

Working Paper 4

THE EMERGING MODEL OF UNIFIED SYSTEM IN SCOTLAND: EVIDENCE FROM THE SECOND YEAR OF HIGHER STILL

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INTRODUCTION

The emerging model of unified system: research questions

This paper presents findings of surveys of schools, Further Education (FE) colleges and local authorities carried out in 2000-01 as part of the ESRC project on *Introducing a Unified System* (IUS). The main aim of the IUS Project is to analyse the model of a 'unified system' of post-16 education and training that is being introduced by the Higher Still reforms starting in 1999. The project also aims to analyse the policy process of developing and implementing a unified system, and in particular to examine the role of institutions (schools and colleges) in shaping the reform. This paper offers some early evidence based on the second year of implementation. It assumes that the reader is familiar with the main features of Higher Still; for those who are not, this is described in more detail in Working Papers 2 and 3 (Raffe, Howieson and Tinklin 2001a, Howieson, Raffe and Tinklin 2001).

The project builds on earlier research which studied the development phases of Higher Still and compared them with developments elsewhere in Britain and in other European countries (Spours *et al.* 2000). All these developments are examples of 'unification', that is, the process of bringing academic and vocational tracks in post-compulsory education closer together or merging them within a unified system. Most countries are 'unifying' their post-compulsory education systems but their strategies for doing so vary widely. We developed a conceptual framework with which to map these different strategies for unification (Raffe *et al.* 1998, Howieson and Raffe 1999). Using this framework, we classify Higher Still as

- a strategy to construct a unified system, which merges the academic and vocational tracks, rather than a linked system which simply brings the tracks closer together.

(However Higher Still's unified system does not cover all tracks; it largely excludes 'work-based' provision represented by SVQs;)

- a strategy which unifies along particular dimensions of the education system, including those which we labelled 'curriculum architecture', 'certification', 'assessment' and 'student pathways'. That is, Higher Still introduces common design rules which specify the curriculum architecture (the size and structure of units, courses and group awards, and the five levels) and common arrangements for assessment, certification and other issues such as core skills. These design rules apply across the unified system. They are intended to make opportunities for access and progression more 'seamless', and in this sense the reform aims to develop a unified network of student pathways. It does not unify along other possible dimensions such as institutions or staffing: that is, it does not introduce an integrated 'tertiary college' nor does it remove the different qualifying routes for school and college teachers;
- a unified system which is flexible, rather than (say) programme- or Baccalaureate-based. That is, it offers flexible entry, exit and re-entry points, and flexible progression routes; and the volume, level, content and duration of study are all flexible.

This paper addresses three sets of research questions. The first concerns the level of support for the aims and strategy of Higher Still. The government document which announced the reform listed nine aims (these are paraphrased in the survey items shown in Table 3 below). The document's subtitle, *Opportunity for All*, suggests that the main rationale of the reform is in terms of access and progression (Scottish Office 1994). The structure of provision at five levels, and the common design rules for assessment and curriculum, are intended to facilitate a framework of opportunities which offers entry points to all potential learners and with no status differences or arbitrary barriers to progression within the system. In IUS Working Paper 2 we argued that the 'vision' of Higher Still was undersold and there was little explicit discussion of why the strategy of a unified system was the appropriate way to pursue these aims (Raffe, Howieson and Tinklin 2001a, 200b; see also Raffe and Howieson 1998). In particular, the rationale for the 'common design rules' – for example, the common arrangements for internal and external assessment – was never spelt out. The failure to reach agreement on an explicit vision and strategy of the unified system, we argued, contributed to the reform's early difficulties and to the critical reactions which surfaced after the exam results crisis of 2000. It made it harder to resolve the conflicts inherent in a unified system which imposes relatively rigid common design rules.

In this paper we examine the level of support among school and college staff for the aims and strategy of Higher Still. If our analysis is valid we would expect to find more support for the general aims of Higher Still than for the specific measures introduced to pursue those aims, and less agreement on the strategy of a unified system than on its aims. We also anticipate that support for particular aims and measures will vary across the system, because the unified system imposes common design rules which affect different sectors, subjects and modes of education in different ways. An example is the common design rules for assessment, which affect schools and colleges, or different subject areas, in very different ways.

We also ask whether all aims and features of Higher Still are equally supported. This is particularly important in the context of the current consultation over assessment (Scottish Executive 2001a). This consultation is based on two options: Option A would allow students

taking courses to by-pass internal unit assessments; Option B would allow students to achieve an ungraded course award on the basis of unit assessments only. Either option might lead to a ‘two-tier’ approach with different assessment regimes for schools and colleges or for academic and vocational subjects. This would undermine the unified system and its objective of parity of esteem for different subjects and institutions. The consultation therefore rests critically on what participants understand by such concepts as ‘unified system’ and ‘parity of esteem’, and whether they consider them to be central to the strategy of Higher Still.

The second set of research questions concerns the model of a unified system which will emerge in practice. The analysis of Higher Still’s unified system, summarised above, refers to the policy blueprint and the formal structures of the system: what Working Paper 1 called the ‘administrative system’ of education. This may not be the same model of a unified system as that reflected in the ‘social relations’ of education (Howieson, Raffe and Tinklin 2000). At this early stage in the implementation of Higher Still we can do little more than speculate about the model which will emerge over the coming years. In this paper, based on the second year of implementation, we ask three questions in particular:

- What is the early pattern of implementation? Which features have been implemented most quickly, and which types of provision have been most affected? To what extent, for example, have Scottish Group Awards (SGAs) or core skills been implemented, and at which stages and levels has there been most take-up?
- Are new patterns of differentiation emerging? Are there new patterns of curricular differentiation, or new divisions among institutions? For example, are we seeing the emergence of a two-tier systems of schools which focus their provision respectively on Advanced Highers and on Intermediate courses?
- To what extent, and in what senses, is the new unified system a ‘flexible’ one?

