spite of the fact that they came from disadvantaged backgrounds. They beat the odds stacked against them to outperform peers from the same socio-economic background and be ranked among the top quarter of students internationally. In PISA 2009, nearly one-third of disadvantaged students across OECD countries were identified as resilient (OECD, 2011:1).

This report also draws conclusions about characteristics of resilient learners, claiming that resilient students attend more regular lessons at school (OECD, 2011). PISA results, the report argues, show that the more self-confident and the more motivated students are, the greater their odds of being resilient. It concludes that schools have an important role to play in fostering resilience, self-confidence, and motivation by offering students equal opportunities to learn.

Disadvantaged students, the report argues, can and often do defy the odds against them when given the opportunity to do so (OECD, 2011:4).

Nevertheless, resilience, like 'grit,' or 'empowerment', is a discursive construct which, I contend, has been drafted into the discourse of the poverty-related attainment gap and is linked to the neoliberal 'responsibilisation of self' agenda. The 1990s were a decade of prolific resilience research. However, there remain significant concerns regarding the usefulness of resilience as a theoretical construct (Luthar, 2007) and reservations regarding its dubious scientific value have accompanied it throughout its rise (Denby, 2016). In 2007, expanding on the concept of resilience, Duckworth co-authored an article in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* and the concept of "grit" arrived in the pantheon of educational concepts. Duckworth and her research team established a psychometric scale that measured grit, defined in the title of the article as 'perseverance and passion for long-term goals,' using a self-report questionnaire (Duckworth et al. 2007). Grittiness, they argue, has little correlation with IQ but is a strong predictor of high achievement. Whether viewed as a strict measure of innate intelligence by, for example, the Wechsler Intelligence Scale (1939), or as an indicator of socioeconomic status by, for example, the Correspondence Principle (Bowles and Gintis, 1976), IQ is not everything, according to Duckworth's research team (Ris, 2015). Duckworth's research shows that character matters. However, this research has fuelled a highly contentious debate which pits grittiness and clawing a way out of poverty against a Social Darwinist argument which blames the victims of entrenched poverty for character flaws which have caused their own disadvantage (Ravitch, 2015).

Since the landmark Coleman Report[7] on equality and educational opportunity published in 1966 in the U.S., hundreds of research studies spanning four decades have chronicled the association between economic background and student outcomes. The OECD's PISA survey draws upon a limited range of research studies which focus specifically on students who, despite coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, exhibit high levels of academic achievement. For example, Finn and Rock (1997), Rouse (2001) and Waxman and Huang (1996). Given such a narrow field of empirical research, the generalisability of PISA's resilience data is questionable.

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[7] The Coleman Report, 1966, published by the U.S. Government, was based on an extensive survey of educational opportunity, mandated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and directed by the sociologist, James Coleman.

In the third line of the third sub-section of the extract, the OECD's positivity regarding CfE is referenced in a complimentary manner:

> The OECD has applauded the boldness of our approach and called on us to maintain the breadth of learning in CfE … the ultimate goal of education is that each and every child develops a broad range of skills and attributes and gains the qualifications to have choices and be successful in life (see Appendix 4).

Embedded in this paragraph is the theory of human capital. For the last fifty years, the theory of human capital which focuses on investment and return on investment has been the most frequently used economic framework in educational policymaking. It assumes that human labour can be treated as a commodity. Education is viewed instrumentally as a means of accruing individual wealth and bettering a person's life. Improved education of the workforce is regarded as an investment that will lead to economic returns for the individual and for society as a whole.

Despite the influence of Human Capital Theory over national education systems, there is widespread criticism of it. Klees (2016) argues that the approach is fundamentally flawed for the following reasons:

- earnings do not reflect productivity
- earnings are a poor measure of social benefit
- estimating the empirical effect of education on earnings is almost impossible
- critically, the underlying concept of economic efficiency is unsound.

Klees (2016) suggests that the human capital model pays little attention to structural problems and separates efficiency from concerns of equity and social value. The assumption that education causes economic growth and personal prosperity is now being challenged. Some recent data suggests the opposite — that economic growth enables more investment in education (Cobham and Klees, 2016). Furthermore, critics of the human capital model argue that the main objective of economy-driven education policies is to put the burden on people's shoulders and expect them to act for themselves. Herein, once again lies the neoliberal discourse of responsibilisation of the self. The ultimate objective of Human Capital Theory, Field (2000) argues, is to reduce the government's financial burden. This approach, he argues, stems from a neoliberal understanding of individuals as economic actors and focuses on enabling citizens to contribute to production rather than relying on the welfare state (Field, 2000). To this end, a neoliberal approach favours moving resources away from social welfare

functions towards production functions (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). It is recognised that one of the ways to positively intervene in productive functions is to increase labour quality, however, it is not the only way. And yet, for many human capital theorists, it is presented as the only way and is readily accepted by the OECD and its member nation states. Arguably, the OECD's PISA programme has been purposely developed in pursuit of human capital approaches to education. Thus, by participating in the PISA programme, the Scottish Government appears to have embraced the OECD's human capital approach without democratic discussion.

In the following section of the text, the focus switches to teachers and the actions which are required to help them 'do their jobs' as follows:

> If we are to achieve this goal, our teachers need to be clear about what is expected of them, and have the time and space to do their job … this requires us to take action on a number of fronts … We need to make the whole CfE framework much clearer and simpler. Too many documents and too much 'guidance' have accumulated as CfE has been implemented. We need clear, simple statements that give teachers confidence about what CfE does, and does not, expect of them (see Appendix 4).

Examining the wording of this section, evaluation emerges as a discursive technique. The wording is persuasive and is directed at a readership of teachers. 'Our teachers' uses a possessive pronoun to encourage teachers into the ideological fold of the government and the policymakers; this is a discursive technique to bring teachers onside. The statement, 'this requires us to take action' is in the present tense and the verb 'require' is a factive verb. The need to 'take action' is presented as a fact to convince teachers that the Scottish Government has their best interests at heart and is doing something about workloads. Teachers' workloads are not explicitly referred to, only alluded to in the sentence, 'our teachers need to have the time and space to do their job'. 'We need to make the whole CfE framework much clearer and simpler' employs comparative adjectives such as 'clearer' and 'simpler' to evoke an evaluation regarding the implied complicated nature of CfE. The statement, 'We need clear, simple statements that give teachers confidence about what CfE does, and does not, expect of them' repeats 'we need' in the present tense for emphasis. It also repeats the adjectives 'clear' and 'simple' and reifies CfE as a living thing which 'expects' certain things of teachers. However, a curriculum, as I have already pointed out is an inanimate object and cannot 'expect' anything of teachers. In addition, according to Priestley (2017), a curriculum is a multi-layered set of

social practices and these practices operate differently at different layers of the system. A curriculum is anything but simple and cannot be made to appear simple. To reify CfE and then try to reduce its interpretation to a set of 'clear, simple statements' is a misleading attempt to oversimplify its complexity. The silver bullets of simplicity, simplification, clarity, and clarification are key elements of this discourse.

'We need (to)' in the present tense is repeated six times in this sub-section. The repetition serves to instil the pressing nature of the need for governmental action. 'Teachers need to' is used once and 'it is imperative that all partners involved take the action needed' is used to conclude the sub-section. The idea of needing to 'take action' continues, and 'need' continues to be used as a constructively factive verb. 'We need to' is underlined in the text extract below to demonstrate the frequency of its use:

> Within that, <u>we need to</u> be clearer and more specific about how children's progress is assessed. This is crucial to making sure children are making the right progress in their learning – not least so they are ready to meet the demands of qualifications in the 'senior phase' of school. <u>We need to</u> de-clutter the curriculum. <u>We need to</u> make sure there is enough time in the week to allow teachers to teach the things that matter most at each stage of a child's learning. Finally**,** <u>we need to</u> strip away anything that creates unnecessary workload for teachers and learners (see Appendix 4).

The opening statement of this paragraph, 'we need to be clearer and more specific about how children's progress is assessed' appears to be almost subliminally inserted exactly mid-way through what is essentially a seven paragraph sub-section, with three initial paragraphs building the argument and three final paragraphs reinforcing the argument. Once again, the sentence is constructed as a fact, preceded by the factive construction 'we need to' in the present tense. The ideology inscribed in this statement — 'this is crucial to making sure children are making the right progress in their learning' — resembles the prescriptive approach of the previous 5-14 curriculum and assumes there is a right way to make progress. The build-up of persuasive text in the first three paragraphs seems to be about convincing teachers of the need for the series of actions that the Scottish Government has decided must be taken. Evidence and intertextuality are discursively employed in the form of the *Tackling Bureaucracy* report of 2013 to enhance credibility (see Appendix 4). The new National Qualifications are deemed to 'have been introduced successfully' (see Appendix 4) although no evidence to support that claim is offered, only a caveat which states 'the practical demands they place on teachers and young

people have created problems, which must be addressed' (see Appendix 4). No mention is made of who must address the problems which the new National Qualifications have created although, implicit, is the SQA, as the partner responsible for the new National Qualifications. This is the first appearance of the SQA in the text, implied rather than stated. The SQA could be described as the ghost at this feast; its relationship to the Scottish Government is difficult to grasp.

Returning to the text and, specifically, the two sentences:

> Within that, we need to be clearer and more specific about how children's progress is assessed. This is crucial to making sure children are making the right progress in their learning – not least so they are ready to meet the demands of qualifications in the 'senior phase' of school (see Appendix 4).

In the OECD's review of CfE, concern was expressed regarding the lack of clarity in the Experiences and Outcomes, about what should be assessed and the blurred connection between assessment and improvement. The debate about assessment and improvement is a longstanding one which hinges on formative versus summative assessment and balancing both within the framework of the curriculum and the pedagogical needs of large, mixed-ability classroom settings. The idea of using assessment to enhance learning rather than simply as a means of judging and labelling learners remains debatable. Neoliberal ideology favours increased measurement of pupils to improve schools and this will be discussed in relation to the findings of this study in Chapter 6.

The text introduces the idea of more assessment and monitoring, framed in such a way as to make it sound sensible. It suggests that 'we need to be clearer and more specific about how children's progress is assessed.' On the surface, this sounds uncontroversial and reasonable. The use of comparative adjectives such as 'clearer' and 'more specific' implies that the current situation — how children's progress is currently assessed — is neither clear, nor specific. The second sentence explains why more assessment is needed, 'to make sure children are making the right progress in their learning'. Once again, this sounds reasonable, however, there is no explanation of what 'making the right progress in their learning' means. The 'right progress' implies that there is a right and wrong way to progress through learning and that the right way is the one which the government favours and teachers ought to favour. There is no evidential basis provided, however, the discourse is framed in such a way as to persuade its readership that more assessment and monitoring, something which CfE originally eschewed, is necessary.

This discursive technique, from a Foucauldian perspective, raises the question of what is normalised and what is pathologised (Wooffitt, 2005). In normalising the 'right progress in learning', by implication, the wrong kind of progress is pathologised, a technique which permits evasion of what is meant by the 'right' and 'wrong' progress in learning.

### 4.4.3 *What We Will Do to Deliver (Appendix 4)*

Continuing to the next section of the text entitled *What We Will Do to Deliver*, there are fifteen action points, presented in bullet point format and resembling the minutes of a board meeting of a private company. The fifteen points read like a list of centrally mandated actions to 'clarify', 'simplify', 'streamline,' 'provide clear practical advice,' and 'reduce workload in schools.' In the first of these action points, Education Scotland (ES) is mandated by Mr Swinney to 'prepare and publish a clear and concise statement of the basic framework within which teachers teach.' In the six action points which follow, the adjective 'clear' or the comparative 'clearer,' the adverb 'clearly' and the future tense 'will make clear' or 'will provide clear' appear frequently. In the fifth action point, it is mandated that,

> Education Scotland will provide clear, practical advice on assessing achievement in literacy and numeracy - making clear the expected benchmarks for literacy and numeracy, for each level of CfE (see Appendix 4).

The word 'clear' appears twice in this sentence. The discourse in the first six action points is about 'clarity' which ES will provide to teachers in the form of statements providing practical advice and benchmarks. Action points seven through eleven mandate 'streamlining' as follows:

- we (the Scottish Government) will significantly streamline the current range of guidance and related material on CfE,

- the SQA will also consult stakeholders on how best to streamline its course documentation for the national qualifications

- this will seek to ensure that local processes for planning, monitoring, and tracking are as streamlined as possible

- we will also ensure that the SQA delivers the actions to simplify and streamline qualifications (see Appendix 4).

Hirthler (2013) explains that 'streamlining' means improving the efficiency of a process, business, or organisation by simplifying or eliminating. It belongs to a particular group of words such as 'outsource,' 'downsize,' 'liberalise,' 'flexibilise,' 'get lean,' 'offshore,' 'lay off' which were invented or repurposed in order to accompany the trajectory of neoliberal economics (Hirthler, 2013). Its frequent use in the text implies that the system, not individuals, and certainly not teachers, is to blame for the problems which the OECD highlighted in its review. Hirthler (2013) argues that words like 'streamlining' and 'outsourcing' remove the human element of agency and can soften reality. Neoliberalism has other tenets such as 'downsizing,' which means 'firing,' along with the benign 'privatise' which in the free market vernacular means the private theft of publicly owned assets. 'Streamlining' is therefore an opaque term, borrowed from neoliberal vernacular, intended to pacify and soften the blow.
Action points eleven to thirteen of the text relate to re-establishing taskforces to solve problems. In this case, the taskforce to be created is the Assessment and National Qualifications Group, chaired by Mr Swinney, 'to further explore what could be done to reduce workload' and 'to consult on the design of assessment within the qualifications system – involving teachers, parents, young people, employers, national partners and other stakeholders.' Action points fourteen and fifteen relate to *Developing the Young Workforce Programme*, and what the Scottish Government will do to provide more opportunities for young people to allow them to gain vocational qualifications. The only mention of consultation with teachers is in action point thirteen and relates very specifically to the 'design of assessment within the qualifications system.' By focussing on only one specific aspect of assessment, this discursively renders the gesture to involve teachers tokenistic. The rhetoric of the entire text of the sub-section entitled *What we will do to deliver* is focused on 'delivery,' 'clarity' and 'improvement' and the lengthy list of actions to be taken implies that substantial improvement is required on many different levels. The partner organisations selected by the Scottish Government to enact improvement, namely, Education Scotland and the SQA, are constructed as facilitators. Education Scotland and the SQA are reified as actors whose aim is to help teachers teach. By helping teachers teach, by simplifying resources and the curriculum, by streamlining guidance and course documentation, it is discursively implied that the Scottish Government and its partner organisations will facilitate teachers to 'deliver improvement.'

Humes (2017) points out that education is subject to the same pressures as other policy areas. By this I mean, for example, financial constraints and, according to Humes (2017), political

imperatives to respond to perceived crises, the representations of a variety of stakeholders often seeking conflicting outcomes, the reluctance of existing bureaucracies to embrace change and the difficulty of winning the hearts and minds of professionals who tend to resent political directives. The *Plan* appears to be discursively constructed to win the hearts and minds of teachers by drawing them into the ideological fold of the Scottish Government and its multiple partners, such as Education Scotland and the SQA. These organisations are committed to 'delivering' improvements using techniques favoured by the OECD, namely, benchmarks and increased surveillance in the form of assessment and monitoring. All counter arguments are excluded. Foucault explains that discourse imbues text with a specific meaning, disqualifying other meanings and interpretations and, thereby, eliminating challenges to the power of the discourse (Foucault, 1981).

#### 4.4.4 *Guidance on Using Benchmarks for Assessment (Appendix 5)*

Having critically analysed the sub-section entitled *A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers,* the introductory statement prefacing each Benchmark document for every subject discipline entitled *Guidance on using Benchmarks for Assessment* (see Appendix 5), also merits critical analysis in the context of this study. The introductory statement begins as follows:

> Education Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Statement for Practitioners* (2016) stated that the two key resources which support practitioners to plan learning, teaching and assessment are:
>
> - Experiences and Outcomes
> - Benchmarks (see Appendix 5).

The immediate invocation of Education Scotland, the principal organisation responsible for supporting quality and improvement in learning and teaching, and the document it was mandated by the *Plan* to produce, is a discursive tactic to add gravitas and legitimacy to the Benchmarks. The ideals of CfE still hold consensus approval, according to McLennan (2019), despite the OECD's perception of CfE's operational weakness in measuring pupils. The juxtaposition of the Experiences and Outcomes with the Benchmarks is a discursive tactic to position the two 'key resources' as complementary; the Experiences and Outcomes represent the old, familiar curricular approach and the Benchmarks represent a new approach. The old and the new are positioned as being at teachers' disposal to plan learning, teaching and

assessment. Discursively, this first paragraph adopts techniques of change management. Out with the old and in with the new could be considered too radical. However, positioning the old and the new as complementary appears more acceptable to those having change imposed upon them. Remarkably, no definition of the Benchmarks is offered. Instead, an explanation of the reason for the introduction of the Benchmarks and their purpose, firstly in terms of knowledge and subsequently in terms of skills, ensues as follows:

> Benchmarks have been developed to provide clarity on the national standards expected within each curriculum area at each level. They set out clear lines of progression in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics, and across all other curriculum areas from Early to Fourth Levels (First to Fourth Levels in Modern Languages). Their purpose is to make clear what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels, and to support consistency in teachers' and other practitioners' professional judgements.
>
> Skills development is integrated into the Benchmarks to support greater shared understanding. An understanding of skills and how well they are developing will enable learners to make links between their current learning and their future career options and employment (see Appendix 5).

The intended purpose of the Benchmarks is to 'provide clarity on the national standards expected within each curriculum area at each level'. The use of the passive voice in the opening sentence, 'Benchmarks have been developed,' masks the identity of the developers of the Benchmarks. There are no definitions offered, neither of 'benchmark' nor of 'national standards'. With no explicit definitions offered, it is assumed that the reader knows what benchmarking and national standards mean; their validity is therefore presupposed. Presupposition is linked to ideology and positions the reader as powerless (Polyzou, 2014) by presenting certain beliefs as true, given and unquestionable, even if, as may be the case with the Benchmarks, they may be no more than group 'guesstimates'. Crucially, the guidance document fails to address how the Benchmarks are connected to each child's developmental sequence and chronological age.

The term' benchmark' has essentially the same meaning as standard and is used in relation to the dynamic process of making relative comparisons, or target setting to improve performance. Within education, the term standard is frequently applied to the achievement or performance of pupils. The purpose of the Benchmarks, according to Education Scotland, on behalf of the

Scottish Government, is ‘to make clear what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels, and to support consistency in teachers’ and other practitioners’ professional judgements’. Echoes of OECD reports such as *PISA Results in Focus: What 15-year olds know and what they can do with what they know* (2012) and *PISA: Measuring Student Success around the World* (2014), are present in the discourse of Education Scotland’s guidance statement:

> PISA assesses the extent to which 15 year-old students have acquired key knowledge and skills that are essential for full participation in modern societies … the approach reflects the fact that modern societies reward individuals not for what they know but for what they can do with what they know (*PISA Results in Focus,* 2012:3).

The guidance document omits the words ‘comparison’ and ‘competition’ as the main purpose of the Benchmarks in favour of a more euphemistically benign construction — ‘to support consistency in professional judgements’. However, benchmarking, high stakes testing, and PISA participation have arguably moved the entire educational process towards continuous measurement of outcomes. The document states that skills development is integrated into the Benchmarks ‘to support greater shared understanding’. Once again, the wording of this sentence is euphemistically benign to mask the concept of comparison. An instrumentalist view of education is invoked in the sentence,

> An understanding of skills and how well they are developing will enable learners to make links between their current learning and their future career options and employment (see Appendix 5).

