

North Berwick High School
Senior Phase Parent Information Booklet



August 2014

"Aim Higher"

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Abbreviations used throughout this booklet:

CfE = Curriculum for Excellence

Es and Os = experiences and outcomes at each level in the Broad General Education (S1-S3)

HMI = Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education

Four capacities = successful learners, confident individuals,
responsible citizens, effective contributors

Who is this document for?

This document is for parents/carers who are interested in finding out more about the decisions the school is making regarding our Senior Phase curriculum. Although some aspects of this document relate specifically to parents of pupils who are currently in S3, and who will be moving into S4 in June 2015, parents with pupils in younger years will also find this of interest. In the Research section of this document, we include extracts from some key Education Scotland and HMI documents which explain the national picture and which have helped to shape our thinking.

How can parents/carers feedback their opinions?

Some of the key issues addressed within this booklet have been part of a recent survey created and sent out by members of the Parent Council. You may have fed back your views in this way. Alternatively, we welcome further parental feedback using the reply sheet at the end of the document or email the school with your views. Further details on how to do this are given at the end of this document.

Curriculum Information Evenings will take place throughout the session. Please look out for details on the website and via email.

What is the Senior Phase?

The senior phase of a child's education is one of the most important, and potentially one of the most challenging. Schools are tasked with creating a curriculum that not only provides a meaningful learning experience which supports pupils in obtaining qualifications, but also enables them to develop emotionally, physically and socially as young adults. In short, the senior phase prepares pupils to make their own way in the world. (Education Scotland, 2012)

All young people in Scotland have an entitlement to a senior phase of education which:

- provides specialisation, depth and rigour
- prepares them well for achieving qualifications to the highest level of which they are capable
- continues to develop skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work
- continues to provide a range of activities which develop the four capacities
- supports them to achieve a positive and sustained destination

Rationale for Change: Guiding Principles of the Senior Phase

Our decisions regarding the senior phase have been informed by the principles that underpin CfE and apply to all schools in Scotland. These principles are summarised as follows:

- Curriculum for Excellence aims to raise attainment for **all** pupils.
- Curriculum for Excellence aims to reduce the quantity of assessment which pupils undertake.
- Qualifications should be taken at the appropriate stage for the individual young person over the three years of the Senior Phase.
- It is no longer appropriate to view S4 in isolation or to see presentation in S4 as a 'given' for each learner in each of their chosen subjects; the vast majority of pupils now stay on to at least S5.
- Young people who leave at the end of S4 or Christmas of S5 should be appropriately catered for in terms of qualifications.
- Students should be prepared for positive destinations and the world of work.
- Schools are asked to produce bespoke senior phase models designed to meet the needs of their young people.
- End point qualifications are where the emphasis now lies; we need to ensure these lead to positive and sustained destinations for our young people, whether employment, college or Higher Education.

What we hope to achieve: the background to our thinking

Each National 4 or 5 course has a notional 120 study hours attached to it, with an additional 40 hours assigned for exam preparation and assessment, making a total of 160 hours. Like Higher and Advanced Higher, courses are designed to be delivered in a year.

Initially, NBHS has offered eight courses in S4. We currently have 32 weeks assigned to National courses, with an additional six weeks of holiday and two weeks of prelim examinations. With three periods per week, this means we are delivering 120 hours of learning in 96 hours. Hence, course content and, often, assessment, has had to start in S3.

However, this does not reflect the principles of CfE or ensure that pupils experience a breadth of content, knowledge and skills required before specialisation into National Qualification courses. S3 courses should be designed around CfE level 4 Es and Os. The full delivery of units and accompanying assessments to pupils who may or may not choose the subject in S4 is not recommended in S3.

Many pupils in S4 following a curriculum of eight subjects during 2013-14 commented that they found assessment to be burdensome – that, at times, they were learning to pass tests in a mechanistic way, rather than learning to love and understand their subject.

From 2015-16, learners will take six subjects in S4.

What we hope is that six courses will allow depth of study, as well as space for learning and reflection; it will better prepare our young people for life beyond S4, for Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications, for college or employment if this is their chosen pathway. Our curricular model, which has already been adopted by many schools in Scotland, will allow more choice and flexibility over the Senior Phase, rather than considering S4 in isolation.