Our third set of questions concern the factors driving change. As we have noted the unified system is flexible in the sense that it does not prescribe the content, volume, mode, place or pace of learning and it offers multiple entry and exit points. Does this flexibility enable institutions (schools and colleges) to shape the system to meet their own objectives and circumstances? Or does it give end-users – higher education and employers – more scope to specify their requirements and thus to influence provision? Or are local or central government, or other central agencies, the main determinants of change? Or are students themselves have more power through the increased possibilities for choice?

Our focus is on the process of change as much as on its content. We use the term Higher Still to describe this process, and either Higher Still or new National Qualifications to describe the new provision which it introduces.

Data

Over the period 2000-03 the IUS project is:

- conducting surveys of all secondary schools, colleges and local authorities in Scotland, in the 2000-01 and 2002-03 sessions;
- analysing Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) data on school and college provision;
- conducting case studies of six institutions, in autumn 2001 and autumn 2002;

- interviewing key informants.

This paper draws primarily on the first surveys of schools and colleges. These were conducted using questionnaires (in paper or electronic form) which were sent to all FE colleges, secondary schools and local authorities during the winter of 2000-01. The aim of this part of the project was to find out how institutions had responded to Higher Still and to look for differences in responses among and within sectors. The colleges' survey was conducted jointly with the Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU), and it built on the survey of the first year of Higher Still which the SFEU had conducted in the previous session (SFEU/HSDU 2000). Different questionnaires were designed for schools and colleges, but several questions were common to both questionnaires, and other questions were similar but with different response categories to allow for the different situations of schools and colleges. The local authority questionnaire was shorter and was designed to elicit the main features of authorities' policies on Higher Still.

The colleges' survey was despatched in November 2000. Responses were received from 40 out of 47 colleges. The schools' survey was sent out in January 2001; we had planned to despatch the survey in November but several schools asked for a delay while they dealt with the extra appeals arising from the 2000 exams diet. The response rates are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Schools' survey response rates

	Questionnaires returned	Response rate
local authority 'mainstream' schools	295	76%
independent schools	26	42%
special schools (local authority and independent)	75	66%

The local authorities' survey was despatched in January 2001. Responses have been received from 31 authorities.

In the tables in this paper, local authority 'mainstream' schools are disaggregated by the average attainment level at Standard Grade. The numbers in each category are as follows.

Table 2. Category of institution and definition

	Abbreviation	Number
Local Authority low attaining school*	Low	89
Local Authority middle attaining school	Mid	90
Local Authority high attaining school	High	89
Independent school	Ind	26
Special school (independent and local authority)	Special	75
FE colleges	FE	40**

* Categories derived from 1999 SQA Standard Grade data

** Unless otherwise stated.

Most questionnaires were completed by a senior manager or the senior member of staff with responsibility for Higher Still. In many institutions, especially colleges, questionnaires were either filled in collaboratively or different members of staff contributed to different sections of the questionnaire.

In the tables that follow, percentages are based on all respondents in the relevant category; those who did not reply to a particular question are included in the 100% base.

SUPPORT FOR THE AIMS AND STRATEGY OF HIGHER STILL

Support for the aims of Higher Still

Table 3. How important are the following aims of Higher Still to your school/college?

	% answering very important or important					
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	FE
all students achieve highest standard of attainment possible	100	99	100	96	97	98
all students gain marketable qualifications	97	98	98	92	52	95
more even progression between stages	98	100	98	65	81	98
courses always available at appropriate levels	91	87	82	77	96	93
Schools: develop attainment across a broader range of subjects/FE: encourage students to take a broader curriculum	61	58	70	31	73	63
give access to a range of academic and vocational subjects	73	70	60	12	57	78
parity of esteem of academic and vocational subjects	53	60	48	8	53	78
bring academic and vocational courses into a unified curriculum and assessment system	60	68	55	8	57	80
develop competence in core skills	49	41	45	27	76	88
to provide a simpler, more efficient, more easily understood system	76	82	71	58	69	88

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of the aims of Higher Still, adapted from *Opportunity for All*, to their own school or college. Their responses are shown in Table 3. The main findings were as follows.

- There was general agreement across sectors with most of the aims.
- Only two aims were ‘consensual’ in the sense of being rated as important by at least three-quarters of respondents in each type of institution. These were: to enable all students to achieve the highest standard of attainment, and to make courses available at appropriate levels. There was also general support for the aims relating to access and progression.
- However, there was less support for some of the other aims, notably those concerning core skills, parity of esteem and the principle of a unified curriculum and assessment system. As we noted above, the principles of parity of esteem and of a unified system are central to the current consultation on assessment.
- Local authority schools’ responses did not vary much according to their average S4 attainment levels. On the other hand, there was less similarity between higher attaining local authority schools and independent schools than might have been expected.

- Different institutional sectors expressed different views. Independent schools expressed support for the narrowest range of aims, and expressed the lowest level of support for aims relating to breadth, to vocational education, to a unified system and to core skills. Special schools and FE colleges expressed most support for core skills.
- FE colleges tended to support a wider range of aims than schools. In particular, they were more likely to support the principles of a unified system and of parity of esteem – aims which arguably touch more directly on the role of colleges within the system.

Respondents were asked for their perceptions of how supportive different groups of staff in their institutions were of the aims of Higher Still (Table 4). Generally, high levels of support were perceived among all groups of staff, but senior management were perceived as most supportive, followed by heads of departments or sections.

Table 4. In your view, how much support is there for the aims of Higher Still in your school/college among the following groups?

	% answering strong support/support					
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	FE
senior management	99	96	96	77	89	90
heads of department/section heads	85	90	89	81	43***	78
guidance staff	83	87	87	69	36***	63
other teachers/lecturers	78	76	78	73	68	60

*** high level of non-response to these items

Table 5. In your view, how much progress has Higher Still made so far towards achieving these aims?