Referencing the instrumentalist links between education and employment signals two strands of debate: neoliberal commodification of education, referred to in Chapter 2, and education as human capital and a determinant of economic growth, referenced earlier in this chapter and a key tenet of neoliberal doctrine. Within the text, pupils are referred to specifically as ‘learners.’ According to Ozga (2012), the Knowledge Economy or Knowledge Society is a project that has been re-energised in the context of global economic recession. Ozga (2012) claims that changes in the structures and systems of education provision which have been brought about by the Knowledge Economy agenda are a re-engineering of education as learning. An important consequence of this shift to individualised learning is that the combination of individualisation and performance management produces a heavy reliance on data. Ozga et al. (2011) argue that data shared between transnational agencies drives up performance and fills

the space between national governments and their increasingly deregulated and devolved systems of provision. Applying an analytic of governmentality, individualised learning could be viewed as a strategy of 'soft' governance to facilitate data collection.

Continuing with this topic of data and its collection, the next paragraph of the text states that the Benchmarks

> … draw together and streamline a wide range of previous assessment guidance into one key resource to support teachers' and other practitioners' professional judgement of children and young people's progress across all curriculum areas (see Appendix 5).

An analysis of the lexicon of this paragraph throws out the following points. The word 'data' is omitted although the notion of gathering data is implied in the statement 'teachers' professional judgement of children and young people's progress'. The word 'learners' has reverted to the more benign 'children' and 'young people'. The word 'comparison' is euphemistically transformed into the statement 'teachers' professional judgement of children and young people's progress across all curriculum areas.' The Benchmarks are essentially about measurement and comparison, although Education Scotland's guidance document neglects to mention this. The closest the document comes to mentioning comparison comes in the Literacy and Numeracy section of the text where it states that 'Teachers' professional judgements will be collected and published at national, local and school levels.' Martens (2007) argues that governance by comparison and the indicators agenda, including PISA, have contributed to the creation of a governable space of comparison and commensurability, referred to as the European education space. Policy instruments, such as indicators (for example, the Benchmarks), and audit culture have become a new form of governance of national education systems. Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007) argue that these new institutional forms have the purpose of

> … orienting relations between political society and civil society through intermediaries in the form of devices that mix technical components (measuring) and social components (Lascoumes and le Galès, 2007:6).

Ozga (2009) suggests that the neoliberal turn to soft forms of governance such as data, comparison and self-evaluation has long taken hold in England. Following the introduction of the Benchmarks in 2016, it is conceivable that a neoliberal turn to soft forms of governance may have taken greater hold in Scotland.

In the sub-section of the guidance document entitled *Benchmarks in curriculum areas*, the Benchmarks in each curriculum area are described as 'concise and accessible, with sufficient detail to communicate clearly the standards expected for each curriculum level'. Once again, the discourse of simplicity and clarity is deployed to reinforce what the Benchmarks will do for teachers. The concepts embedded in 'the standards expected for each curriculum level' relate to stratification. From a governmentality perspective, questions arise regarding the authors of these standards and the standards themselves — whose standards and why these standards? The entire sub-section is undoubtedly persuasive as follows:

> Teachers and other practitioners can draw upon the Benchmarks to assess the knowledge, understanding and skills for learning, life and work which children are developing in each curriculum area (see Appendix 5).

Knowledge, understanding and skills for learning, life and work are a reference to the Knowledge Economy and the importance of the education system to Scotland's economy and future growth. However, oversimplification of the assessment of these vast areas is a reductive strategy to persuade teachers of the benefits of the Benchmarks in each curriculum area, primarily in terms of reduced workload. According to Education Scotland's guidance document, the Benchmarks

> … will help teachers ensure that learners make appropriate choices and are presented at an appropriate level for National Qualifications in the senior phase. This can help avoid excessive workload for teachers and unnecessary assessments for learners. For example, learners should have achieved relevant Fourth Level Experiences and Outcomes before embarking on the National 5 qualifications. Schools should take careful account of this when options for S4 are being agreed (see Appendix 5).

The use of 'make appropriate choices' and 'are presented at an appropriate level for National Qualifications' signify differentiation and stratification. The discourse of 'appropriate choices' signposts increased measurement of cognitive ability and skills capability which can lead to a concomitant narrowing of the curriculum as a direct result of increased gatekeeping by teachers concerned about their exit examination results and I will discuss this in Chapter 5 in relation to my findings. A body of research demonstrates, however, that broadening, not narrowing, curriculum content impacts achievement growth positively:

- a combination of quality of instruction and curriculum content impacts achievement growth (Carbonaro and Gamoran, 2002: 801)

- access to a rich curriculum is a more powerful determinant of achievement than initial achievement levels. That is, when students of similar backgrounds and initial achievement levels are exposed to curriculum material which is more or less challenging, those given the richer curriculum ultimately outperform those given the less challenging curriculum (Alexander and McDill, 1976; Oakes, 1985: Gamoran and Berends, 1987).

Priestley and Shapira (2018) argue that less choice can lead to narrowed aspirations for future study and career options. Reduced choice, they argue, is a significant issue for young people making subject choices around the age of 14, when many will have only vague ideas about their future trajectories (Priestley and Shapira, 2018). Moreover, they point out the possibility of knock-on effects relating to the numbers of students able to subsequently select courses at more advanced levels. Higher study, they argue, can involve prerequisite study in the same subject, so, dropping a subject around age 14 or delaying the trajectory to National 5 which is the entry point to Higher, will preclude it being studied later in the senior phase and could impact transitions into university or other desired destinations (Priestley and Shapira, 2018). Research from Scott (2015), and from Britton (2018) was submitted to the Scottish Government's Education and Skills Committee Subject Choices Inquiry in April 2019. I referenced this research in Chapter 2 and explained that it suggests approximately half of Scotland's local authorities have mandated their schools to offer only five or six courses in S4 instead of the traditional eight, with deprived areas hit the hardest. Five areas were identified where the Scottish education system is struggling: modern languages, ICT, arts, technologies, and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects. Britton attributed this unintended consequence to deep-rooted structures of governance in Scottish education within a system of 'distributed responsibilities and opaque accountabilities' (Britton, 2019: np), a topic which I will revisit in Chapter 6.

The remainder of the text of the guidance document is a list of Key Messages regarding the 'do's and don'ts' of using the Benchmarks as follows:

**Do**

- use literacy and numeracy Benchmarks to help monitor progress towards achievement of a level, and support overall professional judgement of when a learner has achieved a level

- become familiar with other curriculum area Benchmarks over time
- use Benchmarks to help assess whether learners are making suitable progress towards the national standards expected and use the evidence to plan their next, challenging steps in learning
- discuss Benchmarks within and across schools to achieve a shared understanding of the national standards expected across curriculum areas (see Appendix 5).

The key concepts which emerge are:

- literacy and numeracy
- progress
- levels
- national standards
- evidence
- challenge

These six concepts mirror the core values of the OECD's educational thrust and its PISA survey which, I contend, could be less about closing the attainment gap and more about increased and frequent measurement of the gap as a means of evaluating its impact on the economy and future growth. The OECD review of CfE (2015) made it clear that

> … there needs to be a more robust evidence base available right across the system, especially about learning outcomes and progress (OECD, 2015:151).

This exhortation to measure pupils more effectively leads me to question an 'unintended consequences' explanation for the current phenomenon of narrowing of the curriculum. The narrowing phenomenon could be attributable to the unintended consequences of the almost five-year delay in aligning the new National Qualifications to CfE, as highlighted by Scott (2015). Alternatively, it could be attributable to Scotland's decentralised system of governance which can lead to a dilution of accountability, as identified by Britton. Nevertheless, added to the complexity of the phenomenon, is the temporal co-occurrence of the Benchmarks with the new National Qualifications in the period from 2014 onwards. Increased stratification and differentiation of pupils which can cause unequal access to the curriculum as a consequence of the Benchmarks co-occurring with the new National Qualifications could be a more significant factor in narrowing pupils' subject choices and examination candidature than other explanations.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Findings from the deconstruction of the language of two extracts of the *Plan* reinforce the findings of the contextualisation strand of CPDA, namely, a neoliberal tendency towards the legitimisation of evidence-based practices, not unlike what appears to be happening in contemporary evidence-based policy discourses across the globe (Ball, 2003, 2012; Sahlberg, 2010; Lynch et al., 2012; Morgan and Shahjahan, 2014). A downturn in standards of literacy and numeracy in the context of a new curriculum was framed as the problem in need of a solution. Despite significant methodological limitations, the PISA survey was the predominant evidentiary justification for the *Plan* and its Benchmarks. The PISA programme's objectives of commensurability and comparison are heavily imbued with neoliberal values associated with the OECD. To have accepted these values uncritically, I contend, could be short-sighted.

The framework of CPDA supported the deconstruction of linguistic processes of naturalisation and demonstrated the ways in which language is an integral part of the social process and can be used as an agent of social control. This deconstruction also highlighted the ways in which the language of accountability and private enterprise permeate the *Plan.* A version of 'truth' was linguistically produced and institutionalised using a myriad of discursive techniques. The use of an analytic of governmentality allowed me to question the legitimacy of the version of truth produced and, further, allows me to ask whose interests are being served and to what ends, a subject to which I will return in Chapter 6. I referenced Rose et al. (2006) in Chapter 2 who suggest that governmentality is not a theory, 'rather it asks particular questions of the phenomena it seeks to understand'. Winning the hearts and minds of teachers and persuading them of the need to embrace a new audit culture using neoliberal techniques of soft governance such as increased assessment, data collection and surveillance appears to have been one objective of the Benchmarks. From a Foucauldian perspective, the Benchmarks fit with neoliberal techniques of soft governance to micro-manage teachers from a distance, as 'deliverers' of CfE to expected national standards. In the next chapter, I will consider the findings from my interviews with fourteen teachers.

# CHAPTER 5

# THE PARTICIPANTS' UNDERSTANDING

## 5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the data analysis and findings from my conversations with fourteen secondary teachers. In Chapter 1, I explained that, at the outset of this Dissertation, I felt motivated to better understand curricular tensions and to explore possible curricular contradictions which had emerged in the period which encompassed changes to the new qualifications and the introduction of the *Plan*. In the spirit of practitioner enquiry, I wanted to explore how and if the tensions I perceived, and which seemed to be underlying teachers' views expressed informally but frequently in schools, were experienced similarly or differently by other teachers. From my conversations with the participants, it was clear that, although they admired the principles and values of CfE, some had experienced professional dilemmas as a result of the changes imposed on CfE by the Benchmarks and the new National Qualifications and I demonstrate this in sections 5.5, 5.6 and 5.8 respectively of this chapter.

In Chapter 2, I explored the factors which I personally perceived to contribute to curricular tensions and contradictions. I investigated the design of CfE and I suggested that, although it demonstrates some characteristics of a process curriculum, it is rather an outcomes-based, product curriculum. I questioned if the Benchmarks were an attempt to design back from the new qualifications to the curriculum and I noted that such designing back from where students are expected to end up is a principle of outcomes-based education. As I regard CfE to be a predominantly outcomes-based, product curriculum, I argued that measurement of outcomes and mastery of competences was the focus of the new National Qualifications. I highlighted the lack of a research basis for the new National Qualifications, their apparent anti-democratic effect on the narrowing of subject choice in S4, and the apparent absence of any review body to oversee their alignment with the curriculum. I also questioned whether a neoliberal doctrine could be the underpinning philosophy of CfE, the *Plan* and the new National Qualifications. I was interested to find out whether the participants in this study perceived these factors as I did and if they regarded them as contributory to curricular tensions and contradictions.

In Chapter 4, having delved into the wording of two text extracts from the *Plan* using CPDA, I identified what could be interpreted as a neoliberal tendency towards the legitimation of evidence-based practices to enable commensurability and comparison, such as those typified by the OECD and the PISA programme. In my analysis of the interviews conducted, I felt prepared to use aspects of CDA and to explore whether participants' interviews raised any of the underlying tendencies I had tentatively identified in my policy analysis. In Chapter 4, I argued that the discourse of the *Plan* was persuasive and one of its objectives appeared to be to encourage teachers to embrace a new audit culture using neoliberal techniques of soft governance such as increased assessment, data collection and surveillance. I was aware that the participants' positionality regarding the *Plan* and the Benchmarks could range, therefore, from fully embracing the proposals, to partially embracing them, or to criticising them. I considered that all of these positionalities should inform my research question regarding the Benchmarks.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach, I used thematic analysis to segment themes from the participant conversations and the table of intersecting themes is included in Appendix 3. Thematic analysis is a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data with the aim of using them to address research questions. A theme or a pattern is characterised by its significance and captures something significant or interesting about the data and/or research question. My research questions reflected my interest in the participants' accounts of their experiences and their views and so determined the interview questions and the analysis. Braun and Clark (2006) distinguish between a top-down or theoretical thematic analysis that is driven by the specific research questions and/or the researcher's focus, and a bottom-up or inductive one that is more driven by the data itself. My analysis was driven by the research questions and was relatively more theoretical than inductive. Given that I was concerned with addressing specific research questions, I coded each segment of data that was relevant to or captured something interesting about my questions. I then organised these segments of data into broader themes that seemed to reveal something specific about the research questions. Hence, the themes captured the patterns in the data relevant to the research questions and were:

- the perceived operational weaknesses of CfE
- the perceived benefits of the Benchmarks
- the perceived over-use of assessment in general

- the perceived pedagogical challenges encountered on account of the new National Qualifications.

Within this fourth theme, sub-themes emerged, namely, the National 4, the National 5, and the influence of the SQA. Subsidiary themes were:

- the perceived success of the Benchmarks and the National Qualifications in raising attainment

- the omission of teacher voice from curricular reform.

Only three of the interviewees commented explicitly on the absence of teacher voice in curricular policy reform. However, as this was the focus of my third research question, I report it in the last section of this chapter, in section 5.8. As outlined in Chapter 1, my first research question was:

1) How do some teachers perceive the *Plan's* Benchmarks, combined with the new National Qualifications, to have influenced CfE?

The themes related to this question were:

- the perceived operational weaknesses of CfE
- the perceived benefits of the Benchmarks
- the perceived over-use of assessment in general
- the perceived pedagogical challenges encountered with respect to the new National Qualifications (including sub-themes - the National 4, the National 5, and the influence of the SQA)
- the perceived success of the Benchmarks and the National Qualifications in raising attainment.

My second research question had a narrower, more specific focus than the much broader focus of my first question, and only data from the fourth theme related to this question. In this respect, the data for my second question was, like that of my third question, minimal in comparison to the first. My second research question was:

2) Do some teachers perceive tensions between the Broad General Education phase of the curriculum and the exit qualifications?

The key theme related to this question was:

- the perceived pedagogical challenges encountered with respect to the new National Qualifications (including sub-themes - the National 4, the National 5, and the influence of the SQA).

My third research question was:

3) Do some teachers believe that policy is being made, and guidance introduced, without adequate attention to all stakeholders, especially teachers?

The theme related to this question was:

- the omission of teacher voice from curricular reform

In section 5.3, I explore and analyse the participants' perceptions of the first theme, the perceived operational weaknesses of CfE, in relation to my first research question. In section 5.4, the second theme of the perceived benefits of the Benchmarks is considered, again in relation to my first research question. In section 5.5, the third theme of assessment in general and the fourth theme of the perceived challenges of the new National Qualifications in particular, are examined and analysed from the perspective of their influence on CfE, both in relation to my first research question, in section 5.6. In section 5.7, the fourth theme, the perceived success of the Benchmarks and the National Qualifications to raise attainment is explored and analysed, once again in relation to my first research question. In section 5.8, the fourth theme is revisited in relation to my second research question. As my third research question relates to teacher voice, in the final section, 5.9, I explore and analyse the sixth theme of the omission of teacher voice from curricular reform. I am aware of the potential pitfalls of allowing the research questions to drive my analysis and I discuss these dangers and ways of ameliorating them firstly in the following section, 5.2.

## 5.2 The Pitfalls of My Approach

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2000) explain that fabricating evidence can be a common problem in the process of interpreting data (Crabtree and Miller, 1999), even though this is not an intentional process but constitutes the unintentional, unconscious "seeing" of data that researchers expect to find. In Chapter 3, I explained that I worked reflexively throughout the research process to maintain a degree of neutrality in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criterion of confirmability. My study began with an initial research idea regarding the impact of the Benchmarks and the National Qualifications on CfE and the research questions which evolved later in the process influenced the way in which I coded for themes. This form of top-down thematic analysis tends to provide a more detailed analysis of some aspects of the data rather than a rich description of the data overall. In order to ensure what Morrow (2005:256) describes as 'adequacy of interpretation,' which is essential, according to Morrow (2005) to round out Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of trustworthiness (credibility), I used

the actual words of the participants to demonstrate that my interpretations of the data were grounded in their lived experiences. In Chapter 3, I explained that my findings were not intended to be generalisable.

### 5.3 The Perceived Operational Weaknesses of CfE

This theme emerged as significant because it helps to address my first research question, with CfE at the core of that question: How do some teachers perceive the *Plan's* Benchmarks, combined with the new National Qualifications, to have influenced CfE? Had the participants been content with the entirety of CfE's proposition, its perceived operational weaknesses would not have emerged as the recurring pattern revealed in the data. Hereafter, I refer to each participant with P, for participant, and the number I attached to each, so Participant 1 is P1 and so forth.

According to P1, *'CfE's principles were good'* but '*the Experiences and Outcomes were too vague and difficult to measure'*. He explained that *'they did not tell me where I was going nor the route to take'*. P2 thought that the Experiences and Outcomes were *'too vast'* and P3 perceived them to be *'subject to too many interpretations*.' P4 felt disappointed that, *'by the time CfE was introduced, it was merely a vast list of Experiences and Outcomes which teachers were expected to teach and assess'*. P5 and P6 observed respectively that, *'there are loads of Experiences and Outcomes'* and *'they're very broad, which is why they introduced the Significant Aspects of Learning'*.[8] P7 spoke about CfE's *'vagueness'* as follows, '*the Experiences and Outcomes were too vague, and they will be replaced by the Benchmarks'*.

P9 had experience of the English National Curriculum and, in comparison to that, she perceived that the Experiences and Outcomes were too vague. She said, *'there needed to be something more than the Experiences and Outcomes because it was not clear how to establish standards'*. Similarly, P10 perceived that the Experiences and Outcomes lacked clarity and that teachers *'need to know what they are supposed to be teaching'*. P11 thought that the vagueness of the Experiences and Outcomes had led *to 'a lack of consistency across the profession'*. P12, P13 and P14 were all in agreement regarding the volume of the

[8] Significant Aspects of Learning, an initiative introduced in 2015 by Education Scotland to support assessment of achievement and progress. They were replaced by the Benchmarks in 2016.

Experiences and Outcomes and P14 summed up the impact of the Experiences and Outcomes on professional practice as follows:

> *The principles of CfE were good but the Experiences and Outcomes were vast which resulted in teachers spending too much time deliberating about what they should be teaching and to what standard* (P14)

Applying insights from CDA in the service of uncovering the ways in which language shapes and constructs reality, frequently recurring words such as 'vast' and 'vague' merit scrutiny. 'Vague' is used pejoratively in this context and seems to imply a lack of clarity, a lack of understanding. 'Vast' can connote size, for example, a continent or a mountain range and, when used in the interviews and the context of the Experiences and Outcomes, it seems to imply a lack of control. The two words, 'vast' and 'vague,' produce visual imagery of size or mass and a perceived difficulty in seeing clearly what is meant. Hermeneutically, this imagery could represent teachers' lack or loss of control over the bedrock of their practice.