In particular, National 5 courses are designed to feed into Higher courses much more directly than Standard Grade; they have hierarchical structures and units. They are, in essence, much better preparation for Highers and Advanced Highers, and are aimed at pupils on such a pathway.

Ultimately, we want our young people to leave NBHS with a portfolio of qualifications demonstrating their skills and learning at the highest level they can. We are seeking to develop a focus on the quality of planned end point qualifications, rather than on how many qualifications can be picked up in any given single year.

The Right Curricular Model for North Berwick High School

There has been much debate across Scotland about the right curricular model for schools. We are tasked with developing the model that we think best meets the needs of young people in our care here at North Berwick High School. It is our belief that an S1-S3 Broad General Education followed by a three year Senior Phase best allows North Berwick High School to meet the requirements of the curriculum and the needs of our pupils. This is also the belief of those who designed Curriculum for Excellence.

At the moment, we integrate S5/S6 effectively: pupils make their subject choices from the same course choice sheet and often work in classes together. Some schools have also integrated S4 with S5/S6, meaning a fully integrated three-year Senior Phase, where up to six subjects are taken each year. This is an issue we need to research further and consult more widely on.

It is clear from our data that the majority of our pupils will complete a three year Senior Phase here at North Berwick, and this has further influenced our rationale for change. In June 2014, ten pupils left school at the end of S4 and 24 pupils left at the end of S5. For session 2014 – 2015, the total number of pupils who have opted to stay on in S6 is 129. (Interestingly, the number of pupils staying on into S6 has doubled over the last ten years.)

Research

We have read widely on the progression from the Broad General Education to the Senior Phase and this has helped to facilitate our professional discussions and our thinking. We have also visited other schools on recommendation from Education Scotland and HMI.

In February 2013, 'Curriculum for Excellence Briefing 8' was published. It provided advice on the continuing development of Curriculum for Excellence and, in particular, on the Broad General Education and Senior Phase. It states:

At present, most schools are implementing or maintaining approaches that enable young people to study between 5 and 8 qualifications in S4, usually alongside other important areas of learning. Some features of emerging models include:

- *in S4 and S5, delivering typically two-year programmes for young people to learn across two levels, such as National 5 and Higher, with S6 being a single year programme which includes a range of Advanced Highers or a Scottish Baccalaureate which perhaps involves colleges*
- *delivering S4-S6 as a single cohort within which young people can opt for a mixture of subjects and levels and learn in mixed-age groups – this can help provide a wider range of classes*
- *providing 6 qualifications for all in S4, followed by flexible planning over the next two years with study for Higher and Advanced Higher*
- *delivering a flexible combination of one or two year programmes.*

In March 2013, the Scottish Government produced a report on the emerging national picture of curriculum design. The paper used initial figures, gathered by the Educational Institute of Scotland, as to the percentage of responding teachers reporting their curricular model to feature five, six, seven or eight subjects in S4.

Findings in 2013 were:

Table 7: Variation in number of subjects likely to be taken in S4 Number of subjects	% teachers responding
5	7.7%
6	27.5%
7	18.1%
8	25.5%
Not applicable	21.1%

This picture may well have changed as we are a year further into CfE. We await, with interest, updated data of the national picture.

The report then goes on to state:

Pupils in S3 may collect 'evidence' that matches that required for the National 4 and 5 qualifications. In this way, some S3 learning can be counted towards the notional 160 hours required for these courses. An Education Scotland briefing states: "there is no ceiling to the level of learning in S3" and "by the start of the Senior Phase, young people are well on their way to their first tranche of qualifications."

It is at the end of S3 that young people should make their choices for qualifications in the senior phase.

Since the National Qualifications have been designed to build on the experiences and outcomes, learning in S3 can contribute to qualifications in the senior phase. However, the S3 curriculum should not be designed only around qualifications.