	% answering 'a lot' or 'some'					
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	FE
all students achieve highest standard of attainment possible	83	88	91	77	79	40
all students gain marketable qualifications	57	59	63	58	40	18
more even progression between stages	79	74	82	50	57	35
courses always available at appropriate levels	67	54	66	54	71	40
Schools: develop attainment across a broader range of subjects/FE: encourage students to take a broader curriculum	49	47	44	23	57	15
give access to a range of academic and vocational subjects	43	51	44	12	44	20
parity of esteem of academic and vocational subjects	21	44	25	15	40	13
bring academic and vocational courses into a unified curriculum and assessment system	62	76	61	35	51	35
develop competence in core skills	23	21	24	39	68	40
to provide a simpler, more efficient, more easily understood system	24	18	23	12	45	3

Respondents had mixed views on current progress towards the aims of Higher Still (Table 5). The majority of local authority ‘mainstream’ schools believed that at least some progress had been made towards students achieving the highest standards possible, students gaining marketable qualifications, more even progression between stages, courses always available at appropriate levels and academic and vocational courses being brought into a unified system. FE colleges perceived the least amount of progress towards any of the items. Few respondents saw any significant progress towards a simpler, more easily understood system. Special schools saw the most progress towards developing students’ competence in core skills. Many of these responses reflect differences in the speed of implementation and in the priority given to different aspects of Higher Still.

Support for specific measures

Views on levels of support for the specific changes introduced by Higher Still were more mixed. Tables 6a and 6b show responses to the same set of questions; Table 6a shows the percentage indicating support for each change, and Table 6b shows the percentage opposed to each change. The introduction of a single curricular framework for academic and vocational subjects attracted reasonably high support from all types of institutions except independent schools. Changes to assessment drew more opposition than support from schools (except special schools); FE colleges were neither particularly supportive nor opposed. The emphasis on core skills was most supported by special schools and FE colleges, with about one third of other schools opposed. Support for the creation of SGAs was generally low (although nearly four in ten colleges expressed support).

Table 6a. In your view, how much support is there for the changes introduced by Higher Still in relation to ... (support)

	% answering strong support/support					
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	FE
a single curricular framework for academic and vocational subjects	62	66	52	23	48	63
assessment	23	24	25	19	55	28
emphasis on core skills	14	8	7	15	51	58
creation of SGAs	5	3	3	4	24	38
provision based on five levels	38	44	53	15	33	43

Table 6b. In your view, how much support is there for the changes introduced by Higher Still in relation to ... (opposition)

	% answering opposition/strong opposition					
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	FE
a single curricular framework for academic and vocational subjects	1	2	5	27	0	5
assessment	51	48	54	62	13	23
emphasis on core skills	37	36	38	31	5	8
creation of SGAs	39	40	33	27	11	5
provision based on five levels	15	10	8	23	3	5

Institutions’ objectives in implementing Higher Still

Respondents were asked about their institutions' objectives in implementing Higher Still (Table 7). Special schools were particularly interested in providing a more worthwhile curriculum for low attainers and recognising previously uncertificated learning. Local authority 'mainstream' schools were particularly interested in providing a more worthwhile curriculum for low and middle attainers (and to a lesser extent high attainers). Lower attaining schools were more interested in increasing staying on rates and middle and lower attaining schools gave more importance to improving progression to employment than higher attaining schools. Independent schools generally displayed less enthusiasm for any of the items than 'mainstream' schools, although providing a more worthwhile curriculum for middle attainers and making S6 a more worthwhile year were top of their list. FE colleges were generally enthusiastic about most of the items in their questionnaire, with improving progression to HN level, expanding provision at particular levels and improving articulation with local schools seen as most important.

Table 7. What are your school's/college's objectives in implementing Higher Still? Please rate the importance of the following objectives. (Items varied in the schools' and colleges' questionnaires.)

	% answering very important/important					FE (n=39)
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	
more worthwhile curriculum for low attainers	97	96	94	46	84	-
more worthwhile curriculum for middle attainers	97	97	96	73	49	-
more worthwhile curriculum for high attainers	82	80	75	65	24	-
make S6 a more worthwhile year	83	76	69	69	29	-
recognition of previously uncertificated learning	71	63	64	39	92	46
increase staying on rates	67	41	26	19	9	-
improve progression to FE	65	72	54	15	49	-
improve progression to HE	65	69	56	46	9	67
improve progression to employment	67	64	48	12	43	74
improve articulation of provision with local schools	19	23	10	4	40	-
expand provision at particular levels	64	74	76	35	72	82
expand provision in particular subject areas	48	51	51	35	64	72
improve progression to HN level	-	-	-	-	-	87
improve articulation with local schools	-	-	-	-	-	77
increase recruitment of 16-18 year olds	-	-	-	-	-	72
enhance flexibility of provision	-	-	-	-	-	72
better address social inclusion	-	-	-	-	-	54
enhance existing programmes	-	-	-	-	-	74
provide more curricular choice in programmes	-	-	-	-	-	72

The potentially conflictual nature of a unified system is underlined by the responses to Table 8. FE colleges generally saw Higher Still as responding more to the needs of schools than of colleges; independent schools saw it as responding more to the needs of colleges. Other types of school had very mixed views on who it was for (Table 8).

Table 8 . Do you think that the Higher Still framework ...

	% answering yes					
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	FE
... responds more to the needs of schools than colleges	15	9	8	0	16	73
... responds more to the needs of colleges than schools	25	23	34	58	4	5
... is a reasonable balance between the needs of schools and colleges	36	41	37	12	32	23
Not sure or no response	24	27	21	30	48	0

THE EMERGING MODEL OF UNIFIED SYSTEM: IMPLEMENTATION PATTERNS

FE colleges

About one third of colleges were offering up to 10 courses or clusters for new National Qualifications; one third were offering 11-30 courses or clusters and almost one third were offering 31-65. Courses/clusters were mainly at Intermediate 2 and Higher levels (Table 9).

Table 9. Number of courses/clusters running in colleges

No of courses/clusters	% of colleges
0	3
1-10	28
11- 30	34
31-65	30
No information	5

The majority of colleges (64%) were offering between one and five SGAs mostly at Intermediate 2 level (Table 10).