Some of the participants qualified their comments regarding the number and lack of clarity of the Experiences and Outcomes. P3 highlighted that teachers had been told initially, in the curriculum guidance issued by Education Scotland, that *'the point of keeping the Experiences and Outcomes vague was to allow different teacher interpretation'* because:

> *a fixed education system, where everybody was taught the same thing, at the same time, all the way through, was not what CfE was about* (P3)

P4 thought that by the time CfE was introduced *'it had lost all its creativity'* and P10 pointed out that *'one of the aims of CfE was to cut down on assessment and give more freedom to teachers'*. P11 thought that*, 'CfE was supposed to be about personalisation and choice and teachers having creative freedom with the curriculum'*.

In these comments, participants 3, 4, 10 and 11expressed their awareness of the apparently contradictory discourses inherent in CfE which I discussed in Chapter 2, namely, developmentalism and autonomy, on the one hand, functionalism and control, on the other. Using insights from CDA, vocabulary such as *'different'*, *'freedom',* '*personalisation and choice,' 'creative,'* and *'was supposed to be'* suggests that these participants were aware of, and I sensed they had also been supportive of, an alternative reason for the vague nature of the Experiences and Outcomes, one that belongs to the doctrine of developmentalism. From a developmental perspective, vaguely defined objectives are intended to allow teacher

autonomy but in a functionalist curriculum vaguely defined objectives require to be clarified and standardised. In referencing some of the developmentalist ideas of CfE in its early stages in relation to the Benchmarks, these four participants demonstrated awareness of the replacement of any surviving developmentalist characteristics of the curriculum with a functionalist approach.

In sum, from analysis of this first theme, none of the participants demonstrated support for CfE in its entirety. While all fourteen of the participants indicated support for the conceptual principles and values of CfE, the interviews also revealed the participants' readiness for an operational reform which would rationalise the Experiences and Outcomes and clarify standards. I next consider the theme of the perceived benefits of the Benchmarks.

### 5.4 The Perceived Benefits of the Benchmarks

The *Plan* and the Benchmarks are the subject of my study and I was interested in the participants' experiences of them in relation to my first research question: How do some teachers perceive the *Plan's* Benchmarks, combined with the new National Qualifications, to have influenced CfE? The theme of the perceived benefits of the Benchmarks is significant because I perceived the Benchmarks to mark a turning point in CfE's direction of travel.

P1, who had been concerned that the Experiences and Outcomes did not tell him where he was going nor the route to take, thought that, '*the Benchmarks tell me where I am going and give me a selection of routes'*. In this opinion, there are echoes of Donnelly's (2007) explanation of the Australian experience of a standards approach to replace original outcomes-based education. Donnelly (2007) explains that, in Australia's case, on account of the weaknesses of outcomes-based education, the original outcomes-based curricular design was replaced by a standards approach which provided teachers with 'clear, concise and unambiguous road maps of what is to be taught' (p.188). Donnelly (2007) describes an outcomes-based approach as one which focuses on what pupils should be able to do by the end of the process while a standards curriculum identifies what pupils should know and be able to do at the end of a set time.

P2, who had perceived *'confusion regarding the attainment of a level'* using the Experiences and Outcomes, expected the Benchmarks to *'clarify prerequisite knowledge from primary'* and, in so doing, to provide *'consistency across the country'*. P3 thought that the Benchmarks

were *'not a big reform'* and that *'they represent the clarity and exemplification which teachers have been asking for'* which she explained as follows:

> *Teachers were unsure about the level of content detail required, so the Benchmarks will allow them to get the pitch better and they have clarified what the people who originally wrote the Experiences and Outcomes actually had in mind. The Benchmarks have given consistency across the board* (P3)

P3 referred to *'the people who originally wrote the Experiences and Outcomes'* and *'what they had in mind'* and these comments may be implicit references to a neglect of teacher voice and omission from involvement in the construction of the Experiences and Outcomes and I return to this in section 5.8. P4 was positive despite initial concerns that the Benchmarks may have been an additional layer of workload. He said he realised that the Benchmarks

> *can clarify and help create uniformity of teaching, especially for pupils entering S4. They allow Principal Teachers to have a set-up that works, that is, uniformity across all classes* (P4)

According to P5,

> *the Benchmarks are straightforward and there is an assumption that if you use the Benchmarks, you are breaking things down into what you can measure* (P5)

P7 welcomed the Benchmarks because she thought the Significant Aspects of Learning were ineffective and P8 said:

> *The Benchmarks were welcomed in 2017 as something to streamline the process of teachers grappling with the Experiences and the Outcomes and the minutiae of the wording* (P8)

The judgement of pupils' levels was taken up by P10 who thought that the Benchmarks *'make sense to teachers'* because they allow teachers to gauge whether *'this person has reached this level, this person is able to do this or that or whatever'.* Similarly, P11 welcomed the clarity which the Benchmarks provided.

> *The Benchmarks provide more clarity … this is what they (the pupils) need to know and this is the depth they need to know it. They (the Benchmarks) are used as Success*

> *Criteria, for example, 'At the end of this topic, you should know ...' The Benchmarks are not differentiated, and they give consistency across the country for levels* (P11)

P14 described the effect of the Benchmarks on her department as follows:

> *As a result of the Benchmarks, the Principal Teacher has imposed certain tasks and all the children do the same tasks and have the same assessments which brings uniformity to what is taught, and when, across the department* (P14)

The frequent use of words such as 'clarify', 'clarity', 'clarified', 'consistency' and 'uniformity' is indicative, from a CDA perspective, of neoliberalism. Clarity and consistency can signal accountability and performativity. Uniformity is necessary for comparison and accountability. Clarity, simplicity, uniformity, and consistency may represent the lexical sugar-coating of a neoliberal approach. P5 thought that the *'Benchmarks are straightforward'* and that by using them *'you are breaking things down into what you can measure'.* The phrase *'what you can measure'* signals the debateable 'assess to improve' correlation which is a core tenet of neoliberal doctrine associated with the OECD and its PISA surveys. P8's use of the word *'streamline'* signals 'neoliberal-speak' and the word *'grapple'* and the phrase *'the minutiae of the wording'* may suggest an alleviation of overload. P12 spoke about the concept of progress and its measurement and considered that *'it was difficult for parents to see progress with the Experiences and Outcomes, however, with the Benchmarks, everyone can see progress'.* Progress and, particularly, the measurement of progress, are associated with pupil and school improvement, both of which are tenets of neoliberalism. Employing a CDA approach, the interviewees' responses reveal extensive use of the language of accountability. In addition, the metaphor of light being brought to darkness — CfE's Experiences and Outcomes, perceived to be 'vast' and 'vague,' became 'clear' upon the introduction of the Benchmarks, and this seems to capture something of the 'goodness' of the more prescriptive Benchmarks versus the 'badness' of the vague Experiences and Outcomes. All of the participants, apart from Participant 6 who had not used them, demonstrated clear support for the Benchmarks.

Regarding the reasons why the participants perceived the Benchmarks to be beneficial, six of the participants commented regarding the reduction of the number of assessable outcomes. P5 observed that *'the Benchmarks affect each subject differently'.* In Chapter 2, I explained that prescribed outcomes lend themselves to some subjects (for example, mathematics and science) more than others (for example, arts subjects) and I drew upon Eisner (1967). For

example, P2, whose subject discipline was English, considered the Benchmarks to be a relatively insignificant reduction in outcomes and stated that '*the Benchmarks are still too unwieldy, the volume of objectives could have been reduced further'.* P8, whose subject discipline was Maths, on the other hand, was pleased that *'a lot of the content was the same anyway and all of the assessments were the same,'* and so, he observed, *'the only thing to be done was double-check'.* P9, a Modern Languages teacher, thought that the Benchmarks suited *'some subjects really well, for example, History,'* however, *'for some subjects they were no better than the Experiences and Outcomes'.* P11, whose subject discipline was Biology, experienced a minimal effect of the Benchmarks as the content and topics of her subject discipline *'matched'* and P12, who specialised in Modern Languages, experienced a reduction in the Experiences and Outcomes. P14, an English teacher, perceived that *'much of what they (the Benchmarks) prescribe was already being done and there was nothing surprising'.*

Another reason for the participants' support for the Benchmarks was the idea of a recuperation of rigour. P7 thought that '*CfE is being changed with add-ons but at least what is happening now feels rigorous'.* Some of the interviewees directly referred to, or alluded to, the idea of a recuperation of rigour, and yet most of them also acknowledged that CfE had represented a break with previous, more rigorous curricular paradigms. This contradictory 'pull' of both a return to rigour but an awareness that CfE's less prescriptive approach had been welcomed initially by teachers when CfE was introduced, could demonstrate uncertainty regarding the pedagogical implications of a shift to increased prescription.

Regarding the operationalisation of the Benchmarks, some of the participants perceived them to be multi-functional. As well as reducing the Experiences and Outcomes to a shorter list of functionalist outcomes, according to P3,

> *Benchmarks may be used in the classroom differently to their original intention because they also work well as Success Criteria, what the children need to achieve in their assessments* (P3)

Some of the participants recognised that operationalisation of the Benchmarks could assist in the practicalities of lesson planning and assessment. The risk, however, and as I suggested in Chapter 4, was that the Benchmarks would become assessment indicators without having any research basis to support their use. The *Plan* made no reference to the research basis for the

Benchmarks, nor did the participants seek an explanation of it and I will return to this point later in section 5.8.

Only P10 expressed an appreciation of the wider accountability implications of the Benchmarks, stating:

> *Teachers appreciate that the Benchmarks allow the Scottish Government to compare schools and local authorities and that they represent a method of accountability* (P10)

In this phrase *'method of accountability'*, that is, the comparison of schools and local authorities, resides Foucault's concept of governmentality, in the form of comparative techniques of soft governance. In Chapter 2, I cited Joseph's (2010) claim that neoliberalism is a political discourse concerned with governing individuals from a distance. I also referred to Simons and Masschelein (2008) who drew upon Foucault's concept of governmentality to explain shifts in thought which occur not from directly imposed rules and norms but through a series of apparatuses which require people and organisations to become a certain type of person/organisation. Comparison of schools and local authorities through league tables represents such an apparatus of governance, a national form of 'governance by numbers' (Grek, 2009) in the same way that participation in the PISA programme represents an international form of that governance, as discussed in Chapter 2. In addition, according to Hursh (2007), school systems of accountability facilitate increased stratification and social division and allow schools to be blamed for low standards. Hursh (2007) argues that, if there were no low-achieving schools, neoliberal politicians would have to invent them to generate convenient moral panic. None of the participants explicitly expressed an opinion regarding the use of the Benchmarks by the Scottish Government as an evidence-based method of accountability but I did not ask them directly about this, so while I am unable to comment authoritatively, I would suggest that the Benchmarks are perhaps almost taken for granted as an accountability measure.

Some of the participants thought that the Benchmarks would help teachers to refocus on content. P3 thought that the *'Benchmarks will improve literacy, mathematics and science because they have refocused teachers on the content'*. P5 made a connection between the content of the Benchmarks and the content of the National 5 specifications,

> *The Benchmarks seem to have come from the National 5 specifications but don't provide much clarity. If anything, they might be slightly more specific* (P5)

P12 also made a connection between the layout of the Benchmarks and the specifications of the new National 5 qualification, noting that:

> *The guidance for the Benchmarks is laid out in the same way as the course support notes for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher from the SQA* (P12)

As already explained in Chapter 2, the SQA was responsible for the National 5 course specifications from 2013/2014 onwards and Education Scotland was mandated to produce the Benchmarks in 2016 following the publication of the *Plan*. It is entirely possible that the Benchmarks could have been adapted from the National 5 course specifications. It is also possible that there could be a PISA influence on the National 5 course specifications and examination. However, without transparency from the SQA, these connections remain speculative. In Chapter 2, I raised the question of whether the Benchmarks are an attempt to refresh CfE by taking the outcomes of the new National 5 and working backwards. I explained that, according to Spady and Marshall (1991), one of the principles of outcomes-based education is to design the curriculum back from where you want students to end up. I suggested that such a scenario would mean that the new National Qualifications are driving CfE and I highlighted the absence of oversight of the relationship between the new qualifications and the curriculum. In the connection made by some of the participants between the Benchmarks and the new National Qualifications, they may have identified the principle of 'designing back,' one of the principles of outcomes-based education.

With the advent of the Benchmarks, some of the participants agreed that CfE had become more prescriptive and assessment-driven than before. P5 highlighted one danger of an assessment-driven curriculum,

> *The Benchmarks were needed but with them there is a danger of spoon-feeding to meet the outcomes* (P5)

The metaphor of *'spoon-feeding to meet the outcomes'* may well be a euphemism for the phenomenon of 'teaching to the test'. This suggests that originality and creativity displayed by teachers might be replaced by uniformity and transmission for the purposes of comparison and accountability. Teachers could become focussed on teaching their pupils how to pass tests and exams rather than teaching the subject, thus narrowing the curriculum, and restricting the creativity of teachers.

By contrast, participants 8 and 14 were less supportive of the Benchmarks than the other participants. P8 thought that the introduction of the Benchmarks marked a return to the previous 5-14 curricular framework. He stated that, *'CfE started as a blank piece of paper and has come back towards a 5-14 checklist of 'can kids do this – yes or no?'.* P8's opinion is less positive than those of the other participants. It implies that he perceives a return to the more prescriptive 5-14 curricular framework negatively. His question, *'can kids do this – yes or no?'* also indirectly questions the legitimacy of 'guesstimate' Benchmarks, as discussed in Chapter 4. Likewise, P14 criticised the impact of the Benchmarks on teaching practice as follows:

> *The Benchmarks have had a reductive influence on the Broad General Education phase (S1-S3). Teachers have to ensure that the work they are doing ties into the Benchmarks. It's reductive and prescriptive and this idea that we measure this and not that negates the idea that humans evolve* (P14)

Related to P14's opinion of the reductive and prescriptive influence of the Benchmarks is the argument of Eisner (1967:549), to whom I referred in Chapter 2. Eisner argues that educational objectives, clearly and specifically stated, can 'become dogma which in fact may hinder' the ends of instruction. A contemporary of Eisner's, MacDonald (1965), argues that

> objectives are viewed as directives in the rational approach. They are identified prior to the instruction or action and used to provide a basis for appropriate activities. There is another view, however, which has scholarly and experiential referents. This view would state that our objectives are only known to us in any complete sense after the completion of our act of instruction. No matter what we thought we were attempting to do, we can only know what we wanted to accomplish after the fact. Objectives by this rationale are heuristic devices which provide initiating consequences which become altered in the flow of instruction (MacDonald, 1965:613).

I am also reminded of Patrick's (2013) argument, referred to in Chapter 2, that neoliberal dogma, in the service of the Knowledge Society or Knowledge Economy, could reduce the aims of education to a set of functionalist outcomes. P14's opinion that *'we measure this and not that'* may point to a tendency of neoliberalism to value only what can be measured. Biesta sums this problem up:

> The rise of a culture of performativity in which means become ends in themselves and targets and indicators of quality become mistaken for quality itself, has been one of

> the main drivers of an approach to measurement in which normative validity (measuring what we value) is being replaced by technical validity (measuring what we can easily measure and thus valuing what we can measure) (see, for example, Ball, 2003; Usher, 2006). The risk is that greater value is attributed to what is measured and measurement of what is valued counts for nothing (Biesta, 2012:1).

Twelve of the participants perceived the reform of the Benchmarks to be beneficial. For some subject disciplines, the Benchmarks reduced the number of outcomes, although for others, the reduction was not noticeable. This accords with Eisner's (1967) argument that some subjects lend themselves to prescribed outcomes better than others. With respect to my first research question and the influence of the Benchmarks on CfE, most of the participants welcomed the clarity of the Benchmarks. They thought that this clarity would create uniformity of teaching and refocus teachers on content which would particularly benefit pupils transitioning from the Broad General Education phase at the end of S3 to the Senior Phase in S4. The data also reveals that some of the participants perceived the Benchmarks to be useful tools in the assessment of pupils' levels in the Broad General Education phase. P8 and P14 were less convinced about the benefits of the Benchmarks than the other participants and were concerned about a return to prescription and an assessment-driven curriculum which values what can be measured over what cannot and their concerns lead to the third and fourth themes.

### 5.5 The Perceived Over-Use of Assessment in General

As a broad consensus emerged regarding the increased use of assessment generally and the resulting pressures which arose, the over-use of assessment in general became a theme, with most of the participants expressing professional concern therein. In addition, several of the participants observed what they called a misalignment between assessment in the Broad General Education phase (S1-S3) and the exit examinations of the Senior Phase (S4-S6). The alignment of the curriculum in the Broad General Education (BGE) phase with the Senior Phase is the subject of my second research question and I will discuss this in section 5.7.

Starting with the participants' reflections regarding assessment in general, P1 thought that *'assessment is constant, both formative and summative'* and *'much more than there was previously'*. P2 reiterated this point, stating that, *'in the classroom, everything is geared towards assessment, informal and formal'* and *'assessment is integral to everything you do'*.

P4 observed that, *'there has been a return to constant grading of pupils'* and P5 explained that:

> *Assessment is used in the classroom all the time. You're really assessing all the time. A lot of the time, teachers feel they have to use assessment to justify what they do because of the blame culture which has evolved* (P5)

The 'blame culture' is a facet of the environment of an audit culture and is a consequence of performance-driven systems of education. It refers to the consequences of a decline in exit examination results on individual teacher's reputations as well as the reputations of their schools. Ball (2012) argues that performativity is a neoliberal mode of state regulation which requires individuals to organise themselves in response to targets, indicators, and evaluations. Performativity is defined by Ball (2012), in Foucauldian terms, as a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements and comparisons. The performance of individuals or organisations serve as measures of productivity, output or displays of quality (Ball, 2012). Standardised testing, league tables and exit qualifications are arguably tools of surveillance regimes. A blame culture, an obsession with assessment, and teaching to the test are all characteristics of performance-driven, surveillance systems of education. Another characteristic, already highlighted in Chapter 2 with reference to the era of the Ordinary Grade system, is gatekeeping or pre-screening, based on teachers' evaluations of pupils' chances of success in exit examinations. I will discuss gatekeeping with reference to the new National 5 examination later in this section.

Returning to assessment in general, P7 lamented the fact that *'we over-assess in S1 and S2'* and P8 described the situation in his school as follows:

> *In the Broad General Education, right across the school in all classes, pupils are being assessed constantly. Formative assessment is constant. There are also block assessments once a term, at the end of term* (P8)

P9 expressed professional frustration with the situation in her school, stating,

> *The assessment tail is wagging the dog and, although a bit of weighing is good, there is a feeling of 'how do we get back from that?' Too much time is spent on assessment rather than teaching and learning* (P9)

*'The assessment tail is wagging the dog'* suggests that assessment has become too important and is controlling teaching and learning. *'A bit of weighing is good'* is a reference to a quote

used in relation to performance management, namely, ‘weighing the pig won’t make it fatter,’ which means that constant measuring does not necessarily drive improvement. In posing the question, *‘how do we get back from that?’*, P9 conjures up an image of a pendulum which has swung too far towards an orthodoxy of testing and assessment. Her question presupposes a preferable orthodoxy and voices professional concern about the current situation. Similarly, P10 expressed professional concern and frustration as follows:

> *Over-assessment is happening currently in schools which was not the aim of CfE. The assessment tail is wagging the dog. Over-assessment is not raising attainment … all it’s doing is measuring. Teachers are obsessed with tests and exams. In Scotland, there has always been a culture of exams, tests, and grades. There is no culture of ‘just education for its own sake’ which exists in other countries’ education systems* (P10)

P10’s evaluation that *‘over-assessment is not raising attainment … all it’s doing is measuring,’* highlights the questionable research basis for the use of increased assessment to raise attainment. Her evaluation also poses questions regarding raising attainment and whether it should be the sole aim and purpose of education. Bogotch et al. (2007:93) argue that sometimes ‘effective education that proceeds towards a pre-specified end’ is not adequate and they suggest that we should always ask of education, ‘effective for what?’ and ‘effective for whom?’.