In February 2014, Education Scotland held a Curriculum for Excellence Leadership Event where the focus was on emerging practice in the Senior Phase. At this event we were given examples of schools with innovative and progressive curricular models which were highlighted as best emerging national practice to date. Those asked to present on the day were representatives from schools who prioritise flexibility in their Senior Phase and offer varied forms of personal support to their learners.

In June 2014, Education Scotland produced a document entitled 'Evaluating and improving our curriculum S1-3'. This document lists key features of effective provision in S3 as follows:

- *Young people continue to build well on their prior achievements.*
- *S3 courses and programmes provide in-depth learning and support higher order thinking.*
- *Many young people are specialising and working at fourth curriculum level across their learning. The curriculum also provides courses and programmes at third curriculum level which consolidate learning for those who would benefit from it.*
- *The curriculum provides appropriate learning opportunities to ensure young people with additional support needs continue to make progress in their targets.*
- *Interdisciplinary learning is well planned with a clear purpose and provides young people with progression in their learning.*
- *Breadth in S3 means planning learning using the Es (Experiences) and Os (Outcomes) from all curriculum areas (English; Mathematics; Modern Languages; Social Studies; Science; Expressive Arts; Technology; Health and Wellbeing; RE). This may mean year-long courses as well as short courses. It will mean subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement, all planned using Es and Os.*

- *Young people are well informed about their progress. They are taking increasing responsibility for tracking their own progress and profiling their achievements. This supports decisions about which subjects they will choose at the end of S3 to take forward into the Senior Phase and about qualifications at the appropriate level.*
- *Learning in S3 is providing appropriate challenge so that all young people are well prepared for moving into the Senior Phase.*
- *S3 is NOT about a curriculum dominated by the assessment standards for qualifications and practising for examinations.*

We found the last bullet point to be key to our thinking and our rationale.

In June 2014, HMIE released an updated ‘Inspection Advice Note for 2014-15’. In this document, clear expectations of the Broad General Education and Senior Phase are outlined as follows:

The design of the Senior Phase curriculum enables young people to learn over variable time-frames (e.g. 1 or 2 year programmes) to meet learners’ needs, creates space for more in-depth learning and allows more time to be spent on challenging learning at higher levels.

Staff develop and refresh the curriculum on a regular basis and manage curriculum change and innovation effectively. Staff plan carefully, and in consultation with stakeholders, when introducing curriculum innovations and adaptations to meet the needs of learners.

Staff in secondary schools and their partners are building on their experiences of the first year of the new National Qualifications, including reviewing approaches to assessment and verification, and ensuring they are manageable.

Staff work with parents to ensure there is a clear and shared understanding of the benefits to young people of planned changes to the curriculum.

Programmes and courses in the Senior Phase maximise the benefits of qualifications design, including the design of the new Highers. They ensure opportunities for depth and application of learning, and skills development, including higher order thinking skills.

In the Senior Phase, young people can learn across the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework levels with flexibilities in relation to decisions about the level of qualification for which they are presented to encourage them to attain as highly as possible. This should involve partners as appropriate.

Programmes of learning in the Senior Phase provide progression through opportunities for personal achievement with a continued focus on developing the skills and attributes of the four capacities.

University Admissions

North Berwick High School is a Group 2 school in terms of leavers going on to Higher education – this means that around 60% of our S6 cohort choose this as their positive destination after school. All Scottish universities have released statements acknowledging the continuing implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and outlining any changes to their admissions policies in accordance with CfE.

English universities will often make conditional offers based on Advanced Highers, rather than Highers or Nationals, as they have A-level equivalence. Indeed, there are more UCAS tariff points attached to an A at Advanced Higher (130) than an A at A-level (120). This link will give more Scottish/English qualifications comparisons:

<http://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ScottishQs.pdf>

Information regarding admissions for some key institutions can be found at the following links:

http://www.ed.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.112286!/fileManager/University%20of%20Edinburgh%20CfE%20statement%202013.pdf

http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_273068_en.pdf

<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/study/documents/curriculum-for-excellence-statement.pdf>

<http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cfe/>

Further information regarding the engagement process between universities and Curriculum for Excellence can be found here:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/learningthroughoutlife/highereducation/cfeandhe.asp>

Extracts from the University of Edinburgh Curriculum for Excellence statement:

We recognise that not all applicants have an equal opportunity to demonstrate their full academic potential in their prior qualifications. To this end, all applications are given careful individual consideration and a holistic decision is made with regard to an individual's academic achievements, taking into account the context and circumstances of their pre-university studies.