Table 10. Number of SGAs running in colleges

No of SGAs	% of colleges (n=39)
0	8
1-5	64
6-10	21
11+	5

Colleges were more likely to have adapted existing National Certificate (NC) programmes, for example by using particular new National Qualification units or courses to supplement or replace parts of the programme, than to have replaced them totally. Almost all colleges had adapted or replaced at least some of their NC programmes with new National Qualification courses/units. Almost half the colleges had replaced up to one quarter and adapted up to half of their programmes (Table 11).

Table 11. % of NC programmes fully replaced or adapted by HS courses/units

Percent replaced	Percent Adapted	% of colleges (n=39)
0	0	0
0	1-50%	8
1-25%	1-25%	28
	26-50%	18
	51-75%	8
	76-100%	3
26-50%	1-25%	8
	26-50%	3
	51-75%	8
	76-100%	3
51-75%	0	3
	1-25%	3
No answer		8

Table 12. Proportion of teaching departments involved in HS implementation

	% of colleges (n=39)
1-49%	26
50-90%	44
All	23
No answer	8

In almost one quarter of colleges, all teaching departments were involved in Higher Still implementation and in most of the rest over 50% of teaching departments were involved.

The reasons for departments not being involved included:

- The new qualifications did not sufficiently meet the needs of their students;
- Difficulties in implementing the new programmes;
- The influence of employers, lead bodies, professional associations and higher education institutions.

About two thirds of colleges were planning a moderate or extensive increase in new National Qualification units and courses in 2001-02. Only about one third were planning a moderate or extensive increase in SGAs (Table 13).

Table 13. Colleges' provisional plans for 2001-2002 (% of colleges, n=39)

	Minor increase	Moderate increase	Extensive increase
HS units	28	56	13
HS courses	21	56	5
SGAs	56	28	3

Schools

Most local authority ‘mainstream’ and independent schools had replaced almost all of their Highers and at least some of their Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS). About one third had replaced 75-100% of their CSYS (Table 14).

Table 14. Percentage of CSYS replaced by Advanced Highers

	% schools			
	Low	Mid	High	Ind
None	14	9	9	12
1-24%	16	19	15	8
25-49%	10	12	17	8
50-74%	24	22	29	19
75-100%	29	34	28	42

About half the local authority ‘mainstream’ schools had used new National Qualifications to extend the curriculum with new subjects at Intermediate 1, 2 and Higher levels. Almost three-quarters of special schools had extended the curriculum at Access level (Table 15).

Table 15. Are you using Higher Still provision to extend the school’s curriculum with new subjects this session at ...

	% yes at own school or elsewhere				
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special
Access	30	22	20	0	72
Intermediate 1	47	54	42	8	18
Intermediate 2	50	63	52	23	4
Higher	55	48	57	31	4
Advanced Higher	37	35	37	23	0

Table 16. Are you planning to use/are using Higher Still instead of Standard Grade courses/National Certificate modules for any S3 or S4 pupils?

	% answering yes (% expect to/under discussion)				
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special
replacing SG	38 (48)	33 (51)	28 (54)	19 (31)	35 (20)
replacing NC modules	21 (34)	31 (38)	33 (29)	4 (19)	49 (15)

About one third of local authority ‘mainstream’ schools were using new National Qualification instead of Standard Grade for some S3/S4 pupils, and a similar number were using them to replace NC modules for these pupils (Table 16).

About half the local authority schools were planning to offer individual units at levels below Higher in three years time. Few schools were planning to offer SGAs at any level in three years (tables not shown).

THE EMERGING MODEL OF UNIFIED SYSTEM: DIFFERENTIATION

Curricular differentiation

Formally, Higher Still gives equal status to different types of learning, pursued in different institutions. Clearly, it would be naïve to expect status differences to disappear completely. The issue is rather whether Higher Still results in new lines of differentiation and, if so, what they are: is it changing current patterns of differentiation based on curriculum or institutional differences? We will be able to say more about this when we have analysed the SQA data but the surveys of schools and colleges offer a few pointers.

Different subjects or areas of the curriculum have always differed in their social valuation. The most obvious difference is between academic and vocational subjects, and Higher Still aims to promote parity of esteem between them. However, as we have seen there was somewhat muted enthusiasm for the aim of promoting parity of esteem and, perhaps most importantly, it was not an aim that was shared equally across the system. Colleges regarded it as an important aim but schools, and especially independent schools, saw it as one of the less important aims of Higher Still. The principle of parity underpins the key design features of Higher Still, including its common assessment regime, but it seems that key stakeholders do not equally support this basic principles. This has implications for resolving issues, for example, whether a two-tier system of internal and external assessment would be an acceptable response to difficulties with assessment.

One measure of a weakening of differentiation is the extent to which Higher Still encourages more mixing of academic and vocational subjects, and results in a weaker correlation between curriculum choice and the social or educational background of students. We only have limited evidence about this to date (this will be a focus of our analysis of SQA data). There are a few indicators from our surveys which asked about the impact of Higher Still on students' curricular choices (Table 17). Local authority schools reported a positive impact, considering the early stage of implementation. The responses from the independent schools give a very different picture and suggest that the correlation between curricular choice and background remains strong in this sector. The FE figures perhaps need to be interpreted in a context where a higher proportion of students have made a choice to study a vocationally specific course and where mixing of academic and vocational may be seen as less relevant. (This itself suggests that there may be an issue about the extent to which the idea of broadening the vocational curriculum with more academic or general elements is being recognised.) It should be remembered that these figures are staff's perception of students' behaviour; we can assess the extent to which this is an accurate perception when we analyse SQA records.

We do not know from the survey data which subjects are being mixed, at which levels and what proportion of a student's curriculum is affected. These are all questions for our analysis of SQA data. How far the mixing of academic and vocational subjects develops is likely to depend on several factors. In the past we have seen that although formal status differences are removed, differences persist as a result of cultural traditions, the influence of educational (subject) interest groups and the selection criteria of end-users. We have referred elsewhere to the distinction between the 'intrinsic logic' of modularisation with the 'institutional logic' of

the context within which it is introduced (Raffe, Croxford and Howieson, 1994). The intrinsic logic of Higher Still provides more opportunities for students to mix academic and vocational subjects and for high achievers to increase their vocational focus. However the extent to which they respond to these opportunities will depend on the wider institutional logic including institutional policies, the power relations within the system, and the preferences of universities and employers in selecting applicants.