P13 agreed that *‘everything goes towards assessment’* and that *‘everything is about teaching to the test’*. Teaching to the test is a phenomenon associated with assessment-driven regimes, as discussed in section 5.4. P14 expressed her concern as follows.

> *A great deal of time is spent on assessment which means there isn’t much education going on. All pieces of work have to be assessed in a uniform manner which takes a lot of time. The assessment tail has been wagging the dog for at least five years, possibly longer* (P14)

The consensus opinion of ten of the participants was that the over-use of assessment has become the new norm, contrary to CfE’s original ideals. Some of the participants expressed professional concern and indirectly questioned the legitimacy of this new orthodoxy. P14 thought that the imbalance between assessment and teaching and learning became noticeable around 2013 which coincided approximately with the last phase of the implementation of CfE, the introduction of the new National Qualifications. I will next consider the Senior

Phase and the new National Qualifications before relating the findings overall to my first research question. The new National 4, the new National 5, and the influence of the SQA emerged as sub-themes within the theme of the perceived pedagogical challenges caused by the new National Qualifications and I will consider these sub-themes individually.

### 5.6 The Perceived Challenges on Account of the National Qualifications

#### 5.6.1 The New National 4

Regarding the new National 4 which was intended to replace the Standard Grade General level qualification, the participants expressed general concern about the format, the level, and the method of marking of this new qualification. P8 agreed with P2 that the new National 4's standard was *'much easier than Standard Grade General'* and pointed out that, *'pupils receive so much support because it's internally assessed'.* Differential assessment for the new National 4 with internal rather than external assessment by SQA markers, has already been highlighted in section 2.4.1 of Chapter 2. There, I argued that the new National 4 is antithetical to Dunning's (1977) vision of 'certification for all' and the democratic ethos of the previous Standard Grade system. In a similar vein, P9 thought that the *'National 4 exam is not worth the paper it's written on'* and P11 echoed this sentiment,

> *National 4 should be an exam in order to make it a 'proper qualification.' It could be an easy exam, like Intermediate 1. It would give it credibility which it lacks at the moment. There is a feeling that National 4 has been misconceived because it lacks progression for the pupil. It's experiential learning that's all internally assessed* (P11)

P13 reiterated this feeling of negativity towards National 4,

> *Nobody fails National 4. Lack of attendance would be the only thing which would cause a pupil to fail National 4* (P13)

P14 was withering about the new system, particularly National 4, and stated that,

> *The introduction of the new National exams represents a return to an elitist system. The system has gone back to O Grades and ROSLA (raising of the school leaving age). Children who did not sit formal examinations, and that's like National 4* (P14)

P14 spoke about National 4 and National 5 representing a *'return to an elitist system'* and, by that, she is referring to the Ordinary Grade system of the 1970s which I referenced in Chapter 2. P5 expressed her concern regarding the tensions between the level of National 5, which she perceived to be more difficult than Standard Grade Credit level, and the much lower level of National 4 which she perceived to be less difficult than Standard Grade General level. She considered that the new National Qualifications would lead to increased inequality between National 4 and National 5 pupils. National 4 pupils, she observed, *'feel excluded, less valued'* and she perceived that the new National Qualifications reinforce a *'can't'* attitude. P7 summarised the issues surrounding the new National 4 as follows:

> *National 4 has created a lot of problems because pupils, in general, think that there is no point to National 4 and parents do not want their children to undertake National 4 because they have to sign agreeing to it* (P7)

The issues surrounding the new National 4 have engendered a national political debate, a debate in which the Scottish Conservatives have called for the complete reform of the National 4 qualification (McKenzie, *The Scotsman,* 2019). The cross-party consensus which has occurred in Scotland since CfE's initial publication in 2004 appears to have fractured with the National 4. In this new polarised examination system, P14 lamented the situation of pupils in the middle, *'pupils who would have sat Standard Grade General, children who are late bloomers'* and *'who are not being served by the new exam system'.* P14's comments suggest that the pupils in the middle, between the low level of the National 4 and the much higher level of the National 5, are at risk in this new examination system. Another group at risk, identified in the national debate, are pupils leaving school at the end of S4 who could leave with no qualifications because National 4 is internally assessed.

Eight of the participants expressed concerns about the new National 4. They considered its standard to be lower than the previous Standard Grade General qualification which it was intended to replace. They also disapproved of its internal assessment process. Some of the participants highlighted the negative effects which National 4 has on pupil motivation and the negative attitudes of parents towards the new qualification. One of the participants compared National 4 to 'non-certification' classes in the era of the Ordinary Grade examination system and highlighted that the pupils at greatest risk are the pupils in the middle, pupils who may not appear ready for National 5 at the time when decisions are made regarding levels. The

political debate which has emerged demonstrates that the negative perceptions of most of the participants are widely shared by others. I will now consider the new National 5 qualification.

### 5.6.2 The New National 5

The National 5 examination was considered by most of the participants to be of a higher standard than the highest level of the previous Standard Grade examinations, namely, Credit level, with a perception emerging that its standard is between Credit level and Higher. In the previous system, this level between Standard Grade Credit level and Higher was served by the Intermediate 2 qualification. P5 stated that *'National 5 is a difficult exam, far more difficult than Standard Grade Credit level'.* Likewise, P4 perceived the National 5 examination to be *'far more difficult than Standard Grade'* and, on account of its increased challenge, he considered it to be *'elitist'* and *'a return to O Grade'.* P14 also spoke about National 4 and National 5 representing a *'return to an elitist system'* and, by this, she was referring to the Ordinary Grade system of the 1970s to which I referred in Chapter 2. In the changes made to the National 5 examination by the SQA in successive examination diets after its introduction, the examination's duration was extended to 2 hours and forty minutes from 1 hour forty-five minutes, and the examination's weighting became 80% of the overall grade. P9 perceived this new system as one which *'values pupils, who can sit in a room for two hours and splurge everything the know on to a piece of paper'.*

As a result of the increased challenge of the new National 5, some of the participants explained the additional pressure which arose. P5 said that *'teachers are teaching to National 5 because that is what they are judged on'.* Teaching to the test, as already discussed, is a consequence of increased performativity within an audit culture summed up in P10's view below.

> *… there is a feeling of paranoia regarding teaching absolutely everything for National 5 and Higher. The SQA has created an environment of paranoia which is fuelled by the fact that qualifications are the 'currency'… there have been so many changes recently that teachers are exhausted and fearful that they may have missed something. Teachers feel personally responsible* (P10)

P14 explained the effect of increased pressure on teachers.

> *Young teachers are frightened as they are driven by reputation and this can lead them to engage in unethical practices. Output in exams is the only thing staff are interested in. There is a frenzied culture of results. There seems to be a new generation of teachers who are technicians, not professionals, which raises issues of grade inflation and coaching. The culture of over-assessment and performativity has led to unethical practices such as coaching pupils using essay mills* (P14)

The statement that *'the SQA has created an environment of paranoia'* and the use of words such as *'frightened'* and *'frenzied'* invoke a culture of performativity, a culture which I described in Chapter 2, drawing on Ball (2003). Teachers, on some of the participants' accounts, may be fearful of reputational damage from not meeting targets in the same way as, for example, lawyers, accountants, doctors, health professionals or managers in private companies. P4 explained that, *'the exam post-mortem analysis instils fear in teachers'* and P12 felt that performativity could damage collaboration between teachers.

> *An ethos of support and collaboration among teachers can be under pressure in an environment of performativity. There doesn't seem to be trust and it can sometimes be a bullying culture* (P12)

In addition, P13 explained that, on account of National 5's increased challenge and the effect of reputational damage caused by poor results, teachers are not putting pupils forward for National 5 if they think they might fail. This suggests that some teachers may be erring on the side of caution and only putting forward for National 5 only those pupils whom they consider securely capable of passing. One of the participants alluded to the need for evidence, suggesting that, without it, pupils would not be put forward for National 5.

> *National 5 exams are difficult and equate to Intermediate 2 (the level above Standard Grade Credit but below Higher). They are not serving pupils who, in the days of Standard Grade, might have achieved a Standard Grade General qualification. A lot of departments are not putting pupils forward for National 5* (P12)

Similarly, P6 noted that:

*There has been a huge drop in numbers sitting National 5 because a lot of pupils are not being put forward for National 5. National 5 is an elitist exam which affects pupils' confidence and causes anxiety* (P6)

I referred to the process of gatekeeping or pre-screening in Chapter 2 with reference to similar practices which occurred in the era of the Ordinary Grade qualifications in the 1970s. Pre-screening in S2 and S3 in that era channelled many pupils towards non-qualification destinations. I cited Gow and McPherson's (1980) study regarding the negative effect of non-certificate classes on the motivation levels of pupils. Restricting access to the National 5 examination could, I suggest, be a contributory factor in the phenomenon of the narrowing of the curriculum which I also discussed in Chapter 2.

Due to the increased challenge and difficulty of the National 5 examination, six of the participants considered the National 5 to be an elitist examination. According to these six participants, National 5 increased the pressures of performativity on teachers, including teaching to the test and, in the absence of evidence, restricting the numbers of pupils presented for National 5. I will now consider the participants' perceptions of the influence of the SQA which emerged as an additional sub-theme of the principal theme of the challenges of the National Qualifications.

### 5.6.3 The Influence of the SQA

Exit examination results were regarded by most of the participants as the *'currency'* (P4) upon which teachers' reputations depend. As a recently appointed marker for the SQA, P4 was concerned about examination content and marking and had noticed that:

*The SQA have an almost invisible hold on the curriculum. Since becoming a marker, it's like a secret society. There's only one answer they're looking for, no deviation from that. This can disadvantage schools which do not have SQA markers* (P4)

P7 echoed P4's reflections about the importance of being an SQA marker:

*Being a marker for the SQA is really important. If you do not mark for the SQA, you are disadvantaging your pupils because every year the marking changes* (P7)

P11 was critical of the SQA's variable marking system and commented that:

*SQA markers find out different information to what's widely available. This is perceived by teachers as being very unfair. The general population of teachers is given one set of facts regarding assessment criteria, but markers find out that there are different criteria when they sit at the markers' meeting* (P11)

P14 was also critical of the SQA's setting and marking system, stating that:

*In departments in which teachers are either SQA markers or setters, their results are amazing, which has to be more than just coincidence* (P14)

Participants 4, 7, 11 and 14 perceived unfairness in the marking and setting system of the SQA. They spoke about the importance of adding members of their departments to the SQA's marking and setting teams as this was generally considered the best way to prevent other departments in other schools gaining an unfair advantage in obtaining better results. In this respect, some of the participants demonstrated their support for the use of legitimate methods of increasing their pupils' chances of achieving better results. Although most of the participants were aware that the SQA operates autonomously as an examinations body, without the publication of a clear, unifying ideology between the examinations system and the curriculum, teachers' practice could be limited by such experiential understanding of the system, rather than a full and factual one.

With respect to my first research question, 'How do some teachers perceive the *Plan's* Benchmarks, combined with the new National Qualifications, to have influenced CfE?' I now present my response based on the findings in this study. CfE's extensive lists of Experiences and Outcomes were considered in need of reform. Most of the participants welcomed the reform of the Benchmarks because they reduced the number of outcomes for some subject disciplines and clarified standards. The clarification of standards was perceived to be beneficial because it created uniformity of content and could assist pupils in the transition from the Broad General Education phase to the Senior Phase in S4. The data also indicates that some of the participants perceived the Benchmarks to be useful tools in the assessment of pupils' levels in the Broad General Education phase. A small proportion of the participants were critical of the increased prescription of the Benchmarks.

The data highlights an increased use of assessment at all stages of the curriculum, particularly since the introduction of the new National Qualifications in 2013/2014. Before the overhaul of the previous Standard Grade system, what is known from publicly available data is that there was less assessment in general, in accordance with CfE's aims. The introduction of the

new National Qualifications could have been the catalyst for increased curricular prescription because the Standard Grade three-tier, norm-referenced examination system was replaced by a two-tier, criterion-referenced system. In this transformation, S4 became more intense, the examination became more critical than hitherto and increased prescription may have become more acceptable to some teachers in response to the changed circumstance of the curriculum.

Regarding the National Qualifications system, the data provides evidence of a lack of support for the National 4 qualification. Some of the participants referred to similarities between the National 4 and 'non-certification' classes fifty years ago, in the era of the Ordinary Grade examination system. According to the data in this study, the standard of the new National 5 is too high while the standard of the new National 4 is too low. The pupils at greatest risk were identified as the pupils in the middle who were not being served by the highly stratified National 4/National 5 system. Due to the increased challenge and difficulty of the National 5 examination, some of the participants considered it to be an elitist examination. By extension, an elitist examination could be considered anti-democratic. According to the data here, National 5 increased the pressures of performativity on teachers which has encouraged practices such as teaching to the test and, in the absence of appropriate evidence and for fear of failure to achieve results and meet targets, restricting the numbers of pupils presented for National 5.

To sum up, and with respect to my first research question, the data provides some evidence that some teachers perceive the Benchmarks and the new National Qualifications to have shifted CfE towards a more assessment-driven approach than that which had preceded the introduction of the National Qualifications. However, most of the participants considered increased prescription of standards necessary in such an assessment-driven curriculum. As I have already argued, one of the objectives of the *Plan* was to encourage teachers to embrace a new audit culture using neoliberal techniques of soft governance such as increased assessment, data collection and surveillance. This finding indicates that most of the participants had embraced this new audit culture and it chimes with Ball's (2003:218) observation that, in neoliberal schooling contexts, 'teachers are re-worked as producers and providers, educational entrepreneurs' who, according to Davies and Bansel (2007:248), are configured as 'highly individualised, responsibilised subjects' in order to 'deliver' results and prove their worth. A neoliberal regime of assessment and monitoring shapes teachers' identity by requiring them to become a certain type of person, as I argued in Chapter 2. The data also provides evidence of professional concern regarding the degree of stratification

between National 4 and National 5. Problems of excessive stratification and the unrestricted influence of the SQA on the curriculum, teachers, and pupils, emerged as areas of professional concern and I turn next to the theme of raising attainment, the purported goal of the Benchmarks.

### 5.7 Raising Attainment and the Attainment Gap

The aim of the *Plan* and the Benchmarks was to clarify and rationalise CfE in order to raise attainment. Raising attainment and the attainment gap emerged as a theme because I was interested in the participants' experiences of raising attainment and whether they thought that had been achieved through the Benchmarks and increased assessment across the curriculum. Although the conceptual debate of the attainment gap is beyond the scope of this study, some of the participants offered general opinions on raising attainment and specific opinions regarding the influence of the Benchmarks and the new National Qualifications on school effectiveness and raising attainment.

Several of the participants perceived differences in attainment to begin in pre-school years and persist through primary school into secondary due to differences in literacy and numeracy levels correlated to poverty and disadvantage. Underpinning this optic is a large body of research which has sought to address inequality in educational outcomes associated with socio-economic status (for example, Ainscow (2012), Smyth and Wrigley (2013), Sosu and Ellis (2014), Valant and Newark (2016)). None of the participants demonstrated awareness of the body of research which holds that socio-economic problems such as endemic poverty cannot be addressed by focussing solely on schools and teachers as the agents of change (see Mowatt (2017), Bangs, MacBeath and Galton (2011)). For example, Mowatt (2017) argues that a narrow focus on attainment outcomes achieved in schools diverts attention away from a systems-level, holistic approach which should focus on the economic, social, and relational constraints which impact families in poverty. Similarly, Bangs, MacBeath and Galton (2011) argue that what schools can achieve when account is taken of other variables is limited.

Some participants, like P1, thought that *'major issues occur when a pupil's reading age is lower than their chronological age'* and that *'a cycle of low attainment is correlated to poverty'.* This perception of a correlation between low levels of literacy to poverty is attested

to by an annual report published by the Social Mobility Commission, an advisory body to the UK Government, in which it is noted that:

> Children from working class backgrounds still suffer disadvantages compared to their more affluent peers, even from birth. Babies from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be born with low birth weight, which has been shown to lead to worse health in childhood, and worse outcomes in later life through poorer educational attainment and lower wages. Forty-three per cent of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) at age five did not achieve a good level of development in 2018 (as measured by the early years foundation stage profile assessment framework), compared to only 26 per cent of non-FSM eligible pupils (*State of the Nation Report, 2018-2019:* vii).

P2 was aware of this correlation and favoured *'early intervention by appropriately qualified professionals to prevent a gap at the start of primary school*' because she perceived *'interventions at secondary school to be too little, too late'.* Some of the participants welcomed the Benchmarks because, as already noted, they considered that these should improve uniformity of learning in primary schools and, by extension, reduce or prevent large gaps in literacy and numeracy between pupils transitioning from groups of smaller primary schools to larger secondary settings. P8 suggested that to raise attainment it is important *'to improve the link between primary and secondary'.* P5 believed that, *'literacy across learning'* and teachers' engagement with whole school literacy across learning was of paramount importance in tackling gaps in literacy levels. P10 evaluated the current strategy of assessing to raise attainment and concluded that *'over-assessment is not raising attainment … all it's doing is measuring'.* As already stated, this echoes Biesta's (2012:1) argument that, in assessment-driven curricula, 'greater value is attributed to what is measured and measurement of what is valued counts for nothing'.

P8 considered that, '*to raise attainment, it is really important to allow pupils time to master concepts'.* This opinion seems to demonstrate both a developmentalist (*'to allow pupils time'*) and an outcomes-based approach (*'to master concepts')*. All the participants recognised the importance of literacy and numeracy as the key to access the course content of subject disciplines. There was concern regarding the challenges of wide variations in levels of individual literacy and numeracy and the impact these varying levels have on accessing the content of different subject disciplines and, subsequently, succeeding in exit examinations. P4

thought that literacy and numeracy were crucial to his subject discipline because a weakness in literacy can *'mean pupils struggle to keep up and they give up'*. The examinations, he explained:

> *are all about literacy and the major cause of marks being lost is a lack of understanding of what the pupils are being asked to do, for example, summarise, investigate the relationship etc.* (P4)

P4 thought that *'the return to elitist exams will contribute to an attainment gap rather than addressing it'*. P5 also considered that the new National Qualifications would lead to increased inequality between National 4 and National 5 pupils. She observed that National 4 pupils *'feel excluded, less valued'* and the new National Qualifications reinforce a *'can't'* attitude, a point which I raised in section 5.5, within the sub-theme of the new National 4. P7 expressed concern about the lengthening of the National 5 exam because *'not a lot of pupils can undertake such a strenuous exam'*. She perceived the new National Qualifications to be a factor which will widen the attainment gap rather than close it and the other participants were generally in agreement with that view. P14 considered that:

> *In order to raise attainment every child should be sitting exams and there should be more teacher autonomy and teacher judgement* (P14)

In the statement, *'every child should be sitting exams'* lies the concept of inclusion and Dunning's (1977) inclusive aim of 'certification for all', one of the democratic principles of Scottish education dating back to the introduction of the Standard Grade system in the 1980s and which arguably has been lost with the introduction of the new National 4.