In light of Curriculum for Excellence, particularly the emphasis on flexible learner journeys in the senior phase, and the principles outlined above, the University of Edinburgh has amended its admissions policies.

We recognise that some students, particularly stronger students, may progress directly from the Broad General Education to Highers in some, or all, of their subjects, and will therefore not achieve any National 5 qualifications. Our selection criteria and processes will ensure that applicants following this route will not be disadvantaged.

The University currently expresses its minimum entry requirements in terms of achievement in Highers at one sitting, i.e. in a single exam diet. Following the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence, the University will express its minimum entry requirements in terms of achievement of SQA Highers by the end of S5.

Regardless of the number of Highers taken in each year of the senior phase, we expect applicants to have followed a coherent, rigorous and challenging curriculum that builds on prior learning, demonstrated by SQA qualifications or a combination of SQA qualifications and other achievements.

Extracts from the University of Aberdeen Curriculum for Excellence statement:

The University believes that in expanding the broad educational experience from S1 and S2 to encompass S1, S2 and S3, with specific subject choice later, at the end of S3 instead of S2, the Curriculum for Excellence provides a strong platform on which to build when students commence the Senior Phase across S4 to S6, effectively the start of the journey to obtain qualifications for entry to higher education.

We remain committed to promoting a fair admissions policy to ensure we give equal consideration to candidates who apply on time and who possess the necessary knowledge and skills, irrespective of the route travelled through the Senior Phase, S4 to S6.

We place no requirement on students to follow an S6 curriculum that is linked specifically to Advanced Highers only; our preference is that students select as full a programme of study as possible that is of interest to them, continues to present challenges and learning opportunities, and where appropriate, allows the student to contribute to the life of the school.

Where a student is in S6 and receives an unconditional offer of admission, we expect full and continued participation in the subjects declared within the UCAS application, particularly if their study involves Advanced Highers, as the self-directed learning and project-based work will have direct relevance to the University environment.

Parents are encouraged to contact specific institutions directly as appropriate.

Admissions officers can answer key questions regarding specific subjects and courses, and give details as required.

Personal Support

Built into Curriculum for Excellence is an entitlement to personal support. For our young people, this support is provided by their guidance teacher with whom they will continue to work closely throughout their time at NBHS, and by their subject teachers.

Building the Curriculum 3 states:

Every child and young person is entitled to personal support to enable them to gain as much as possible from the opportunities which *Curriculum for Excellence* can provide

Supporting children and young people in their learning involves a range of people - parents and carers, nursery teachers and nurses, primary teachers, secondary teachers, support staff, college staff, psychological services, Skills Development Scotland, volunteers and workers from voluntary organisations and local authority youth work provision. It is important to work in partnership to "get it right for every child". Children and young people are entitled to personal support to enable them to

- *review their learning and plan for next steps*
- *gain access to learning activities which will meet their needs*
- *plan for opportunities for personal achievement*
- *prepare for changes and choices and be supported through changes and choices*

All children and young people should have frequent and regular opportunities to discuss their learning with an adult who knows them well and can act as a mentor, helping them to set appropriate goals for the next stages in learning. This provides opportunities to challenge young people's choices, which may be based on stereotypes. Young people themselves should be at the centre of this planning, as active participants in their learning and development.

We are currently researching how to deliver Personal Support most effectively at North Berwick High School. There are many different models for this in other schools. One model that we have explored is creating a period of personal support time in the timetable; one way to do this might be to operate a "first period registration" system and use the six minutes per day gained from registration to create personal support time in the week, perhaps in one 30-minute session. During this session, pupils would spend time with a tutor and engage in learning conversations, or follow a carefully planned programme of support and encouragement. Your views on any programme like this would be most welcome.

Frequently Asked Questions

What will the Senior Phase mean for my child?