Table 17. Impact of Higher Still on the mixing of academic and vocational subjects

Has Higher Still...*	Low	Mid	High	Indep	Special	FE
... enabled more mixing of academic and vocational/ promoted more mixing of academic and vocational subjects (% yes)	39	44	35	0	23	23
... of those saying 'yes': are more academic students/high achieving students encouraged to take vocational subjects (% yes)	43	63	55	0	59	44

* Different wording in the school and FE questionnaires

One possibility raised in earlier discussions of Higher Still was that the distinction between vocational and academic programmes might re-emerge as the distinction between students taking SGAs and those taking programmes based simply on courses. In the early stages of the Higher Still Development Programme, SGAs were generally seen as vocational awards, designed to meet the needs of Further Education; college NC programmes were seen as prime candidates for replacement by SGAs. But in the interests of a unified system, in which the same kinds of provision would be available in different sectors, other more general SGAs were developed that could be used in schools (Howieson *et al*, 1998). Nevertheless, the general expectation was that provision in school would continue to be largely course-based and essentially academic in nature. It is true that colleges are more supportive of SGAs than schools (see Table 6 above), but colleges have nevertheless been slow to introduce them. Colleges have more often adapted their NC programmes, by substituting or adding HS units and courses, than replaced them by SGAs. Some SGAs are perceived to reduce colleges' ability to meet industry requirements, because too high a proportion of the award is prescribed, and some content is too general/academic and insufficiently skills focused. On the other hand, schools did not perceive SGAs as being only, or indeed mainly, about vocational training and preparation for employment; they considered them just as relevant for those planning to go on to FE or HE (Table 18). Asked about their plans over the next three years, schools were more likely to anticipate offering SGAs at Higher than at any other level (43% of local authority schools responded 'yes' or 'probably' to offering SGAs at Higher). The majority of colleges who answered the question anticipated only a minor increase in their SGA provision. We are at a transitional point in relation to SGAs. It is not yet clear who their main client group and purpose will be, or, indeed, if they will serve multiple client groups and purposes.

Table 18. Client groups for SGAs in schools

Which students do you expect will be the main client group(s) for SGAs in your school?					
Those planning to ...	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special
... enter employment	39	48	40	15	43
... go on to FE	53	64	53	23	44

Institutional differentiation

During the development of Higher Still, various scenarios were suggested about its likely impact on institutional differentiation. Might it reduce differentiation between schools and colleges by encouraging schools to offer a wider range of vocational options, and to recruit students for whom college is currently the normal option, while colleges used the opportunity to offer ‘academic’ Highers? Conversely, might differentiation among schools increase if resource constraints meant that schools had to specialise in certain areas of the Higher Still portfolio? Would only a minority of schools be able to offer a wide choice at Advanced Higher while others might offer more subjects at Intermediate levels? Would schools become (even) more differentiated according to the social or educational background of students?

Our analysis of the survey data has shown that the variation in the opinions, provision and plans of the local authority schools was not explained by differences in their average S4 attainment. Low-, middle- and high-attaining schools were, in the main, similar in their responses. Local authority schools with high average S4 attainment were much more similar to schools with medium and low attainment than they were to independent schools. A cluster analysis of planned and current provision among local authority ‘mainstream’ and independent schools reveals three groups of schools with different approaches to implementing Higher Still (Table 19).

- Group 1 could be described as the ‘rapid implementers’. They have already replaced high proportions of their CSYS and are planning the highest numbers of courses at all levels above Access in three years time.
- Group 2 could be described as the ‘innovators’. They have lower levels of CSYS replacement and they plan fewer courses in the future than Group 1, but they are the most likely to have extended the curriculum with new subjects, to have used Higher Still to replace existing provision for some pupils in S3 and S4, to anticipate offering individual units and to anticipate offering SGAs.
- Group 3 are ‘the steady implementers’. They have the lowest levels of current or planned provision of the three groups.

Schools in Group 3, the steady implementers, tended to have higher rates of free meal entitlement and smaller S5 rolls. This group also included more independent schools. Average Standard Grade attainment did not vary across the three groups. Group membership was not related to the extent to which local authorities pursued a ‘hands-on’ or ‘hands-off’ approach to implementation within their schools (see below). It was only marginally related to parental characteristics: mother’s social class was associated with group membership (steady implementers had more working class pupils) but father’s social class, parental unemployment and parental education did not vary significantly across the three groups. Among local authority schools, the level of free meal entitlement was higher among the steady implementers than the other two clusters. It should be remembered that FME is limited as a measure of socio-economic status (Croxford 2000).

Higher Still does not appear to be increasing differentiation *among* local authority schools on the basis of specialisation in certain levels of the Higher Still portfolio: we are not seeing the emergence of the Advanced Higher school or the Intermediate school. Several local

authorities, most recently Aberdeen, have considered but rejected the idea of sixth form colleges that would focus on Advanced Higher provision. Instead schools generally seem to be using the full range of Higher Still provision and the differences lie more in the speed and extent to which they are using it and how innovative they are in its application. Underlying these findings, we speculate, is a continuing strong norm of the comprehensive school as a school which aims to cater effectively for all students in its age group.