In sum, in relation to my first research question regarding how teachers perceive the impact of the Benchmarks and the new National Qualifications to have influenced CfE with respect specifically to the goal of raising attainment, the data seemed inconclusive. Most of the participants considered that the Benchmarks should help create uniformity of content and measure standards of literacy and numeracy of primary pupils transitioning to secondary settings but there was little specific discussion of how this has raised attainment or will raise attainment. One participant considered that increased assessment does not raise attainment, it simply measures differences in pupils. Regarding the impact of the SQA's National Qualifications on the attainment gap, many of the participants were concerned that the internally assessed National 4, along with the more challenging National 5 examination,

would contribute to widening the gap and increase inequality. I next consider my second research question.

### 5.8 Tensions Between the BGE and the Senior Phase

My second research question was: Do some teachers perceive tensions between the Broad General Education phase of the curriculum and the exit qualifications? I will draw on previous themes to explore this question, in particular the theme of the challenges which have arisen on account of the new National Qualifications. The data for this second research question is slighter than that data for my first, as noted in the introduction to this chapter. Many of the participants indicated their perception of a lack of 'readiness' of many of their pupils for the National 5 examination in S4. P7 considered a 3+3 model advocated by CfE, that is, 3 years of Broad General Education (BGE), followed by 3 years of the Senior Phase, to be *'too big a leap for many pupils'* because the content of National 5 could not be taught in one single year, in S4. Many schools may have adopted an unofficial 2+2+2 model to allow an extra year to cover the course content for National 5 but this model could also entail a narrowing of the curriculum at the start of S3 or S4 because of gatekeeping or pre-screening which can entail only allowing pupils to undertake National 5 if teachers think they are capable of passing it.

As already stated, several of the participants observed what they called a misalignment between assessment in the BGE phase (S1-S3) and the exit examinations of the Senior Phase (S4-S6). P2 raised the problem of the mismatch between Level 4 and the new National 4. She said:

> *Level 4 and National 4 do not match. Level 4 matches National 5. In addition, the Broad General Education phase does not fit with timed exam assessments in S4-S6, so, the SQA and the exams indirectly impact the Broad General Education phase. The forms of assessment do not match. National 4 has got to go. The standard for National 4 is so low, it does not match Level 4* (P2)

In stating that *'the Broad General Education phase does not fit with timed exam assessments in S4-S6'*, P2 refers to both the preparedness of pupils and the challenges of preparing pupils for the increased difficulty of the National 5 examination. Although the Benchmarks were perceived positively by most of the participants as a means of creating uniformity of content

in S1-S3 which could help pupils to manage the content of the National 5 course in S4, P1 pointed out that:

> *The problem is that there is no time to do anything with the Benchmarks because of constant changes to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher* (P1)

P1 expressed the difficulty in balancing the demands of the Senior Phase with the BGE phase, stating that, *'exams keep changing which means teacher attention is taken away from the BGE'.* P4 concurred, stating that, *'there is concern about the time taken up by the changes in the SQA exams to the detriment of the BGE'.* Similarly, P5 stated:

> *Because of the constant changes to the Senior Phase exams and the awareness that National 5 is almost as difficult as Higher, teachers' time is disproportionately spent on S4-S6 rather than the BGE. Teachers are too preoccupied with the changes to the Senior Phase to reappraise the BGE according to the Benchmarks* (P5)

Combined with the participants' perceptions of the lack of preparedness of many of their pupils for the National 5 course in S4, there was also concern that the content of the National 5 examination could change in successive examination diets. P4 expressed his view that *'pupils feel they are being examined on topics which they may not have been taught'* and added that there is *'concern about the constantly changing content of the National exams'.*

The participants' comments build a picture of curricular imbalance with a dominant Senior Phase, in which the content of the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher examinations can be changed arbitrarily by the SQA in successive examination diets, leaving little time for the subordinate BGE phase. In addition, there is the suggestion that the misalignment between the level of the new qualifications and the curricular levels of the BGE phase presents significant difficulties for teachers preparing pupils for National 5.

Regarding my second research question, the data does point to perceptions of a curricular imbalance between a dominant, highly differentiated Senior Phase which starts in S4 and the previous three years of the BGE phase. The imbalance appears to occur because of the increased intensity of the National 5 course and the high-stakes, two-hour examination at its end, compared to the safer, more protected environment of the BGE phase, originally created by CfE. The imbalance also manifests in the increased demands of the Senior Phase to the detriment of the Broad General Education phase. These tensions suggest a lack of a unifying

philosophy between the SQA's National Qualifications and CfE. In the final section of this chapter, I will address my third research question regarding teacher voice.

**5.9 Teacher Voice**

My third research question was:

Do some teachers believe that policy is being made, and guidance introduced, without adequate attention to all stakeholders, especially teachers?

With respect to this research question, only three of the participants commented explicitly on the absence of teacher voice in curricular policy reform. P2 considered teacher voice to be 'ineffectual' in reaching policymakers. P2 had observed that:

> *Teacher voice in seeking clarification since the introduction of CfE was ineffectual but external drivers like PISA and the Literacy Survey prompted clarification. This sends a demoralising message for teacher voice* (P2)

P2 considered the Benchmarks to have been introduced five to ten years too late and said that some teachers had sought clarification during the entirety of that period but to no avail. P3 also pointed out that some teachers had been asking for clarity for five to ten years. Both the comments of P2 and P3 suggest that teachers' opinions had been disregarded for years. P2 reflected that this *'sends a demoralising message for teacher voice,'* which suggests that confidence has been lost. P9 was concerned that *'they (the Benchmarks) were put in place with not a lot of consultation with the actual practitioners on the ground'.* This was a concern which had been expressed by academics such as Scott and Britton in their presentations to the Education and Skills Committee in 2019, and to which I referred in Chapter 1. From a CDA perspective, the use of the phrase *'actual practitioners on the ground'* suggests that teachers operate in a place where the real practical work is done but it also conjures images of hierarchy, of teachers working *'on the ground'* while policymakers operate somewhere above them. P11 was explicit that:

> *Teacher voice is being ignored by policymakers who are introducing policies to raise attainment. There is a perception among teachers that the government doesn't know what to do* (P11)

P11 refers to *'policymakers'* who are ignoring teacher voice, but she does not elaborate regarding the identities of these policymakers. The issue of the invisibility of the authors of

reform policies is apparent and I will discuss this further in the following paragraph. P11 perceives, like other teachers in the wider community with whom I have spoken informally, that the *'government doesn't know what to do'.* This suggests that there are some teachers who perceive top-down policies, enacted by the Scottish Government in order to raise attainment, to be unsuccessful in reversing the problem of declining levels of literacy and numeracy. There is also the suggestion that teachers cannot hope for solutions to come in the form of top-down government policies.

In section 5.3 of this chapter, P7 raised a question which reveals that the identity of the author(s) of the Experiences and Outcomes was unknown. She said, *'I did think "who is writing this?"'.* Implicit in this question is the unknown identity of the author(s) of the Experiences and Outcomes and, by implication, the neglect of teacher voice in their authorship and construction. P6 referred to the authors of the Significant Aspects of Learning as *'they'* when she said, *'the Experiences and Outcomes are broad which is why **they** introduced the Significant Aspects of Learning'.* Once again, implicit in the word *'they'* are unknown identities of authors. In section 5.4 of this chapter, P3 spoke about *'the people who originally wrote the Experiences and Outcomes'* and *'what they had in mind'* which are, again, implicit references to the neglect of teacher voice. This suggests that not only the identity of the author(s) of the Experiences and Outcomes is unknown, but also that CfE's underlying philosophy of outcomes-based education had not been openly shared with teachers. In Section 5.4, I explained that the *Plan* made no reference to the research basis for the Benchmarks, nor did the participants seek an explanation of it. From a CDA perspective, in the same way that authorship, the underlying philosophy and the research basis of CfE were omitted from the curriculum's communications documentation and thus rendered invisible to teachers, so too were the rationale, the research basis and the identity of the authors of the Benchmarks from the *Plan*.

To sum up, the data indicates that three of the participants perceived teacher voice to have been neglected and omitted from curricular policy and reform. Some of the other participants made indirect references to the invisible identities of the policymakers and, by implication, teachers' exclusion from consultation. The data also highlights a declining level of confidence in top-down policy solutions. In the next chapter, I will reflect on the findings in this chapter and bring my Dissertation to a conclusion.

# CHAPTER 6

# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 Introduction

In this concluding Chapter, I draw on the five previous chapters to bring my inquiry to a close. Initially, I summarise the stages of the research as they appeared in each of these previous chapters. I bring forward postponed discussions and position them within appropriate sections of this final chapter. I then re-visit the research questions which I established in Chapter 1. In relation to each of these three research questions, I synthesise the data from my interviews with fourteen secondary teachers and discuss the findings with respect to my own arguments. In the final part of this chapter, I consider the contribution, albeit modest, which my research makes to the future of CfE and how I might take the research forward. after briefly reflecting on some of the study's peculiarities and limitations. Finally, I reflect on the ways in which this research journey has influenced my own practice.

## 6.2 Summary of Previous Chapters

In Chapter 1, I introduced this project as an attempt to better understand tensions and contradictions in CfE which arose in secondary schools in the period from the replacement of the previous Scottish qualifications system in 2014 to the introduction of the curricular reform policy, the *Plan,* in 2016. In order to do this, and on account of my motivation to explore other teachers' understanding of the *Plan* at a time of ongoing changes to the qualifications, I explained my interest in engaging in conversation with a small group of secondary teachers. In addition, as I was sceptical of the *Plan's* research basis, I explained my rationale for undertaking an analysis of extracts from the *Plan* using Critical Discourse Analysis.

In Chapter 2, due to a paucity of research literature on CfE's implementation, I engaged with literature regarding the background and design of CfE and the background and design of the new National Qualifications. I advanced the argument that CfE appears to be a mix of product and process curricula, but that this mix is weighted more strongly in favour of a product, outcomes-based model. I also questioned the lack of a research basis for the new qualifications and the SQA's claims describing the new qualifications as more democratic

and inclusive than the previous Standard Grade qualifications. By doing so, I laid the basis for the argument that curricular tensions appear to manifest in a narrowing of the curriculum in the Senior Phase of many secondary schools and I suggested that such a phenomenon signals increased stratification and differentiation in school and beyond to higher education. I noted the absence of an independent review body to scrutinise the process, quality, and impact of changes to the qualifications by the SQA and suggested that the new National Qualifications appear to be driving CfE. I raised the question of whether the Benchmarks introduced by the *Plan* are an attempt to refresh CfE by taking the outcomes of the new National Qualifications as a new starting point and working backwards. Finally, in this same Chapter, I explained neoliberalism as a global narrative which discursively influences education policy and practice. I posed the question of whether neoliberalism is the underpinning philosophy of CfE, the *Plan* and the new National Qualifications. With respect to uncovering neoliberal ideology in the discourse of the *Plan*, I explained my interest in Foucault's concept of governmentality as an analytical dimension of Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA), but I also noted the limitations of such an approach.

Chapter 3 provided details of the research approaches used in this inquiry and reflectively described their effectiveness and limitations in practice. In this chapter, I described the conceptual foundation of my study as interpretivist with a critical slant. I explored Critical Discourse Analysis and how to operationalise it in order to present my own critical discourse analysis of two relevant extracts from the *Plan* in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrated that the form of CDA which I chose, namely, Critical Policy Discourse Analysis (CPDA), supported the deconstruction of linguistic processes of naturalisation in policy documents and revealed the ways in which language can be used as an agent of social control. By using an analysis of governmentality, I questioned the legitimacy of the version of 'truth' produced in the *Plan* and, further, such a perspective allowed me to ask whose interests are being served and to what ends, a subject to which I will return in section 6.3 of this Chapter.

Chapter 5 presented the findings from my interviews with the teacher participants. I summarise these findings below in section 6.3 and I discuss these in relation to my arguments raised in previous chapters.

## 6.3 Research Questions and Findings

Drawing on the initial chapters of this study regarding the background and the design of CfE, and the background and design of the previous and the new qualifications, I start by providing, initially, a brief response to my research questions. These questions were derived from my interest in curricular tensions which emerged following the introduction of the National Qualifications and the Benchmarks.

### How do some teachers perceive the *Plan's* Benchmarks, combined with the new National Qualifications, to have influenced CfE?

While the principles and values of CfE continue to command respect, the general perception of the Experiences and Outcomes, expressed by the teachers in this study, was negative. All of the participants considered the Experiences and Outcomes to be in need of operational reform in order to rationalise the number of outcomes and clarify the standards expected. The majority of the participants welcomed the clarification of CfE's standards and the reduction of the assessable outcomes by the Benchmarks, although this reduction varied depending on each subject discipline. I suggested in Chapter 2 that, according to Donnelly (2007), outcomes-based education is conceptually flawed, difficult to implement and onerous for teachers in terms of their remit to engage in school-based curriculum development at the same time as assessing hundreds of objectives for several different levels. The participants readiness for an operational reform reflects McKernan's (1993) related argument that outcomes-based education places enormous demands on teachers to individualise instruction, plan remediation and enrichment, administer diagnostic assessment and keep extensive records. Donnelly (2007) explains that, in Australia's case, on account of the weaknesses of outcomes-based education, the original outcomes-based curricular design was replaced by a 'standards approach' which provided teachers with 'clear, concise and unambiguous road maps of what is to be taught' (p. 188). Some of the participants echoed Donnelly's (2007) use of metaphors of road maps and clear directions when they described their understanding of the Benchmarks and I suggested that the Benchmarks appear to represent such a 'standards approach' to address the weaknesses of the Experiences and Outcomes.

Two of the participants were critical of the reductive influence of increased prescription and uniformity on CfE and, in their interviews they reflected Patrick's (2013) view that neoliberalism reduces education to a set of functionalist outcomes. There are also echoes of Brady's (1996) critique of the notion that all knowledge is acquired in incremental steps and in a linear manner, with developmental stages matching chronological age. Brady (1996)

regarded this notion as suspect and too neat an expression of the relationship between knowledge acquisition and understanding. In view of this contrasting viewpoint of two of the participants and the participants' overall affirmation of the developmental principles of CfE, I suggested, drawing on Ball (2003), that the opinions of the other participants in favour of increased assessment and data collection may have been shaped by neoliberal orthodoxy and its persuasiveness in transforming teachers into neoliberal subjects.

Regarding assessment in general, most of the participants perceived an increase in assessment across the curriculum to have occurred, contrary to CfE's original ideals. The introduction of the new qualifications was considered by some of the participants to be an important contributory factor in increasing assessment across the curriculum. Regarding the new exit qualifications, most of the participants were critical of all aspects of the new National 4. They disapproved of its internal marking process and the effect its perceived low standard has on pupil motivation. They expressed concern for pupils caught 'in the middle' between the highly differentiated levels of National 4 and National 5, not least because these were pupils they considered most at risk of remaining within the low level of National 4 rather than rising to the higher level of National 5. These perceptions are shared by a wider grass-roots movement which sparked a national political debate in 2019 in order to reform National 4, a political debate which is currently ongoing. The participants' perception that the standard of the new National 5 is too high while the standard of the new National 4 is too low, is a problem previously experienced, I suggested, in the era of the Ordinary Grade system in the 1970s. Six of the participants considered the National 5 to be an elitist examination on account of the increased challenge of its content and the extended duration of the final examination and most of the participants referred to the increased pressures of performativity as a result of the new examinations system.

The increased pressures caused by the new examinations system and which I have aligned with performativity were referred to by many of the participants. They spoke about the negative effects of accountability on their teaching practice, citing, for example, teaching to the test to improve results, and restricting the numbers of pupils presented for National 5, based on their predictions of their ability to pass, in order to meet targets and prevent reputational damage. Muller (2018) describes this new kind of audit culture as a tyranny of metrics, in which teaching to the test, herding pupils towards easy-to-pass qualifications and, in the case of the participants in my study, limiting the numbers of pupils permitted to access the new National 5, are all features of qualifications-centric regimes. I suggested that the

phenomenon of narrowing of the curriculum, a phenomenon which was under investigation by the Scottish Government's Education and Skills Committee in 2019, could be an unintended consequence of teachers limiting pupils' access to the National 5 examination because of its perceived level of difficulty. Overall, my data provides some evidence of professional concern about the general curricular trend towards increased accountability and a more assessment-driven, high-stakes curricular approach than that which had previously existed. Four of the participants perceived markers and setters for the SQA to have access to different information from the majority of teachers, information which some of the participants perceived to permit an unfair advantage in some schools' exit results. There was also evidence to suggest that participants favoured a rapprochement between schools and the marking and setting teams of the SQA to better support their pupils' successes in the National 5 exit examination.

Taking the influence of the Benchmarks and the National Qualifications together, the participants perceived their combined influence to have shifted CfE towards a more assessment-driven curricular approach than that which had existed prior to the introduction of the National Qualifications, as already stated. With respect to the Benchmarks' purported aim of raising attainment and reversing the pattern of decline in levels of literacy and numeracy according to successive PISA surveys, the evidence seemed inconclusive. There was evidence of a perception that frequent measuring does not raise attainment and one participant explicitly stated this. Regarding the impact of the SQA's National Qualifications on the attainment gap, many of the participants were concerned that the internally assessed National 4, along with the more challenging National 5 examination, would contribute to widening that gap and increase inequality. This is another area which could merit further research as the National Qualifications are now in their seventh year and comparative data could provide worthwhile insights into the attainment gap and the effects of the new qualifications regime on closing it, or not.

**Do some teachers perceive tensions between the Broad General Education phase of the curriculum and the exit qualifications?**

The data pointed to perceptions of a curricular imbalance between a dominant Senior Phase and the earlier Broad General Education phase. This imbalance appeared to occur because of the increased intensity of the National 5 course and its culminating exit examination. The data suggests a qualifications-centric approach to the curriculum. The imbalance also manifests in the increased demands of the Senior Phase to the detriment of the Broad General

Education phase, where results are regarded as less important. These tensions suggest a lack of a unifying philosophy between the SQA's National Qualifications and CfE.

Earlier in this study, in Chapter 2, I questioned the SQA's lack of transparency regarding the philosophy of the new National Qualifications and I highlighted the apparent misalignment of the new qualifications with CfE. I suggested that this could be an area meriting further research and I return to this later in this Chapter. I pointed out that there appears to be no oversight by any of the governing bodies of the alignment of the new National Qualifications with CfE. Allais et al. (2009) argue that qualifications-centric systems combined with qualifications frameworks seek to drive up the efficiency and effectiveness of providing institutions by creating increased competition. What is at risk, they argue, in pursuing the goals of qualifications frameworks is a reduction of knowledge and skills (Allais et al., 2009). I found evidence of perceptions of curricular imbalance between a dominant Senior Phase and CfE's Broad General Education phase. I also suggested that the SQA's technical-rational approach appears to have a firm grip on CfE and the new qualifications which do seem to have fuelled an ethos of increased competition, appear to have replaced CfE's vision of a more developmental approach to learning. I sensed, however, that many of the participants continued to prize CfE's developmental learning approach, with teachers as agents of change and developers of the curriculum. Managing this new assessment-driven system, in which measurable outputs are apparently valued above qualities and values such as intuition, caring and judgement (Helsby, 1999), also entailed, for many of the participants, an attempt to preserve the collective, inherited values of the profession. In this perceptible lament for the loss of CfE's developmental approach, lies Biesta's (2005) suggestion that:

> While learning as acquisition is only about getting more and more, learning as responding is about showing who you are and where you stand. It is about a process of 'coming into presence' … If education is indeed concerned with subjectivity and agency, then we should think of education as the process which provides opportunity for individuals to come into presence, that is, to show who they are and where they stand (p. 62).