Your child will choose courses in specific subjects and prepare to be presented for the new National Qualifications at an appropriate level. Some learners may choose to follow programmes of study in partnership with Edinburgh College and the East Lothian Skills Centre. Some learners may be supported to find relevant and meaningful work experience, in conjunction with their school-based courses. Opportunities will be provided for all young people to have their wider achievements recognised.

What is meant by ‘wider achievement’?

Wider achievements are pupil achievements beyond the classroom. Our learners may participate in, for example, Duke of Edinburgh Awards or gain Sports Leadership and Coaching qualifications. Wider achievement programmes and opportunities are designed to enrich all who participate in them. They may or may not lead to formal accreditation but will develop the four capacities within young people – confident learner, responsible citizen, effective contributor and successful learner.

How will the North Berwick High School Senior Phase curriculum prepare my child for leaving school?

Each child’s abilities, needs and aspirations will lead them on a pathway to a destination of their choosing. Highers and Advanced Highers will continue to be recognised as key qualifications for entry into university or college, along with wider achievements which can be acknowledged in a personal statement. National 3, 4 and 5 courses will prepare young people for transition straight into employment, college or training. The Senior Phase will allow each learner to gather a portfolio of qualifications and experiences throughout, which will benefit them as they make the transition to life after school.

Why are National 3 and 4 courses internally assessed? I think exams are important.

National 3 and 4 are accredited qualifications like any other and are equivalent to what was previously known as Access 3/Foundation level and Intermediate 1/General level. They are internally assessed but the SQA have a programme of robust quality assurance in place to ensure national standards are maintained and understood. The qualifications are designed to support the needs of young people at this level and provide a variety of ways for learning to be demonstrated beyond the set of skills used in an examination experience.

Why has the school decided to reduce the number of subjects studied in S4 now? My older son/daughter will have more qualifications than their sibling and this does not seem fair. You are restricting the breadth of my child's learning.

Many parents are concerned that this cohort will, on paper, achieve 'less' than previous cohorts; we believe they will achieve much more. We ask parents to consider when their child's exit point from school is likely to be and to what extent qualifications gained in S4 alone will impact their choices of destination in the future. We believe that our learners will leave North Berwick High School with a better quality of qualification than previous cohorts and a rich portfolio which demonstrates their best skills and abilities, cohesively and comprehensively.

A smaller range of subjects will lead to greater depth of learning.

Will my child's learning be narrowed because they will only be able to study a maximum of six qualifications/subjects in S4 rather than the more traditional eight?

This concern is the most common concern we hear raised from parents. Each National course has a notional 120 hours plus 40 hours of added value, assignment, research assigned to it. It is not possible to timetable eight courses of 160 hours in a year, even if preparing learners for this in S3. We feel that six subjects facilitates deeper learning, which will better prepare young people for further qualifications in their chosen field. There is scope to take qualifications over differing timescales.

Are Maths and English compulsory in S4? Will the other subjects be restricted in columns or will a "free choice" be possible?

Maths and English remain compulsory in S4. At the moment, whether we have columns or free choice very much depends on the research and consultation we carry out in terms of integrating S4/S5/S6 together. We would prefer, at this stage, to offer a free choice in order to maintain flexibility as much as possible.

I like the sound of seven subjects. Why can't we have this at North Berwick?

We feel that the number of qualifications a pupil sits in S4 is of less importance than the quality of the qualifications they attain. Currently, our school week is based on 27 x 1 hour periods. Within our new curricular model, we will be able to implement a Scottish Government directive where two hours of high quality PE is given to all pupils and we are able to do this fully within our current school week. East Lothian came at the very bottom of a national grid showing how many secondary schools in each authority were successfully

implementing two hours of quality PE in the curriculum, therefore action had to be taken to improve this.