Table 19. Profile of the three clusters (includes local authority 'mainstream' and independent schools only)

		Cluster			significantly different?
		1 N=123	2 N=116	3 N=82	
% CSYS replaced	<i>average %</i>	72	39	31	yes
No. courses planned in 3 years at ...	<i>mean no.</i>				
	Access	1.9	4.8	1.2	yes
	Int. 1	12.9	8.7	5.4	yes
	Int. 2	20.7	16.9	10.5	yes
	Higher	22	20.5	15	yes
	Adv. Higher	9.6	8.6	5.4	yes
Anticipate offering individual units in 3 years at ...	<i>% saying 'yes'</i>				
	Access	68	87	30	yes
	Int. 1	79	93	48	yes
	Int. 2	79	91	50	yes
	Higher	52	57	30	yes
	Adv. Higher	36	34	21	no
Anticipate offering SGAs in 3 years at ...	<i>% saying 'yes'</i>				
	Access	2	20	2	yes
	Int. 1	16	35	8	yes
	Int. 2	37	54	24	yes
	Higher	43	59	27	yes
	Adv. Higher	22	30	4	yes
Have you extended the curriculum with new subjects at ..	<i>% saying 'yes'</i>				
	Access	20	61	11	yes
	Int. 1	65	73	21	yes
	Int. 2	70	79	24	yes
	Higher	68	74	28	yes
	Adv. Higher	53	66	16	yes
Using/expecting to use HS instead of NC modules in S3/S4?	<i>% saying 'yes'</i>	32	65	33	yes
...instead of SG?		54	59	43	no

Instead of increasing levels of differentiation or specialisation among schools, Higher Still has encouraged increased collaboration. Local authority schools reported increased or new links in respect of the joint delivery of provision, students going to another school for certain subjects, and activities aimed at improving articulation (Table 20). High attaining schools were least likely to have enhanced their links with other schools. Collaboration across schools is being seen by local authorities as a way to overcome resource constraints on the ability of schools to offer a full range of Higher Still provision especially at the Advanced Higher level.

Table 20. Impact of Higher Still on schools' links with other schools: increased or new links

	% answering increased/new links				
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special
joint delivery of provision	15	14	7	0	11
your students accessing provision at another school	16	17	7	0	7
activities to improve articulation	17	20	6	0	19

Independent schools were quite different in their responses from the local authority schools. Of all the institutions covered by our survey the independent sector was least committed to the full range of aims of Higher Still (see Table 3 above). They tended to be among the steady implementers rather than the rapid implementers or the innovators. This cannot be explained by their lesser commitment to Scottish qualifications. Only three of the independent schools responding to our survey did not offer SQA qualifications. The others were evenly divided between those offering only Scottish qualifications and those offering a mixture of Highers, CSYS, and A and AS levels, but the nature of their qualifications did not make a difference to their responses. A possible explanation is that the concept of unification, and especially the unification of academic and vocational learning, was perceived as less relevant by a sector which offered little if any vocational provision (or at least, little that it classified as vocational), and whose main progression routes were to higher education rather than FE, training or employment. It is difficult to judge whether these responses merely reflect existing differences between the independent and local authority sectors, or whether Higher Still has increased these differences.

Our analyses of the data from the college survey did not reveal any clear pattern in colleges' approaches to implementation and we were not able to group the colleges in any meaningful way except in terms of the speed and intensity of implementation. It may be that FE responses vary more at a departmental level rather than at a college level but we do not have the data to test this.

In terms of differentiation between schools and colleges, the limited data we have suggests that neither sector is trying to take over some of the functions of the other but that, with the opportunity presented by a common framework, they are collaborating to extend possibilities for students. Higher Still has increased collaboration between the two sectors, enhancing existing links and developing new ones. Joint delivery of provision and school students taking courses or units at college are both aspects where Higher Still has had an impact (Table 21). Just over two thirds of colleges (67%) reported either new or increased planning activities with schools to improve articulation of provision, taking advantage of the fact that they were both offering new National Qualifications. Colleges were less likely to report new or increased articulation arrangements with higher education institutions, whose provision is not covered by Higher Still.

Table 21. Impact of Higher Still on colleges' links with schools

	% of colleges reporting increased or new links in respect of:
joint delivery of provision	41
school students accessing college provision	38

The evidence so far suggests that the effect of Higher Still on institutional relationships may not be to create more or different lines of differentiation, but to lead to the breaking down of boundaries. If institutional relationships develop in this manner then students' institutional base becomes less clear. If this happens, then there are certain practical implications in relation to funding, administration and record keeping that will need to be addressed.

THE EMERGING MODEL OF A UNIFIED SYSTEM: FLEXIBILITY

We have suggested that Higher Still represented a 'flexible' model of a unified system, but there are different types of flexibility and a system which is flexible in one respect may be inflexible in another. An earlier analysis distinguished four aspects of flexibility:

- individual flexibility (an outcome of education which can be thought of as transferability);
- curricular flexibility;
- flexibility of delivery (in the method, pace, and place of learning); and
- flexibility of pathways (in entry and exit points, movement within the system and re-entry to it) (Raffe, 1994).

On paper, Higher Still is a flexible unified system primarily in respect of the curriculum and of student pathways. It encourages curricular flexibility through its limited prescription of the content, volume, level and duration of study. Students have flexible entry points (students of different backgrounds and abilities can access it), flexible exit points, flexible opportunities for movement within the system, and flexible opportunities for re-entry. Its design rules are intended to support a seamless, unified system of pathways in which students can access education at any level and progress across and between all parts of the system. In Working Paper 3 we use data from the college survey to examine the issue of flexibility in more detail; we suggest that Higher Still's emphasis on curricular flexibility and flexibility of student pathways has potentially negative implications: it is likely to limit flexibility of delivery, to result in a large total volume of assessment (each unit needs to be assessed), and to offer scope for conflict about the appropriateness/relevance of assessment arrangements (Howieson, Raffe and Tinklin, 2001). To what extent is Higher Still, as it has been implemented so far, realising its potential for flexibility and to what extent have the possible difficulties occurred in practice?