In Chapter 4, I explained that in conducting a critical analysis of two extracts from the reform policy, the *Plan*, the use of an analytic of Foucauldian governmentality allowed me to question the legitimacy of the version of 'truth' produced and, further, allowed me to ask whose interests are being served and to what ends. The evidence from my study suggests that

some teachers' and some pupils' interests are not being served in the new system and points to the dominance of the interests of the education market which appears to be led by the SQA. Until the SQA permits an intellectual understanding of the underpinning philosophy of the new National Qualifications in relation to CfE, systemic tensions will, I believe, persist and continue to complicate teachers' and pupils' lived experiences.

**Do some teachers believe that policy is being made, and guidance introduced, without adequate attention to all stakeholders, especially teachers?**

The data indicated that three of the participants perceived teacher voice to have been neglected and omitted from curricular policy and reform. Some of the other participants made indirect references to the invisible identities of the policymakers and, by implication, teachers' exclusion from consultation. The data also highlighted a declining level of confidence in top-down policy solutions. With respect to this third research question, there was a very modest amount of evidence as I did not discuss this topic with all of the participants, an issue which I highlight below in the discussion of the study's limitations. In Chapter 1, I argued that Scotland's system of educational governance, arguably a system of 'opaque accountabilities' (Britton, 2019), appears to value data and measurement of pupils over the broader more learner-centred principles of CfE and teachers' judgement. This system of governance could also be a significant factor in the devaluation of teacher voice. I suggested that an exploration of structures of educational governance, combined with the apparent de-professionalisation of teachers in an era of performativity, could be a worthwhile starting point for research focussed on teacher voice and its relationship to curricular policy. At the end of this study, I maintain this position, and suggest that another future area of research could be a cross-stakeholder approach, looking at ways in which to incorporate democratic consultation between all stakeholders into curricular policy discussions. I now consider the limitations of this study.

## 6.4 Limitations of the Study

With fourteen participants and no opportunity for follow-up interviews, the findings of this inquiry are limited, and no claim is made that they are generalisable beyond the teachers who participated. Moreover, it should be clear, that in view of the non-homogeneous nature of the body of secondary teachers in Scotland, this study only engaged with those teachers who volunteered to take part. All of the emergent participants were secondary teachers with ten

years or more of teaching experience, however, a more fine-grained approach with a larger participant group could have extended the analysis to incorporate gender and status, as well as years of experience. Were I to undertake the study again, I would address the broadness of the first research question by breaking it down into more specific questions. The volume of data collected regarding the first question was disproportionately high in comparison to the more minimal data collected in relation to the second and third research questions. With respect to teacher voice, only three participants commented explicitly, and a fuller picture could have emerged, had I specifically asked all of the participants to engage with this topic. I therefore acknowledge that the semi-structured nature of the conversations with participants, although chosen to allow the participants freedom to express their views in their own terms, could have benefitted from a better balance of questioning, incorporating some core questions directed towards all of the participants.

I now turn to consider my own position as the instrument of research and explain how it shaped my study. According to Malterud (2001):

> A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions (p. 483).

Throughout this Dissertation study, I was alert to the possible intrusion of my own biases, which could have manifested at any point in the process from the choice of the general and specific topic of study, the interview questions and the conduct of the interviews, to my interpretation of the data that emerged. While I worked reflexively to remain neutral at all stages of the research process, in choosing to undertake CDA of two extracts from the policy, I acknowledge that I adopted a position of criticality to demonstrate areas which I perceived could be pedagogically problematic and which, I hoped, could engender debate. In Chapter 3, I stated that my intention in employing CDA was to stimulate discussion regarding CfE and its future direction of travel. I also employed insights from CDA when analysing the data in an attempt to demonstrate how, from a CDA perspective, language constructs reality. My appreciation for such a critical approach began at the start of the EdD. I had obtained an MSc in Psychological Studies which had focussed my interest in literacy and child development. However, earlier courses of the EdD alerted me to the possibility of a wider philosophical and sociological approach, rather than a narrow psychological approach, to critique education policy to raise attainment and I made my positionality explicit in Chapter 3. Once again, reflecting on my study within the confines of a doctoral dissertation, were I to undertake the

inquiry again, I would consider the research benefits of a more extensive use of CDA to analyse further key extracts from the policy.

Bearing in mind my critical stance, I felt, following Morrow (2005), the weight of an additional onus of trustworthiness, particularly regarding the study's criteria of credibility and confirmability. Regarding the criteria of transferability and dependability, I made clear that my study was not intended to be generalisable in Chapter 3. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility refers to the idea of internal consistency, where the core issue, according to Gasson (2004), is 'how we ensure rigour in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so' (p. 95). Confirmability is based on the acknowledgment that research is never objective. It is based on the perspective that the integrity of findings lies in the data and that the researcher must adequately tie together the data, analytic processes, and findings in such a way that the reader is able to confirm the adequacy of the findings. So, to achieve confirmability, I used recognised techniques such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, referential adequacy, thick contextual description, reflexivity and transparency. I briefly summarise these techniques before progressing to the final section of this concluding Chapter.

Prolonged engagement requires the researcher to spend adequate time to learn about the culture in which the research is conducted. As a secondary teacher of Modern Languages turned researcher for the purpose of my study, I knew well about the culture in which my research was conducted. Bush and Amechi (2019) argue that if prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth. Persistent observation in secondary school settings had alerted me to my research topic. According to Amin et al. (2020), thick contextual descriptions of the settings, the participants, their quotes, and other contextual data, are essential components which add depth to how issues and phenomena are understood. Ponterotto (2006) argues that thick descriptions lend themselves to thick interpretations. Thick description is regarded as a form of building trustworthiness and validity (Amin et al., 2020) because the reader can see the depth of the data and analysis. The participants provided me with rich, thick data which I interpreted using a critical perspective. The rigour of my critical approach was discussed in Chapter 3 and its limitations were also highlighted. Amin et al. (2020) argue that such reflexivity also provides researchers with the means to deal with the inherent influence that the researcher brings to this type of investigation. According to Daly (2007), reflexivity is both the positioning of the researcher

and a systematic approach for the researcher to be attentive to their role in the construction of knowledge during each step of the research process. As stated above, I worked reflexively at all stages of the research process to remain as neutral as possible and I incorporated my critical position using transparent descriptions of my position and the research tools I used, as described in Chapter 3. In arguing for transparency as a precondition for quality, Moravcsik (2014) cautions that without it, many key aspects of the research including perceptions, beliefs, interests, processes, and even choices could be assumed or implied rather than actually found in the data. Relatedly, Amin et al. (2020) argue that transparency with data allows readers to consider the richness and nuance of what sources say, to assess how they relate to claims made, and to evaluate whether data have been interpreted and analysed in a sound manner. I sought to make transparency apparent at every stage of the research process in this study and, taking all these techniques together, I consider my study to fulfil the criteria of trustworthiness, namely, credibility and confirmability.

## 6.5 So What? What Now?

At the outset of this study, I was motivated to find out if my perception of tensions between the original principles of CfE and the frequent changes to the new National Qualifications and curricular policy initiatives were felt similarly by other teachers. Having engaged in conversations with a small group of secondary teachers and, having had my initial scepticism validated in some ways by them, I believe that this research project has, at the very least, answered my questions regarding tensions driven by a shift in the direction of CfE. I also hope that it has made a contribution, albeit modest, to the future of CfE. Educational research, since CfE's introduction, appears to have been attenuated to what can be measured in the form of annual statistical data from qualifications results and standardised testing. In view of the environment of tension which I perceived at the outset of this study, and to which my participants' perceptions have attested, I have identified the following areas for future research:

> 1) the alignment of the new National Qualifications with the curriculum in the Broad General Education phase. The SQA is responsible for the National Qualifications, however, there has been no communication regarding the underlying philosophy of these exit qualifications, nor has there been oversight of their alignment with CfE by any other governing body. Such research into the

philosophy of CfE could entail trying to retrieve the original principles and premises of CfE.

2) the effect of the highly disparate levels of the National 4 and the National 5 qualifications on the attainment gap and inequality.
3) teacher voice and curricular reform policy.

As I was motivated throughout this research process to promote teacher voice and to highlight the neglect and omission of teacher voice from curricular policy discussions, I noted above, in section 6.3, that another area of worthwhile future research could be a cross-stakeholder project, looking at ways in which to incorporate inclusive, democratic consultation between teachers, educational leaders, institutions, such as the SQA, Education Scotland and HMIe, and the Scottish Government, into curricular policy discussions.

Having presented these recommendations, I will conclude with the observation that undertaking this study has presented me with a range of personal, professional, and intellectual challenges which I am still assimilating. My study has demonstrated that research about CfE and, specifically, curricular issues which have arisen in the period since CfE's implementation, is under-resourced at a national level. However, small-scale studies, consonant with practitioner enquiry (Donaldson, 2011) which I referred to in Chapter 1, can provide fruitful insights at a grass-roots level and should be encouraged within school settings. Based on my research and the observations of commentators, twenty-one years after the creation of Scotland's devolved Parliament, the expectation that a Scottish Parliament could make 'better policy' for education founded on transparent governance, has not, I contend, been met. Paterson (2000a:1) articulated this original sentiment of expectation as follows:

> A Scottish Parliament could make better policy for education. Under devolution, there should be far more transparent governance (Paterson, 2000a:1).

I will finish with an optimistic observation. Perhaps the post-devolution era, in which all stakeholders shared high expectations for top-down policy solutions, is over, and bottom-up, grass-roots movements of teachers, concerned about the heritage, collective wisdom and inherited values of the profession, require and deserve new paradigms with new voices which seek transparent systems of governance.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Plain Language Statement

| | |
|---|---|
| Title of study: | Teachers' understanding of the Scottish Government's plan, "*Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education*" (2016). |
| Researcher: | Rona MacFarlane |
| Supervisor: | Professor Robert Davis |
| Course: | Concluding EdD Dissertation |

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

**The purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' understanding of the Scottish Government's new plan "*Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education* (2016)" Its rationale is to promote a spirit of critical reflection on learning and practice which is widely encouraged in professional practice by employers and regulatory bodies such as GTCS and HMIE. The study will contribute to the body of knowledge relating to equity and closing the attainment gap.

**What the research will involve**

If you decide to take part, I will ask you, firstly, to consent in writing to be interviewed and, secondly, to participate in the audio-recording of the interview in school at a time which is suitable to you. In the course of the audio-recorded interview, I will ask you to tell me about your understanding of the Scottish Government's new plan "*Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education,* (2016)" and how it is implemented in the classroom. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

You do not have to take part in this research and you should feel comfortable to decide not to, for any reason. Also, if at any stage of the interview you feel that you no longer wish to participate, just let me know. I will be happy to stop and I will not use anything you have said in my study.

**Confidentiality and storage**

I will keep information collected for this study in a locked cabinet and on a password-protected computer. When I transcribe our conversation or when I write about what I have found, your name will be replaced with an appropriate pseudonym and any details which could help to identify you or your school or region will be de-identified or omitted. At the stage of data analysis, all identifiers will be removed and replaced by a code which will be known only to the researcher and stored securely.

Please note that confidentiality will be maintained as far as it is possible, unless during our conversation I hear anything which makes me worried that someone might be in danger of harm. I might have to inform relevant agencies of this.

**Use of the information**

The recording and transcript of our conversation will be stored securely. At the stage of data analysis, the transcript of the recording will be coded and locations and any other personal information will be de-identified. The transcripts and recordings will be held for 10 years in accordance with university guidelines. Thereafter, all transcripts and recordings will be destroyed and electronic files will be deleted. In future, the research, including the data derived from your contribution, may appear in journals published online or in print, in a book or a conference paper.

**Disposal of personal information**

Following successful completion, by the end of December 2019 or earlier, depending on the completion and ratification of my dissertation, I will destroy any personal information that I have collected from you for the purposes of this study. Paper documents will be shredded and electronic files will be completely deleted. Anonymised research data, transcripts and audio recordings gathered through this research will be held for up to, but no longer than, 10 years in accordance with the University of Glasgow's Research Guidelines, after which the data will be destroyed in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998).

This study has been considered and approved by the College of Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me, Rona MacFarlane, (r.macfarlane.1@research.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisor, Professor Robert Davis, (Robert.Davis@gla.ac.uk)

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this study, you can also contact the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston (Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk)

## APPENDIX 2

# Consent Form

Title of Project: Teachers' understanding of the Scottish Government's plan, "*Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education*" (2016).

Name of Researcher: Rona MacFarlane

Name of Supervisor: Professor Robert Davis

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I consent to talking about my understanding of the new plan "*Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education,* (2016)" and how it is implemented in the classroom.

I consent to the interview being audio-recorded.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by an appropriate pseudonym.

All names and other information likely to identify individuals or schools and their locations will be de-identified or omitted.

The data will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.

The research may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I agree to waive my copyright to any data collected as part of this project.

I agree to take part in this research study ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study ☐

Name of Participant ………………………………………… Signature ……………………………………………………..

Date ……………………………………

Name of Researcher ………………………………………………… Signature ……………………………………………………..

Date ……………………………………

## APPENDIX 3

## TABLE OF INTERSECTING THEMES

| | CfE & 5-14 | B/marks | Assessment | Attainment Gap | Teacher Autonomy | Challenges of change | Mindset/ attitudes |
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| 1<br><br>U | CfE - principles good but Es & Os too vague and difficult to measure<br><br>CfE was not a magic wand<br><br>Es and Os did not tell me where I was going or the route to take<br><br>5-14 was too prescriptive<br><br>Es & Os will be replaced by the B/marks in time, practitioners will begin to start using the B/marks rather than the Es & Os because it's where your signposts are | Intro of SALs 2015 then B/marks in 2017 welcomed<br><br>The B/marks provide clarity to teachers as to what is expected of them – the B/marks tell me where I am going and give me a selection of routes<br><br>The problem is that there is no time to do anything with the B/marks because of constant changes to National 5, Higher and Adv Higher | Assessment is constant, both formative and summative (much more than there was previously)<br><br>Intro of SNSAs in P1, P4, P7 & S3 – these assessments supposedly demonstrate progression<br><br>Data from SNSAs is more relatable – it is important to "arm" the teacher with as much information as possible | Raising literacy and numeracy is key and there needs to be practical, proactive help<br><br>Major issues occur when a pupil's reading age is lower than chronological age<br><br>Cycle of low attainment is correlated to poverty<br><br>To raise attainment in S1-S3, we need to provide opportunity and experiences | Teacher autonomy is good but only if there is direction<br><br>The guidance for the B/marks is similar to HGIOS4 which is a really good self-evaluation programme | Workload issues resulting from SALs, then B/marks and changes to the national qualifications<br><br>Exams keep changing which means teacher attention is taken away from the BGE | Impact of negative mindset is substantial<br><br>Many children from poverty are culturally conditioned not to see the value of education<br><br>Parental involvement is needed to effect change, however, parental illiteracy can be an issue |
| 2<br><br>R | Awareness of role, scope and reach of Education Scotland - Education Scotland was aware that the B/marks were coming<br><br>The Es and Os were too vast<br><br>Es and Os will not be replaced by the B/marks because they have a different purpose – Es and Os are for planning and the B/marks are for assessment | Rationale for B/marks – there was confusion regarding attainment of a level – more consistency across all schools was sought – clarity and clarification<br><br>B/marks are still unwieldy, the volume of objectives could have been reduced further, however, they represent a welcome reduction of the Es and Os which were too vast. Some local authorities had already taken action | In the classroom, everything is geared towards assessment, informal and formal. Assessment is integral to everything you do<br><br>Learning, teaching and assessment is totally circular and allows teachers to identify pupils who need support<br><br>The assessment tail is wagging the dog<br><br>Teaching to the test for National 5; disconnect between the BGE and the Senior Phase. | Early intervention required to prevent a gap at the start of primary school – perceived correlation between literacy and family's cultural background (speech/ books) so, raising awareness also necessary<br><br>Interventions at primary school require appropriately qualified staff and constant review to see what works – some authorities do this well but it needs to be across the board – interventions at secondary | Teacher voice in seeking clarification since the intro of CfE was ineffectual but external drivers like PISA and the Literacy Survey prompted clarification – this sends a demoralising message for teacher voice | Workload has definitely been affected by the B/marks<br><br>Organisations like Education Scotland are reluctant to put anything in writing so interpretation of the B/marks' guidance is usually by experienced teachers – Education Scotland practice "education speak" which is not helpful | Parental involvement in speech development pre-3 is crucial and is also crucial to encourage reading pre-5 |

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| | | to provide more clarity to the Es & Os.<br><br>B/marks may be used in the classroom differently to their original intention because they also work well as Success Criteria – what the children need to achieve in their assessments – the B/marks are perceived as a very useful tool<br><br>B/marks are another layer of workload | Level 4 and National 4 do not match – Level 4 matches National 5. In addition, the BGE does not fit with timed exam assessments in S4-S6, so the SQA and the exams indirectly impact the BGE – the forms of assessment do not match<br><br>Most schools require teachers who are also SQA markers in order to cascade marking information<br><br>National 4 has got to go – the standard for National 4 is so low, it does not match Level 4 | school are perceived to be too little, too late | | | |
| 3<br><br>R | The Es and Os were subject to too many different interpretations – but teachers were told that the point of keeping them vague was to allow different teacher interpretation – a fixed education system where everybody was taught the same thing at the same time, all the way through was not what CfE was about. If you fully engaged with 5-14, it looks like CfE – teachers tended to forget about the skills in 5-14 and only valued the content – so CfE embedded the skills so that teachers could not omit | The B/marks are not a big reform – they represent the clarity and exemplificati-on which teachers have been asking for – teachers were unclear about the level of content detail required so the B/marks will allow them to get the pitch better and they have clarified what the people who wrote the original Es and Os actually had in mind – the B/marks have given consistency and uniformity across the board, although, they came very late (5-10 years too late) | In Science, the bulk of teaching is formative assessment, constant questions from teachers to pupils and vice-versa because of the importance of unpacking what they already know<br><br>End assessments are always summative and not differentiated | In Science, pupils who struggle with literacy are capable of engaging at the same level as everybody else and it is about facilitating them – helping them access the content in a different way<br><br>Measuring attainment in literacy and numeracy is difficult and Heriot-Watt University are going to produce digital tests which will determine how literacy and numeracy are measured – in recent years, the emphasis has been on learner engagement and presentation rather than literacy and numeracy, fun at the expense of rigour? | Autonomy in CfE was given to teachers by allowing them to create their own contexts but that was taken away and context was much more firmly controlled<br><br>Teacher engagement with any policy reform should be about embracing change but always with an awareness of what has gone before and the ability to adapt to change | Teachers need to go back and rewrite courses and assessments, which is a huge amount of work – the whole of S1-S3 in the BGE<br><br>Substantial workload implications for Science teachers, especially for teachers who may be teaching outside their subject specialism | Health and wellbeing has become predominantly about mental health and if pupils are feeling depressed because of events which are perhaps happening at home |