We currently deliver eight subjects with three hours per week – in order to increase the amount of time allocated to each subject, in line with the notional 160 hours for each course, each subject requires four hours per week. Seven subjects at four hours per week would mean 28 periods a week, plus PE, RME, PSE, which simply does not work. We have explored changing our school week to 50 minute periods. Staff were not in favour of this as, fundamentally, it would only increase teaching time for each National course by 20 minutes per week (ie. a move to 4 x 50 minutes per week rather than a current 3 x 60 minutes per week). We believe that 4 x 60 minutes per week of learning for each of their chosen six subjects will have a far more positive impact on our learners.

Some schools are adopting curricular models involving long and short courses to allow flexibility and choice between six, seven, or eight subjects – a short course would deliver a National course in 3 x 50 minutes (30 minutes less than we currently have in our eight subjects model); a long course would deliver a National course in 6 x 50 minutes. This is an untested model at present, although early findings suggest that six and seven subjects are the norm, and that relatively few pupils have opted for eight subjects. Interestingly, more academically able pupils are among those choosing six subjects as they perceive that they are ready for a depth of study which will ultimately prepare them for Higher and Advanced Higher more effectively. Other schools are adopting curricular models where five subjects is a preferred option for students in S4, with additional emphasis on recognising wider achievement formally and through a wider range of Skills for Work qualifications. We await the findings as regards the impact of such models with interest. There are many schools which have successfully implemented six subjects in S4 over the past year.

Why are some schools still offering eight subjects instead of six in S4?

Every school is asked to adhere to the principles of Curriculum for Excellence and Scottish Government documentation when designing their curriculum. We are keen to adhere to the principles we have been given as we believe in them wholeheartedly. Fundamentally, we realise that pupils at North Berwick High School will continue to work on all core areas of the curriculum over S1 to S3, therefore will be better placed to make choices at the end of S3 rather than the end of S1 or S2 (when Standard Grade choices had to be made). We feel the '2+2+2' model (i.e. starting qualifications in S3) no longer delivers on the principles of CfE; other schools may disagree. Private schools are not bound to Government directives as we are.

Will pupils effectively have to choose in S3 what they are going to sit at Higher? What if they make a mistake and want to change direction?

We understand that our learners have to make choices in the latter part of S3 for S4. We also understand that things can change; it is possible to pick up a subject in S5 that they had dropped in S4, as we know they will have a certain level of prior attainment from S3 (all curricular areas are studied until the end of S3). Any decision to pick up a subject would be based on knowledge of the learner and in consultation with the parent and subject staff.

Is it possible for my child to take Highers in S5 in subjects she has not studied in S4?

In some subjects, yes – as has always been the case. We are very keen to look at individual cases on their merit; any decision to pick up a Higher in a subject not previously studied at a lower level will be subject to discussion with the appropriate guidance teacher, depute head, principal teacher and subject teacher.

Will my child still be able to take five Highers in one sitting? What about three Advanced Highers?

Each child's progress, maturity and abilities will be taken into consideration as they move through the Senior Phase. Any decisions made regarding the number of Highers and Advanced Highers taken will be made in consultation with child, parent and school staff and there will be variation from child to child. Nothing in the new Senior Phase model will prevent any learner from achieving five Highers in one sitting.

Does my child have to sit National 5s before he can embark upon Highers?

Teachers, in consultation with the learners and parents, will suggest the most appropriate level of study for a youngster based on progress in their learning. The aim of the Senior Phase is to ensure that appropriate levels of study are followed and qualifications undertaken as and when they are appropriate for each individual. We recognised that some students may be capable of bypassing National 5 and moving straight to Higher, but we do not feel this will be appropriate for entire cohorts of young people, rather those with exceptional skills and abilities. Nationally, this may become increasingly common as it is no longer appropriate to see S4 in isolation or to see presentation for qualifications as a 'given' at the end of each year of the Senior Phase. There should be, however, no artificial ceiling to what a child can achieve.

Under current arrangements, Intermediate 2 provides a ‘safety net’ for those who start a Higher course and then struggle. Standard Grade allowed all pupils to be presented for two levels – one appropriately challenging level and a ‘fall back’. There is no such security in the new Nationals. How will North Berwick High School address this?

Pupils who are secure at CfE 4th level by the end of S3 would bypass National 4 and progress straight into National 5 level qualifications. CfE 4th level is broadly equivalent to National 4. Those who are operating within 3rd level at the end of S3 would progress into National 4 in S4.