Schools and colleges have had no choice as to whether they replace SCE Highers and CSYS with new National Qualifications (the only choice, in some cases, is the timing of doing so). In other areas of the curriculum both schools and colleges have taken advantage of Higher Still's curricular flexibility, adopting a 'mix and match' approach to tailor provision to meet particular needs. Thus colleges have adapted existing programmes by substituting or adding Higher Still courses or units, rather than replacing them. Perhaps one of the most important consequences of Higher Still's curricular flexibility is its use in S3 and S4 instead of Standard Grades. As we have seen (Table 16) around a third of local authority schools were using new National Qualifications to replace Standard grade in S3/S4, and another half expected to do this or were discussing it. The variety of uses of Higher Still provision in third and fourth

years is a mark of its curricular flexibility. It is used to provide more up-to-date course content, more motivating provision for disaffected pupils, more suitable provision for less able students as well as more demanding courses for the more able, and better progression opportunities. The flexible possibilities offered by Higher Still coupled with the relaxation of the national curriculum guidelines recently announced by the Education Minister (Scottish Executive 2001b) has led to considerable speculation about the eventual demise of Standard Grade and the breakdown of the age/stage-related curriculum in schools.

In the short to medium term there is likely to be greater complexity in S3/4 as schools offer a mix of new National Qualifications and Standard grades. A question is whether in the longer term Higher Still will replace SG and we see the extension of a single system from S3 onwards. Similarly in colleges, the effect in the shorter term will be greater complexity of provision; it remains to be seen whether later, Higher Still replaces other existing non-advanced programmes. If the effect of Higher Still is simply to increase the range of curricular options from which schools and colleges select, it will not achieve its aim of making the system simpler and easier to understand.

Higher Still's flexibility of entry levels appears to be recognised by institutions, especially local authority schools. The existence of units and courses at Access and Intermediate 1 levels has enabled schools and colleges to tailor provision to meet the needs of particular groups (especially students with learning difficulties), extending opportunities for accreditation and for progression.

Table 22. Has Higher Still given students more opportunity to take courses at a level appropriate to them/their starting point? (% yes)

Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	FE
90	91	91	65	73	58

The college sector has frequently expressed concern as to whether Higher Still would allow them enough flexibility to meet the needs of their diverse client groups. As we have seen, colleges were least positive that Higher Still had given students more opportunity to start at an appropriate level. The survey also asked colleges about the extent to which Higher Still had affected their capacity to meet the needs of different categories of students and of employers (Table 23). For all but one category of student, a majority of colleges either indicated no change, or responded 'don't know'. The exception was students with learning difficulties; over half of colleges said Higher Still had increased their capacity to meet the needs of these students. Forty per cent felt it had increased their capacity in relation to disadvantaged students. In no case did more than a small minority respond that Higher Still had reduced their capacity to meet the needs of any of the categories of students. Colleges either thought that Higher Still had not made any difference to their ability to meet the needs of employers or responded that they did not know.

Schools felt that Higher Still had helped their ability to meet the needs of certain students, in particular, S5/6 students with low or average SG attainments. Special schools responded positively to the opportunities that Higher Still offered them to respond better to students with special educational needs (72%).

Table 23. Impact of Higher Still on colleges' capacity to meet the needs of clients

Has Higher Still affected your capacity to meet the needs of...	strongly increased/ increased* %	no change %	strongly decreased/ decreased %	don't know %
...16-18 year olds	32	62	0	5
... students over 18	18	74	5	3
... disadvantaged students	40	45	8	8
... New Deal students	13	71	5	11
... SWAP students	23	54	3	20
... students with learning difficulties	55	40	3	3
... employers	0	61	8	31

* mainly increased rather than strongly increased

Higher Still aims to provide more flexible pathways by providing a ladder of educational progression through its five levels and in a unified system these steps are of a uniform height. However if some students need to progress up smaller steps than others, this then becomes a problem. This has proved to be the case, in particular in relation to the level of Scottish Group Awards at Higher which has caused difficulties for some students in FE. In principle, an SGA at Higher level leads on to the first year of higher education whether this is for a university degree course or for an HNC/D. However the specification for a Higher SGA corresponds to the traditional entry level for degree courses, whereas most college students who progress to higher education enter HNC/Ds, whose entry requirements are less demanding. The SGA at Higher level represents an unnecessarily high hurdle for them to cross. How will this be taken forward? In certain respects, the flexible, modular nature of Higher Still provides a solution to this - colleges can construct programmes whose average level is somewhat below that of the Higher SGA to suit their particular students (what is currently referred to as an 'Intermediate 2½'). But there are some difficulties with this approach: the creation of such programmes adds to the complexity of the system and undermines the principle of a uniform national currency.

As Higher Still has been implemented, it seems that the programme's flexibility of pathways has created difficulties for the flexible delivery of provision in the college sector. The most constraining of the design rules, in the view of many college staff, concerned the nature, volume and timing of assessment. External assessment appears to be a factor in colleges' reluctance to introduce SGAs.

Half the colleges in our survey reported a reduction in flexibility in the timing of assessments. In particular, the fixed annual examination diet, based on the school calendar, inhibited colleges' ability to provide assessment on demand or to offer open and distance learning or 'roll-on roll-off' provision. This reduced their ability to respond to the needs of many adult learners. In the first year of Higher Still, few colleges had offered Higher Still courses in the evenings because it was difficult to accommodate the increased assessment requirements within a timetable typically based on one evening a week (SFEU/HSDU, 2000). Even in 2000-01, less than half of the colleges offered any Higher Still courses (mainly Highers) in the evenings.

There are several ways in which provision may develop in the light of these difficulties; these may not be mutually exclusive. One is that colleges will continue to offer a substantial level of other non advanced provision with new National Qualifications merely another option on which they may draw. This would add to the complexity of the system. Another is the creation of different assessment regimes within Higher Still; this raises issues about both complexity and parity of esteem.

Assessment has been a particularly contentious issue in schools; among other aspects, the volume of internal assessment has been criticised for overloading both students and teachers and for reducing the amount of time for teaching. A high level of assessment is inherent in a system that achieves flexibility by crediting units and providing multiple pathways. Nevertheless, this has been exacerbated in a climate where there is great concern about standards and a lack of trust in the system. Unless a system with flexible pathways is founded on a high level of trust and confidence in the standards achieved across the system, its flexibility is likely to be weighed down by an excessive burden of assessment. An issue for Scottish education is how to resolve the apparent tension between flexible certification and confidence in standards.