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| | | The B/marks will improve literacy, numeracy and science scores because they have refocused teachers on the content<br><br>The B/marks may take over from the Es and Os – teachers have to be careful not to ditch Es and Os in favour of B/marks<br><br>B/marks will also clarify pre-requisite knowledge from primary which means consistency across the country | | | | | |
| 4 U /R | CfE, by the time it was introduced had lost all of its original creativity and was merely a vast list of Es and Os which teachers were expected to teach and assess<br><br>CfE has been altered by the intro of the B/marks – "Here's CfE and then there'll be a big coloured stripe along there and that's the 5-14 area of CfE" | The B/marks superseded the SALs and, initially, were perceived, especially by the professional organisations, as an additional layer of workload, however, that has not been the case – they have been welcomed by Science teachers because they can clarify and help to create uniformity of teaching esp. for pupils entering S4<br><br>The B/marks allow PTs to have a set up that works i.e. uniformity across all classes | The National 5 exam seems to be a return to O Grade – it is an elitist exam and far more difficult than Standard Grade. National 5 Maths has also become much more difficult.<br><br>The role of the SQA – there have an almost invisible hold on the curriculum - since becoming a marker, it's like a secret society – there's only one answer they're looking for, no deviation from that – this can disadvantage schools which do not have SQA markers.<br><br>Problem of alignment between the curriculum and National 5 exams – pupils feel they are being examined on topics which | The return to elitist exams will contribute to an attainment gap rather than addressing the gap<br><br>Literacy and numeracy are crucial to Physics – a weakness in literacy can mean pupils struggle to keep up/give up. It is easy to blame the primary schools for low levels of literacy but is that entirely fair? The Physics exams are all about literacy and the major cause of marks being lost is a lack of understanding of what the pupils are being asked to do, e.g. summarise, investigate the relationship etc. | There was a side of teacher autonomy that was problematic – teachers would teach different content which meant lack of uniformity in S4 and, as a result, increased teaching to the exam in S4<br><br>Teacher autonomy can depend on their department – they can be watched by the minute<br><br>Teacher autonomy is affected by the fear of assessment at the end. The exam post-mortem analysis instils fear in teachers<br><br>Teachers are creatures of | We did not try to reinvent the wheel, we made the B/marks fit what already existed<br><br>There is concern about the time taken up by the changes to the SQA exams to the detriment of the BGE | Issues of attendance arising from attitudinal problems relating to 3rd generation of unemployment and pupils not seeing the value in education – the legacy of Margaret Thatcher still affects communities which were decimated by her policies. There is a lack of aspiration.<br><br>Issues of perception of difficulty regarding subject disciplines e.g. Physics – with no role models among family or friends, children talk themselves out of choosing "difficult" subjects. Standard Grade Physics was arguably the 8th easiest Standard Grade to get a Credit mark in, however, the perception that Physics is very |

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| | | | they may not have been taught<br><br>The assessment tail is wagging the dog – the National exams are all-important and there is concern about the constantly-changing content of the National exams<br><br>There has been a return to constant grading of pupils | | habit and like to be told what to do<br><br>Changes to the exams are taking up so much of teachers' time, they are unable to focus on the BGE<br><br>Change is constant | | difficult has never changed. |
| 5 U | There are loads of Es and Os and they're very broad which is why they brought out the SALs<br><br>Teachers were more creative using 5-14, creativity has been lost | The B/marks affect each subject differently<br><br>The B/marks were needed, something had to be done but, with them, there is a danger of spoon-feeding to meet the outcomes<br><br>SALs were before the B/marks which were supposed to pull out the main things from the Es and Os, however, they were too broad<br><br>The B/marks are straightforward and there is an assumption that, if you use the B/marks, you are breaking things down into what you can measure | National qualifications criteria which is published by the SQA should be used to inform the assessments using the B/marks for S1-S3<br><br>Teachers are teaching to National 5 because that is what they are judged on<br><br>National 5 is a difficult exam, far more difficult than Standard Grade Credit level<br><br>Assessment is used in the classroom all the time – you're really assessing all the time<br><br>A lot of the time, teachers feel they have to use assessment to justify what they do because of the blame culture which has evolved<br><br>Teachers teach to the National 5 exam because this is what they are judged on<br>Tension has been created by | The National 5 and National 4 system has led to inequality – pupils who are doing National 4 feel excluded, less valued and it can reinforce a "can't" attitude<br><br>Literacy across learning – teachers need to buy into this more – raising attainment in literacy is a whole school responsibility, pupils need feedback regarding their literacy in all subjects<br><br>Challenges for raising attainment in literacy – fewer children are reading books, there is little conversation between parents and children because of the rise of social media<br><br>More investment in teachers who are specialists | Teachers used to be valued for their creativity, however, now uniformity is paramount<br><br>When CfE was introduced, there was a handing back of autonomy to teachers, however, it was not long before it became clear that teachers were expected to prove they were "doing it correctly" (Learning Intentions, Success Criteria, SALs,B/Msand Tracking Reports) | The B/marks mean replacing assessments<br><br>Because of the constant changes to the Senior Phase exams, and the awareness that National 5 is almost as difficult as Higher, teachers' time is disproportio-nately spent on S4-S6 rather than BGE<br><br>Teachers are too preoccupied with the changes to the Senior Phase to reappraise the BGE according to the B/marks | "Can't" attitude prevails among many children from disadvantaged backgrounds |

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| | | | the National 5/National 4 system | | | | | |
| 6 U / R | The Es and Os were very broad<br><br>CfE seems to be like the Finnish model, however, the Senior Phase is not at all like the Finnish model – there is a disconnect between the BGE and the Senior Phase | | There has been a huge drop in numbers sitting National 5 because a lot of pupils are not being put forward for National 5 - the National 5 is an elitist exam which affects pupils' confidence and causes anxiety<br><br>The exams in the Senior Phase do not fit with CfE's BGE – there is no alignment – which causes problems<br><br>The PEF is good as an initiative to raise attainment but it may not be sustainable and the funding is only for 3 years – in addition, the rules can be easily circumvented; there may also be stigma attached to the PEF which prevents parents filling in the forms | Closing the attainment gap – it seems as if our higher ability learners are going down the way as opposed to our less able learners going up the way<br><br>The importance of practical abilities awards has to be stressed, e.g. the John Muir Award and SQA personal development awards and level 3 qualifications for all children<br><br>By S3, pupils do not like to be taken out of class for extra Maths, however, for some, their developmental age may be below their chronological age<br><br>Primary schools are receiving a lot of PEF funding and this may help some pupils be "less of a burden" by the time they reach secondary school<br><br>We live in a society that is focused on measuring attainment – how many qualifications, how many As, how many Highers?<br><br>The importance of channelling pupils into positive destinations | There has been a lot of flip-flopping between giving teachers autonomy in the CfE to taking the autonomy away again and making everything universal<br><br>CfE gave teachers more autonomy – it let them take the Es and Os and create their lessons and assess their lessons the way they want to, however, the problem with that was that everybody was at different stages when they came to S4 | Work overload – splitting 2 roles within Support for Learning – roles which include counselling /nurturing role - similar to a social worker/ counsellor/ psychologist/ mother<br><br>Extra-curricular support groups also important to build confidence and social skills<br><br>The changes to the national qualifications by the SQA are often perceived incorrectly by teachers as policy changes – teachers seem to lump together policy changes which are introduced by the Scottish Government and changes to the exams by the SQA | Mental health issues are increasing, however, resources to support pupils are decreasing |

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| | | | | Major challenges which can affect attainment are behaviour and attendance | | | |
| 7 U /R | CfE was progressive but perhaps too much autonomy was given<br><br>The 5-14 curriculum engendered uniformity which meant you could make comparisons<br><br>CfE is being dismantled/ changed with add-ons but at least what is happening now "feels rigorous." When CfE first came out, even though I admired the progressive ideas and its progressive rationale, I did think "who is writing this?"<br><br>The Es and Os were too vague and they will be replaced by the B/marks<br><br>I think the Scottish Government would be happy if CfE were never mentioned again and instead GIRFEC, PEF and the B/marks | The SALS which preceded the B/marks were very vague and ineffective and when the B/marks came out, some teachers were annoyed because they felt that policymakers were trying to "get the horse back after it had bolted" – in other words, trying to get standards back where too much autonomy in all different schools had been given. In addition, people were being paid to produce the SALS and the B/marks – they were being paid for a correction exercise | Being a marker for the SQA is really important – if you do not mark for the SQA, you are disadvantaging your pupils because every year the marking changes<br><br>The transition from BGE, from S3 to S4 and National 5 is significant and is too big a leap for a lot of pupils – 3 + 3 does not work because National 5 cannot be taught in 1 year<br><br>The new National 5 has a 10 hour assessment which is completed in school but marked externally. The exam lasts 2 hours 40 minutes and represents 80% of the overall mark and the unit assessment is 20%.<br><br>Over-assessment is going on at the moment but there needs to be more challenge for pupils who are going to progress. We over-assess in S1 and S2 – there are 12 assessments across the year – all formative – only summative in S3 and we don't set for S4, they all start S4 in mixed classes | The new National qualifications do not help to close the attainment gap, they are elitist – if you are looking at results, the way the National qualifications are set up, they actually widen the attainment gap – the National 5 exam used to be 1 hour 45 minutes, it's now 2 hours 20 minutes straight without a break – not a lot of pupils can undertake such a strenuous exam<br><br>Literacy is a concern – pupils seem to be well-versed in HWB and SHANARRI but literacy is poorer<br><br>There is a decrease in pupils sitting the National 5 exam because of the no National 4 award – if the teacher does not have evidence, the child will not be put forward for National 5<br><br>There are so many problems with National 4 – it should be an exam but that would be bringing back over-assessment. The Standard Grade was the gold standard which has been replaced by a | Prior to the SALs and the B/marks, there had been too much autonomy in all different schools – where were the standards?<br><br>CfE was progressive and gave autonomy to teachers but it was not measured autonomy and it did not match up with the exam system | Teachers are working under the pressure of constant new developments (e.g. the B/marks and the BGE, changes to the National Qualifications, the "new" Higher, more changes to National 5) and these constant changes impact department development time<br><br>Changes in educational governance – the government is going to be able to say that they gave the money to the Head Teacher and that is a massive "buck pass" | |

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| | | | and then, after Xmas, we determine who is going to do National 5 | completely elitist system<br><br>Teachers face huge challenges to raise attainment because there is little/no awareness of what goes on at home. There can be a feeling of inheriting things which are difficult to turn around<br><br>National 4 has created a lot of problems because pupils, in general, think that there is no point to National 4 and parents do not want their children to undertake National 4 because they have to sign agreeing to it<br><br>Decisions for National 4/National 5 are made from early February/March which is too early for a lot of middle-of-the-road pupils<br><br>The PEF is a great idea to raise attainment. The gap starts at P1, at age 5. The PEF is a targeted approach with financial resources, although there is no clear funding strategy beyond 3 years)<br><br>In many areas, the importance of literate parents to raise standards of literacy and the impact of generations of unemployed on literacy is discernible<br><br>Going back to 5-14, you knew what level they | | | |

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| | | | | were because they were assessed in P4 and P7 – the data from all the changes will be interesting because we do need to know how wide the gap has become | | | | |
| 8 U | CfE started as a blank piece of paper and it has come back towards a 5-14 checklist of "Can kids do this – yes or no…?" | The B/marks were welcomed in 2017 as something to streamline the process of teachers grappling with the Es and Os and the minutiae of the wording<br><br>SALs were already in place and the B/marks took over – concern about the number of different systems<br><br>When the B/marks were introduced, it became clear that a lot of the Maths content was the same anyway and all assessments were fine – the only thing to be done was to double-check | In the BGE (S1-S3), right across the school in all classes, pupils are being assessed constantly – formative assessment is constant – there are also block assessments once a term, at the end of term<br><br>The Higher exam is the big summative assessment and information is taken from National 5 assessments<br><br>Classes are kept as mixed as possible for as long as possible – moves between classes are determined by many factors, not simply results in assessments<br><br>Additional length of time added to the new National 5 exam was surprising – it does seem unnecessarily long – the positive side to it, is that everything from the course has to be covered which means there are no gaps for pupils going on to Higher<br><br>Teaching for mastery – there seems to be a big push in that direction – | The transition from primary to secondary and the data available has not been sufficient – there is a need for more joined-up thinking across the board and, with CfE and the B/marks, we are beginning to see progress<br><br>With the PEF, a PT of Numeracy has recently been appointed and has made a lot of progress<br><br>A lot of the discussion regarding how to improve teaching and learning is rendered unimportant by constant changes to exams and the BGE – Maths teachers can be very pedantic and get bogged down in the wording of a specific line in a document, perhaps in the guidance documents from the Scottish Government. So, monthly Maths PT meetings have become too focused on minutiae and, therefore, engaging on Twitter and What's App groups is more satisfying in | The exciting thing about CfE was the idea of teachers having a bit more autonomy, however, it can be understood that teachers cannot have full autonomy, however, the pretence that CfE was giving more autonomy to teachers and then the B/marks were taking it back was annoying<br><br>Concerns about professional and experienced practitioners being told what to do when they are already doing what is needed | Not a lot of reworking required after the introduction of the B/marks – the content of Maths has never really changed from 5-14 right through to CfE and now the B/marks – what should change is how Maths is taught and how pupils perceive Maths and the level of challenge and difficulty involved<br><br>The B/marks have deflected the conversation away from pedagogy to poring over the wording of the content and whether things are included in levels<br><br>The changes to the exams in the Senior Phase have also deflected from talking about teaching and learning – unit assessments have been replaced by a longer final exam which, in one sense, is good because teachers' professional | Lack of aspiration arising from cultural differences between children from different social and economic backgrounds is a huge issue in some schools – deep-rooted low aspiration is a major barrier to raising attainment<br><br>Parental involvement can have an impact on pupils seeing the value of education – there are pupils from first or second generation immigrant backgrounds who have a different view of the value of education and those pupils are doing well in school whereas pupils whose parents are native Scottish but perhaps third generation unemployed do not place a high value on education<br><br>The perception of difficulty of Maths is influenced by parents who do not see the benefit of learning it and put their children off choosing it |

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| | | | removing time as a barrier to learning and giving pupils time to develop which goes against the B/marks as they focus too much on levels and what year group the pupil are in<br><br>National 4 is much easier than Standard Grade General and pupils receive so much support because it's internally assessed – the SNP could claim success for a huge increase in kids achieving National 4 | terms of engaging in educational conversation. There is a private company called La Salle which has a platform called Complete Maths and are worth attending for CPD<br><br>In order to raise attainment, it is really important to allow pupils time to master concepts – also to improve the link between primary and secondary. The PEF is good because it looks at "impact" and "what impact is being made" – evidence is important | | judgement is trusted a bit more, however, the teacher conversation is still more about the exams instead of pupils' understanding of concepts and how that can be improved upon<br><br>Constant change may be a political issue because the Scottish Government may view a successful education system as a vote-catcher – and a successful education system may be the SG's objective in order to stay in power/gain votes rather than any real concern about raising pupils' attainment – the politicisation of education raises a lot of questions about the purpose of education<br><br>Attempts to improve "education" should be constant but that would require everyone in the profession to see the big picture and the professional body is extremely diverse, so it can be difficult to find consensus | |

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| 9 R | The future of CfE may be hanging in the balance because of “changes/add-ons” but it will be important not to “throw the baby out with the bathwater”<br><br>The Es and Os in general were too vague and, specifically, for Modern Languages, they were hopeless<br><br>The former Head of Education Scotland issued guidance on “where we need to go next with CfE” in August 2017<br><br>The Es and Os felt like a top-down imposition on teachers regarding context and content in Modern Languages | The SALs became the “new things” in 2015 but, within a year, the B/marks were introduced and they were going to be the next new thing in terms of assessing levels<br><br>The B/marks suit some subjects very well, e.g. History, however, for other subjects, the B/marks were no better than the Es and Os<br><br>Education Scotland issued guidance which stated that the Es and Os should be used for planning and the B/marks should be used to make judgements about overall levels<br><br>There are concerns that the Drama B/marks are still not detailed enough<br><br>The B/marks feel like a top-down imposition on teachers regarding context and content in Modern Languages<br><br>The B/marks seem to have come from the National 5 specifications but don’t provide much | The new exams make bi-level and tri-level teaching difficult<br><br>There should be more direction regarding the number of qualifications pupils study in 4th, 5th and 6th years<br><br>The National 4 exam is “not worth the paper it’s written on” in spite of the SG’s rhetoric about an education system which is not just about “passing exams” and “we’re going to value you even if you’re the sort of pupil who doesn’t do well at exams because we’ve got these great things called National 4s”<br><br>The new National qualifications represent an elitist system which values National 5 pupils and doesn’t value pupils who do National 4s – in other words “pupils who can sit in a room for 2 hours and splurge everything they know on to a piece of paper” are valued<br><br>The assessment tail is wagging the dog and, although a bit of weighing is good, there is a feeling of “how do we get back from that?” Too much time is | Raising attainment and inspiring and engaging children is so much more about the relationship between the teacher and the class and the teacher and the individual and the teacher’s teaching skills than it is about the content or the B/marks<br><br>In Scotland, not enough time is spent on improving teaching practice or upskilling the teaching profession to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and difficult learners | Concerns about teacher voice regarding the B/marks because they were put in place with not a lot of consultation with the actual practitioners on the ground<br><br>Concerns about teacher autonomy because experienced practitioners already know what it takes to get children to a certain level and don’t need to be told. The purpose of education is thrown into focus because teachers are only judged on qualifications, however, their purpose is not merely to get pupils through qualifications<br><br>The Es and Os and the B/marks felt like a top-down imposition on teachers regarding context and content in Modern Languages<br><br>Teacher autonomy needs to be a compromise between guidance and autonomy but there needed to be something more than the Es and Os | There is very little time for teachers to learn about different ways of teaching because of constant changes to the National qualifications, the B/marks and the standardised assessments | |

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| | | more clarity – if anything, they might be slightly more specific | spent on assessment rather than teaching and learning<br><br>The introduction of standardised national assessments in Scotland is similar to the SATs in England – SATs have sparked controversy in the English education system<br><br>The use of data and baseline assessments in order to measure VALUE-ADDED is used extensively in England and it has benefits but it also has drawbacks<br><br>The new standardised assessments are apparently aligned to the B/marks and to the Es and Os<br><br>There is concern about the new standardised tests and how the data is going to be used – are we going to follow England's lead? In England, there is a grass-roots movement against SATs. Parents in Scotland have a right to ask for the report on their child/children so there is going to be a big question-mark regarding the data generated by the new standardised tests | | because it was not clear how to establish standards – "How am I supposed to know what the standard is?" | | |
| 10<br><br>U | The Es and Os were vast | There was a feeling among teachers that | Over-assessment is happening currently in | Early intervention is very important | | Change is constant | Low aspiration among children and their parents from |

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| | The Es and Os needed clarity – you needed to know what it was you were supposed to be teaching<br><br>The philosophy of CfE was really good but the practice has not allowed it to shine through<br><br>Arguably, the dismantling of CfE started as soon as it was introduced because of the pressure to conform, the pressure to do well, the pressure to do better<br><br>One of the aims of CfE was to cut down on assessment and to give more freedom to teachers | the B/marks were much needed because the Es and Os were vast and there was uncertainty around how many of them should be assessed – and then the SALs were introduced which helped teachers understand where they were going<br><br>The B/marks replaced the SALs and seem to make sense to teachers – this person has reached this kind of level, this person is able to do this or that or whatever<br><br>Teachers appreciate that the B/marks allow the Scottish Government to compare schools and local authorities and that they represent a method of accountability | schools which was not the aim of CfE – one of the aims of CfE was to cut down on assessment<br><br>There is a feeling of paranoia regarding teaching absolutely everything for National 5 and Higher – the SQA has created an environment of paranoia which is fuelled by the fact that qualifications are the "currency"<br><br>The assessment tail is wagging the dog<br><br>Over-assessment is not raising attainment, all it's doing is measuring<br><br>Teachers are obsessed with tests and exams<br><br>In Scotland, there has always been a culture of exams, tests and grades – there is no culture of "just education for its own sake" which exists in other countries' education systems. In addition, there has always been a culture of "not trusting teachers to be able to teach" | in raising attainment<br><br>Children from areas of multiple deprivation needed longer to catch up but are judged against the same benchmarks as kids from middle-class backgrounds, middle-class areas and middle-class schools<br><br>The PEF is good but may not be radical enough<br><br>More teachers are needed – better teachers – incentives should be given to attract the best teachers into schools in areas of multiple deprivation – there should be smaller classes and there should be lots of extra support in the form of full-time social workers based in school and full-time counsellors to deal with the things that go on outside of school which clearly impact learning<br><br>GIRFEC as a policy has suffered because social work is now even less well-resourced than education and schools and teachers are often dealing with a lot of the problems<br><br>Nurturing children is very important but teachers need extra support | | There have been so many changes recently that teachers are exhausted and fearful that they may have missed something. Teachers feel personally accountable<br><br>Teachers do not have time to undertake Masters qualifications due to demanding workloads | economically disadvantaged areas is not necessarily the case – it depends on the area and in what way it has been impacted by employment and social changes<br><br>Mental health issues may be a major barrier to learning |