In terms of National 5, learners are given assignments which will also cover a National 4 Added Value Unit within their subject. Any learner who passes the units of National 5, but fails the exam, and has covered the outcomes necessary for a National 4 Added Value Unit in the subject, qualifies for the SQA Recognising Positive Achievement service, where they are automatically given a National 4 Course Award at a ‘pass’. This link provides further information:

http://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/Recognising_Positive_Achievement_N4N5.pdf

In terms of Higher, it may be that any learner who attains a C or D pass at National 5 will find the level of work challenging at Higher. They may need two years to progress towards Higher. We would have to have robust evidence of a learner’s capability to achieve a Higher before suggesting they go straight to Higher without first attempting National 5. We recognise, however, that some young people will indeed have the evidence of prior attainment to suggest this is a realistic and manageable goal. Tracking and monitoring progress closely will, it is hoped, ensure the best outcomes for all young people concerned.

I’ve heard there are ‘new’ Highers and ‘old’ Highers. What is the difference and which type of Higher will my child be sitting?

2014-15 is the last year of dual-presentation – i.e. both ‘new’ and ‘old’ Highers are valid. East Lothian Council has adopted a policy whereby all subject departments are encouraged to adopt ‘new’ Higher unless there is a valid reason for delaying. Valid reasons include staffing changes and large numbers of S6 in 2014-15 taking the subject as a progression from Intermediate 2 rather than National 5. Each Principal Teacher retaining the ‘old’ Higher in 2014-15 has had to submit a rationale to the Head Teacher. Please see the NBHS website for information regarding particular subjects.

In 2015-2016, all schools and subjects across Scotland will adopt ‘new’ Higher.

There is no difference in the standard or quality of the two – both have the same tariff score in term of UCAS and there will be no advantage or disadvantage to doing either. National 5 progresses directly and hierarchically into ‘new’ Higher.

What plans are in place to ensure academic rigour and motivation is sustained in S6?

The Scottish education system places great stock on Highers. For many of our pupils, this is something they work towards in S5; for others, Highers will be gained over S5 and S6. It is, therefore, challenging to keep S6 motivated and interested in learning, especially when unconditional offers come in from universities. We ask that all learners in S6 take four subjects, unless they are studying three subjects at Advanced Higher. We acknowledge that Advanced Higher subjects require independent research, dissertations and project work that pupils must learn to plan for and work towards themselves. It is our vision that S6 will be a time of enrichment for our young people; they may choose to return to subjects that they have previously dropped or pick up additional National 4, 5 or Higher qualifications over a year. Some subjects are offered only to S6 – Higher Economics, for example – as a certain level of prior attainment needs to be in place (Higher Maths or Higher Business Management, for example). We would like to explore the possibility of S6 short courses or ‘masterclasses’ at North Berwick and need to consider financial and staffing implications for what could be a very worthwhile investment.

What consultation has taken place over the decision to go with six subjects rather than eight in S4?

This process started for us in October 2013 when we were visited by representatives from Education Scotland and HMI, and once S4 had started their eight National courses. We became aware of the pressure on the young people and on staff to ‘deliver’ in the timescale we had. It quickly became apparent that replacing like with like (i.e. eight Standard Grades with eight Nationals) was not going to work if we were to meet national expectations and entitlements of the Broad General Education until the end of S3. Nationals are much more akin to Intermediate and Higher courses, which our learners had experienced in S5, not S4, and in five hours a week and five subjects, rather than three hours a week and eight subjects.

The Senior Management Team then went to visit four other schools across a variety of different local authorities. Each school had successfully implemented both the Broad General Education and a Senior Phase model where S4-S6 were considered holistically. Each school was currently delivering six subjects to S4, five or six subjects/courses/opportunities in S5, and five or six subjects/courses/opportunities in S6.