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| | | | | Parental engagement is a huge issue and strategies to increase parental engagement may not be successful<br><br>School engagement with organisations /projects which widen access to universities (e.g. Top Up, Reach, the Caledonian Club) is extremely important in raising attainment<br><br>Data – Insight Data – every year the data is analysed with a view to understanding results – the school is judged on the results across every level – 3,4,5, Higher, Adv Higher. If a school's results are not good then somebody from the local authority would pay that school a visit<br><br>The importance of school leadership - the interviewee's school had a visionary Head Teacher with family links to universities who had applied for extra funding through the Schools of Ambition project and had introduced a vast array of initiatives/ practices to raise attainment. The school pushed meetings with parents and meetings with pupils and by doing so, kept everyone highly | | | |

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| | | | | motivated – "we had a programme that they could buy into"<br><br>In order to raise attainment, pupils need to be targeted and resourced appropriately. Mainstreaming is an equitable strategy, however, teachers lack support/ resources/ training to allow them to deal with diverse needs within a classroom | | | |
| 11<br><br>U/<br>R | The Es and Os were quite vague which led to a lack of consistency across the profession. The idea of CfE was that it was supposed to be personalisation and choice and teachers having creative freedom with the curriculum<br><br>The Scottish Government let teachers down by introducing CfE without enough resources | The B/marks provide more clarity – this is what they need to know and this is the depth they need to know it<br><br>Topics were already close to the B/marks so there has been no need to change content<br><br>The B/marks are used as success criteria e.g. at the end of this topic, you should know …….<br><br>The B/marks are now used more than the Es and Os – the Es and Os could not be used as Success Criteria but now the B/marks are the Success Criteria<br><br>The guidance for the B/marks is laid out in the same way as the course support notes for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher from the SQA<br><br>The B/marks are not differentiated and they give consistency across the country for levels | SQA markers find out different information to what's widely available – this is perceived by teachers as being very unfair, the general population of teachers is given one set of facts regarding assessment criteria but markers find out that there are different criteria when they sit at the markers' meeting<br><br>National 4 should be an exam in order to make it a "proper qualification" It could be an easy exam, like Intermediate 1, for example, it would give it credibility which it lacks at the moment. There is a feeling that National 4 has been misconceived because it lacks progression for the pupil – it's experiential learning that's all internally assessed<br><br>Every school is different regarding assessment in the BGE. There is a need to balance getting pupils used to tests but not over-testing in the BGE, especially in S1 and S2 and increasing in S3 | Project is funded by the PEF to target pupils in the lower deciles in S1 to S3. It entails an attempt to measure the impact of mindset on literacy, numeracy and HWB which are the main areas of concern. The impact is very difficult to measure by looking at scores so reflective reports are used which are essentially interviews with the pupils involved. Approximately 40 children involved this year with 3 teachers looking at different approaches but no collaboration between the three of them<br><br>Numeracy is a problem and could stem from pupils arriving in S1 from primary with poor levels of numeracy | Teacher voice is being ignored by policymakers who are introducing policies to raise attainment. There is a perception among teachers that the Government doesn't know what to do | Changes to content are viewed with a certain amount of scepticism because a huge amount to teachers' time goes into developing courses<br><br>Teachers' morale is low because of the lack of a reasonable amount of time to deliver changes and also the lack of resources to do so. The bottom line should be that nothing new is introduced unless you can properly resource it | PEF project to improve mindset and attitudes to learning. The project focuses on strategies to help pupils cope with external circumstances which impact their readiness to learn. Sounds like "resilience" from Educational Psychology |

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| | | | The new standardised assessments will help identify gaps and that will be good. The standardised assessments are an attempt to tackle the problems | | | | |
| 12<br><br>U/R | The Es and Os were vast | The B/marks were very good for ASN because the Es and Os were so vast. It was difficult for parents to see progress with the E's and O's, however, with the B/marks everyone can see progress | Assessment depends on the Head Teacher who may require pupils to have reached level 2 by a certain time<br><br>National 5 exams are difficult and equate to Intermediate 2 – they are not serving pupils who, in the days of Standard Grade, might have achieved a General qualification. A lot of departments are not putting pupils forward for National 5 if they think they might fail | The PEF is used for literacy and numeracy across all subject disciplines although a lot of teachers feel out of their comfort-zones and there is a feeling that literacy and numeracy should not be taught beyond the bounds of English and Maths classes<br><br>Older teachers are being replaced by younger teachers from the primary sector in order to promote literacy and numeracy which has led to concern regarding the reduction of the specialist aspect of school<br><br>The PEF is a worthy policy, as is entitlement for all, inclusion and equality<br><br>SFL departments have been cut drastically in favour of the PEF<br><br>The PEF goes some way towards supporting pupils, however, the spending has to be very targeted, everything has to be measurable and the use of the | Ethos of support and collaboration among teachers can be under pressure in an environment of performativit y – there doesn't seem to be trust and it can sometimes be a bullying culture<br><br>There is a perception that schools have to be performative | | |

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| | | | | funding must correlate with attainment which puts pressure on teachers<br><br>Data and targets – in the ASN sector, it's all about targets, data and evidence – thousands of pounds are being poured into the ASN sector and attainment levels are increasing | | | |
| 13<br><br>U | | | Everything goes towards assessment, everything is about teaching to the test<br><br>Streaming of pupils in Maths and English takes place in S1<br><br>Perception that National 4 is not a good idea. Nobody fails National 4 – lack of attendance would the only thing which could cause a pupil to fail National 4<br><br>The National 5 exam is not serving kids who might have achieved a General award | The PEF is always misspent – it's a lot of propaganda<br><br>Budgets for SFL departments have been slashed and the support staff have been cut. PTs of Guidance have a massively increased remit because they are taking on a lot of SFL<br><br>More teachers are needed – tri-level classes of National 3, 4 and 5 are extremely difficult and support is needed. In order to raise attainment, more teaching staff is required. 5 new PEF PTs have been appointed, all of whom are paid a PT's salary<br><br>More funding is needed because of the pressure to raise the number of pupils going to university or reaching positive destinations through programmes such as Developing the | | | |

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| 14<br><br>U/<br>R | The principles of CfE were very good but the Es and Os were vast which resulted in teachers spending too much time deliberating about what they should be teaching and to what standard | The B/marks have arguably had a reductive influence on the BGE, S1-S3 – teachers have to ensure that the work they are doing ties into the B/marks – it's reductive and prescriptive – the idea that we measure this and not that negates the idea that humans evolve. Everything is prescribed by the Head of Department and that has the effect of ripping the creativity out of teaching and creating uniformity<br><br>The B/marks did not create more workload. Much of what they prescribe was already being done and there was nothing surprising<br><br>There is a consensus view that the B/marks represent a reductionist mentality, particularly in English<br><br>As a result of the B/marks, the PT has imposed certain tasks and all the children do the same tasks and have the same assessments which brings | There is a perception that the Standard Grade exam system was more fluid and more democratic. The introduction of the new National exams represents a return to an elitist exam system – the system has gone back to O Grades and ROSLA (Raising of School Leaving Age), children who did not sit formal examinations and that's like National 4<br><br>The new exam system is not serving pupils in the middle, the pupils who would have sat General/ Foundation Standard Grade, children who are, perhaps, late bloomers<br><br>The reasons for changing the exam system are unknown although there is speculation about the new system being cheaper than the Standard Grade system. The new exam system is causing concern because the introduction of National 4 has dismantled the democratizati-on of education and it is helping to marginalise children<br><br>It is all about results. If a child is | They're not raising attainment, they're measuring it<br><br>Possible reasons for falling standards – the primary curriculum may be overloaded and not enough time is spent on literacy per week; children transitioning from primary to secondary may be working below their chronological ag; the SFL department has been cut from 15 to 3 which means that only children with physical disability receive support; teachers are hugely involved in the demands of the upper school which means that the lower school can be neglected; the difficulties of correcting the massive volume of work has meant that a school policy of peer correction has evolved to cut the amount of time teachers spend marking/ correcting<br><br>In order to raise attainment, every child should be sitting exams and there should be more teacher autonomy regarding what is taught and more reliance on teacher judgement | There should be more teacher autonomy regarding what is taught and there should also be more reliance on teacher judgement | | Constant assessment can have a negative impact on pupils' mental health |

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|  |  | uniformity of what is taught and when across the department. This uniformity of what is taught and when completely negates CfE<br><br>There is a perception that the B/marks are like a “plug” to stop the gap because standards are definitely falling<br><br>The B/marks may have freed teachers up to see what they are teaching and preventing them having to crawl/trawl through masses of work, however, uniformity can lead to mediocrity | presented for National 5 and fails, he/she gets nothing. The message to National 4 pupils is “you’re not valued”<br><br>The perception of Scottish qualifications abroad is not good according to one source<br><br>The head of SQA is David Swinney who is John Swinney’s brother. There is a perception among teachers that there is a coterie of policy-makers from various organisations such as the SQA, Education Scotland, GTCS etc.<br><br>A great deal of time is spent on assessment which means that there isn’t much education going on. All pieces of work have to be assessed in a uniform manner, which takes a lot of time<br><br>Pupil tracking has gone “mad” and it requires teachers to predict grades right from the start of the year and if management see that a pupil is predicted a certain grade, then pressure is on the teacher to make sure the pupil achieves the predicted grade. If the pupil does not succeed, teacher voice is diminished<br><br>Data – analysis of results after summer and the |  |  |  |  |

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| | | | the data is gathered by PTs and Senior Management. The data is all-important and is used for comparison of overall general results<br><br>The assessment tail has been wagging the dog for at least 5 years, possibly longer, with PTs absorbing all of the assessment changes because their results are scrutinised by Senior Management<br><br>The culture of over-assessment and performativity has led to unethical practices such as coaching pupils using essay mills. Young teachers are frightened as they are driven by reputation and this can lead them to engage in unethical practices. Output in exams is the only thing staff are interested in. There is a frenzied culture of results. There seems to be a new generation of teachers who are technicians, not professionals, which raises issues of grade inflation and coaching<br><br>In departments in which teachers are either SQA markers or setters, their results are amazing which has to be more than just coincidence | | | | |

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## APPENDIX 4

## EXTRACT FROM *THE PLAN*

### A Curriculum which Delivers for Children and Teachers

### Our ambition

The introduction of Curriculum for Excellence ( CfE) - Scotland's approach to learning and teaching - has been a very positive development in our schools. Scotland's children and young people are now much more confident, resilient and motivated to learn. The OECD has applauded the boldness of our approach, and called on us to maintain the breadth of learning in CfE.

The ultimate goal of education is that each and every child develops a broad range of skills and attributes and gains the qualifications to have choices and be successful in life. If we are to achieve this goal, our teachers need to be clear about what is expected of them, and have the time and space to do their job. This requires us to take action on a number of fronts.

We need to make the whole CfE framework much clearer and simpler. Too many documents and too much 'guidance' have accumulated as CfE has been implemented. We need clear, simple statements that give teachers confidence about what CfE does, and does not, expect of them.

Within that, we need to be clearer and more specific about how children's progress is assessed. This is crucial to making sure children are making the right progress in their learning - not least so they are ready to meet the demands of qualifications in the 'senior phase' of school.

We need to de-clutter the curriculum. We need to make sure there is enough time in the week to allow teachers to teach the things that matter most at each stage of a child's learning.

Finally, we need to strip away anything that creates unnecessary workload for teachers and learners. The 'Tackling Bureaucracy' report of 2013 was agreed and well-evidenced, but has still to be fully implemented by all partners. Our new national qualifications have been introduced successfully, but the practical demands they place on teachers and young people have created problems, which must be addressed.

It is imperative that all partners involved take the action needed to free teachers and staff to do what they do best - provide high-quality, interesting and engaging learning, to raise attainment, close the gap, and give all our young people the best chance of success in life. The Government will act to ensure this is the case. This action will be taken whilst preserving the great strength of a broad general education.

**What we will do to deliver**

- The Deputy First Minister has instructed Education Scotland to prepare and publish a clear and concise statement of the basic framework within which teachers teach. This statement will be published in time for the new school session in August 2016. This will set out very clearly the role of the various elements of CfE, and the use teachers should make of them - highlighting the significant flexibility CfE offers to teachers.

- This statement will make clear, for example, that the 'Experiences and Outcomes' of CfE should not be used for assessment - that is the exclusive role of the 'Significant Aspects of Learning'. Rather, teachers should use the Experiences and Outcomes as a guide, to help them plan holistically for a broad range of learning experiences over the course of the year.

- Crucially, this statement will make clear that teachers do not need to cover each and every Experience and Outcome individually, or in a 'tick-box' way. It will also make clear that primary teachers do not need to cover every curriculum area every week - another factor that can lead to the curriculum feeling 'cluttered'.

- The statement will also set out a very clear priority for primary schools - to ensure above all else every child achieves the best possible progress in the key areas of literacy, numeracy, health and wellbeing and to maintain our commitment to PE.

- Also, by August 2016, Education Scotland will provide clear, practical advice on assessing achievement in literacy and numeracy - making clear the expected benchmarks for literacy and numeracy, for each level of CfE.

- By the end of 2016, Education Scotland will provide similar advice on the achievement of curriculum levels in every curriculum area across the Broad General Education. This will allow teachers to make sure their learners are on track, with a firmer, clearer understanding of their next steps. It will also ensure that learners are developing the range of skills required to progress smoothly through the broad general education, and on into the senior phase.

- Alongside this work, we will significantly streamline the current range of guidance and related material on CfE, based on feedback from teachers. By January 2017, a new, much simpler set of key resources will be available on the new National Improvement Hub.

- From September 2016, the SQA will also consult stakeholders on how best to streamline its course documentation for the national qualifications.

- Based on ideas contributed by teacher associations and other partners in education, we will formulate a more intense new programme of reducing workload in schools. This programme will be directly overseen by the Deputy First Minister. Prior to agreement and implementation, the programme will be tested with a new panel of class teachers to ensure it has the potential to be effective. This will seek to ensure, for example, that local processes for planning, monitoring and tracking are as streamlined and efficient as possible. It will also give examples of how workload can be reduced by using digital approaches.

- At the request of the Deputy First Minister, HM Inspectors will carry out a focused review of the demands placed on schools by each local authority in relation to CfE. This review will report with recommendations by mid-September 2016.

- We will ensure that the SQA, Education Scotland, schools and local authorities deliver the commitments made in the first report of the Assessment and National Qualifications Group. We will also ensure that the SQA delivers the actions to simplify and streamline qualifications set out in the 51 'subject reports' published in May 2016. The Deputy First Minister will meet the Chief Examiner for Scotland on a monthly basis to ensure that the SQA continues to take all actions it can to reduce workload.

- We will also reconvene the Assessment and National Qualifications Group, chaired by the Deputy First Minister, to further explore what more could be done to reduce workload associated with the new qualifications, as quickly as possible.

- We will also work with the Assessment and National Qualifications Group to consult on the design of assessment within the qualifications system -involving teachers, parents, young people, employers, national partners and other stakeholders.

- We will take action to help young people develop the skills and knowledge they will need in the workplace in particular in the areas of STEM, digital skills and languages. Through the Developing the Young Workforce programme we will provide more opportunities for young people to experience high-quality work-related learning, and to gain vocational qualifications. We will increase the percentage of school leavers attaining vocational qualifications at SCQF level 5 and above by the end of academic year 2020-21 and take a tailored approach to young people who most need support, increasing positive destinations from school for looked after children by 4 percentage points per annum, resulting in parity by 2021.

- Building on Curriculum for Excellence and Developing the Young Workforce, we will review the learning journey for all 16 – 24 year olds to ensure that education provision for young people is as effective and efficient as possible and provides more stepping stones for those needing most support. The review will consider the current offer across school, college, university and training from a learner perspective. The aim is to further improve the post 16 system to ensure that learners are supported to make well-informed choices, have equal opportunities to access the right options for them, and can move through the system and towards employment easily, with no unnecessary duplication of learning. The review will begin in September 2016.

## APPENDIX 5

## PREFACE TO THE BENCHMARKS

## EDUCATION SCOTLAND: GUIDANCE ON USING BENCHMARKS FOR ASSESSMENT

Education Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Statement for Practitioners (Aug 2016) stated that the two key resources which support practitioners to plan learning, teaching and assessment are:

- Experiences and Outcomes
- Benchmarks

Benchmarks have been developed to provide clarity on the national standards expected within each curriculum area at each level. They set out clear lines of progression in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics, and across all other curriculum areas from Early to Fourth Levels (First to Fourth Levels in Modern Languages). Their purpose is to make clear what learners need to know and be able to do to progress through the levels, and to support consistency in teachers' and other practitioners' professional judgements.

Skills development is integrated into the Benchmarks to support greater shared understanding. An understanding of skills and how well they are developing will enable learners to make links between their current learning and their future career options and employment.

Benchmarks draw together and streamline a wide range of previous assessment guidance (including significant aspects of learning, progression frameworks and annotated exemplars) into one key resource to support teachers' and other practitioners' professional judgement of children and young people's progress across all curriculum areas.

Benchmarks have been designed to support professional dialogue as part of the moderation process to assess where children and young people are in their learning. They will help to support holistic assessment approaches across learning. They should not be ticked off individually for assessment purposes.

Benchmarks for literacy and numeracy should be used to support teachers' professional judgement of achievement of a level. In other curriculum areas, Benchmarks support teachers and other practitioners to understand standards and identify children's and young people's next steps in learning. Evidence of progress and achievement will come from a variety of sources including:

- observing day-to-day learning within the classroom, playroom or working area
- observation and feedback from learning activities that takes place in other environments, for example, or on work placements
- coursework, including tests
- learning conversations
- planned periodic holistic assessment and information from standardised assessment.

**Benchmarks in Curriculum Areas**

Benchmarks in each curriculum area are designed to be concise and accessible, with sufficient detail to communicate clearly the standards expected for each curriculum level.

Teachers and other practitioners can draw upon the Benchmarks to assess the knowledge, understanding, and skills for learning, life and work which children are developing in each curriculum area.

In secondary schools, Benchmarks can support subject specialist teachers in making robust assessments of learners' progress and the standards they achieve. They will help teachers ensure that learners make appropriate choices and are presented at an appropriate level for National Qualifications in the senior phase. This can help avoid excessive workload for teachers and unnecessary assessments for learners. For example, learners should have achieved relevant Fourth level Experiences and Outcomes before embarking on the National 5 qualifications. Schools should take careful account of this when options for S4 are being agreed. Benchmarks should be used to help with these important considerations