At this time, we consulted with staff about how they felt courses were progressing in the time allocated to them. Feedback was largely centred on the huge pressures of assessment

experienced by the learners in what felt like a compressed timescale. Staff also fed back that some course content that was traditionally Higher level was now appearing in National 5 courses. Staff fed back that they perceived National 4 learners felt devalued at times by the fact they were not working towards an externally-assessed exam. Guidance staff fed back that some young people in S4 were feeling burdened by assessment and were experiencing anxiety due to this. We went on to discuss changing our curricular model with Principal Teachers more formally at Senior Leadership Team meetings.

Feedback from staff as regards having more time to deliver courses was unanimous in its positivity – with more time (four hours per week), teachers felt they could do the courses justice and teach ‘beyond the test’, which is what CfE sets out to do.

Pupil feedback on the S4 experience was gathered and recorded, via focus groups, evaluations and individual conversations. The S4 pupils, too, felt as if they were being driven through assessments rather than learning their subjects.

In February, the Head Teacher’s Update to parents outlined the school’s current thinking on how best to develop the curriculum structure, and invited parents to comment. We shared some of our concerns and our desire to make things better for our S4 learners at Parent Council meetings and Parent Information Evenings for S2 and S3 parents. We met with S4 parents to give reassurance that we would not let their learners down and that staff were doing their utmost to instil confidence in the new Nationals with their pupils. Staff reported they had read every available document and every communication from the SQA, to enable them to deliver the courses to the best of their ability. It was acknowledged, however, that this was not without concerns regarding workload and assessment.

In April, we held an extra Parent Council meeting for all members of the parent forum with just one item on the agenda - the development of the curriculum at NBHS. S2 Parent Focus Groups also took place and views were noted. In addition, any parent who has requested a meeting with the senior management team has been granted this, and open discussion has taken place.

The Parent Council designed and sent out a survey to all parents in June and a summary of the results of the survey will be on the website soon.

SMT designed this comprehensive booklet to better inform parents of our thinking and rationale for change.

Visits from our Quality Improvement Officer proved useful in guiding and supporting our thinking around the Senior Phase, as did key CfE documents. Many other schools in Scotland are adopting a similar model to the one we propose.

Key CfE documents that shaped our thinking can be found at this link:

<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/keydocs/index.asp>

The senior management team plans to deliver further Parent Information Evenings to S1, S2 and S3 parents in the autumn term, as well as to parents of P7 children in our cluster primaries. We will also elicit more detailed and comprehensive feedback from the learners who have been through eight subjects in 2013-14 and those embarking upon eight subjects in 2014-15.

A Curriculum Development Group will be set up from September 2014, comprising interested staff and representation from the Parent Council. The recommendations of this group will be shared more widely before implementation.

Decisions to be made

There remains discussion to be had and consultation to be carried out as to the full shape and structure of our Senior Phase. We have taken a positive step to moving forward with Curriculum for Excellence in terms of delivering the Broad General Education from S1 to S3 and encouraging depth of study in S4 to S6.

We are particularly interested in your views on:

- full integration of S4/S5/S6 into a 3-year Senior Phase with the same course choices for all three year groups available (based on the principle of presenting pupils when they are ready to sit qualifications);
- bypassing qualifications at particular levels, including starting Higher courses in S4;
- the concept of taking up to six subjects each year of the Senior Phase, meaning that the exit point for a young person at the end of S6 may be a portfolio of up to 18 qualifications at varying levels and across subjects/Skills for Work;
- personal support/mentoring periods.

Acknowledgements

As we consider how best to deliver Curriculum for Excellence at NBHS, we would like to acknowledge the help we have received – and continue to receive - through visits to, discussions with, and sharing of documentation, from the following schools:

Balfron High School, Stirlingshire

Bathgate Academy, West Lothian

Bell Baxter High School, Fife

Bucksburn Academy, Aberdeenshire

Perth High School

St Margaret's Academy, Livingston

Dunbar Grammar, Knox Academy, Preston Lodge High School, Musselburgh Grammar, Ross High School – East Lothian

What happens next – Parental Feedback Form

Please do share your view with us. You are welcome to email those views to us at northberwick.hs@northberwickhigh.elcschool.org.uk or use the space below to write your thoughts and return them to us.

Parent/Carer name:

Pupil name(s):

Register class(es):