INSTITUTIONS AND THE FACTORS DRIVING CHANGE

The flexible or open nature of Higher Still begs the question: flexibility for whom? Our survey was designed to capture the institutional perspective, and we surmised that in a flexible unified system schools and colleges would have a more important role in shaping the emerging system, because of their ability to choose which elements of the curriculum to offer and how to package them for students. However their decisions may be constrained by the anticipated preferences of end-users such as employers and higher education; or a flexible system might empower the individual student.

Schools and college were asked which factors had influenced their decisions about Higher Still. Government policies and priorities, the profile of students in the institution and readiness and willingness in staff were relatively important influences in all sectors (Table 24). The availability of national support materials had also been important in most institutions, although less so for special schools. The presence of key individuals had been influential, but less so in independent schools. Timetabling issues had affected local authority 'mainstream' schools more than other groups. Resource issues had had an effect, but less so in special and independent schools. Links with other schools/colleges had not had a strong influence. A further question asked whether problems with the August 2000 exam results had affected plans for Higher Still; it had done so in about one-third of institutions, except for special schools whose plans were hardly affected (table not shown). Most of those affected reported a slower rate of implementation.

So far, therefore, institutions' implementation decisions have been most strongly influenced by the perceived needs of their client groups, by government policies and priorities, by resource and staffing issues and by the availability of materials. For local authority schools, another factor identified was the policies and priorities of the local authority. From our survey of local authorities, we have characterised them as 'hands-off' or 'hands-on' in their approach to their schools. However, even in the more hands-on authorities, schools had a large measure of autonomy, and the nature of a school's local authority as either hands-off or

hands-on was not a significant factor in explaining membership of our three clusters of schools.

Table 24. To what extent have the following factors influenced the school's/college's decisions about Higher Still provision to date? (Items varied in the schools' and colleges' questionnaires).

	% answering very strong/strong influence					FE (n=39)
	Low	Mid	High	Ind	Special	
government policies and priorities	79	89	92	73	59	77
local authority policies and priorities	88	94	90	0	60	-
profile of students in college/upper school	87	87	90	81	76	80
needs of HE	38	44	37	85	7	21
needs of employers	35	34	17	31	12	49
feedback from students	56	47	54	42	29	41
resource issues	58	71	63	46	36	59
timetabling issues	70	71	65	46	33	31
availability of national support materials	74	82	81	69	52	87
presence of key individuals in school/college	65	63	53	39	60	59
readiness of staff	90	82	90	81	80	77
willingness of staff	91	83	88	81	80	62
role of local authority advisers	38	31	27	0	25	-
links with other/local schools	15	19	9	8	29	44
links with colleges	18	12	10	0	21	13
local economic trends	-	-	-	-	-	28
existence of HS provision	-	-	-	-	-	92
single exam diet	-	-	-	-	-	26

End-users have not had a strong direct influence on schools' and colleges' implementation of Higher Still. With the exception of independent schools, the needs of higher education institutions were not identified by schools and colleges as a major influence, nor were the needs of employers. To the extent that employers have been mentioned this has often been as a reason for *not* implementing aspects of Higher Still – for example, the comments that some SGAs were less suited to the needs of employers than the existing NC programmes. However institutions recognised end-users as a *potential* influence. For example, it is clear that the attitude of universities and employers will be critical for future decisions about SGAs. It may be that the power of end-users to shape the system is a question of timing: their influence may emerge more strongly when students leave with particular subjects and qualifications and it becomes apparent how they are received by HE and employers.

It is too early to say who has been 'empowered' by the flexibility within Higher Still. Schools and colleges have made use of the opportunities to pursue their own objectives, and the cluster of schools we have labelled 'innovators' have used it change existing practice. But institutions also reported that government policies and priorities were influential on their implementation decisions, and they acknowledged at least a potential influence of end-users. There is less direct evidence of students having been empowered, but most institutions identified groups of students who had been its beneficiaries.

CONCLUSION

The central question addressed by the IUS project is: what kind of unified system will emerge from the Higher Still reforms? While our data describe an early stage in the process, they provide a number of pointers.

- First, there is no evidence so far of greater stratification among local authority secondary schools. Schools did not divide into two tiers according to whether they emphasised Advanced Higher or Intermediate in their post-S4 provision. Nor did their implementation strategies vary significantly according to the S4 attainment levels of their students. Instead, institutions reported closer collaboration in order to deliver the new curriculum. Rather than greater differentiation, therefore, schools and colleges were looking to more collaboration and, in the longer term, to a structure of provision with a weaker concept of institutional base.
- Second, the survey reveals differences between independent schools and local authority schools. Independent schools were generally slow to implement the reform and they supported a narrower range of aims of Higher Still than local authority schools. Perhaps the independent sector feels distanced from a reform which aims to unify academic and vocational learning, because it has little engagement with vocational learning, either as part of its own provision or as a progression route for its students.
- Third, to the extent that school and college staff share an implicit vision and rationale of a unified system, it is of a system based primarily around access and progression. Developments such as core skills which might promote curricular integration are not a high priority with most sectors; nor are SGAs. To the extent that other aspects of curricular integration are mentioned in the surveys it is often in negative terms, for example in reports that the more academic slant of some new National Qualifications makes them less acceptable to employers.
- Fourth, the model of a unified system is flexible in respect of curriculum and student pathways, but not necessarily in respect of delivery. There are tensions between these different types of flexibility. Some aspects of new National Qualifications, such as the assessment arrangements, make flexible forms of delivery, such as part-time and distance learning, more difficult.
- Fifth, there is a further tension between curricular flexibility and Higher Still's aim to rationalise the system and make it easier to understand. Both in FE, and in the third and fourth years of secondary school, new National Qualifications are being used to extend the range of curricular options rather to rationalise them. It remains to be seen whether this is merely a transitional phenomenon. Will the aims of unification be helped or hindered if new National Qualifications continue to coexist with Standard grade in S3/S4, and with other qualifications in colleges? And will they be helped or hindered if other 'flexible' uses of the new curriculum result in more complexity, for example the creation of an Intermediate 2½ level?

At the time of writing the government is consulting over possible changes to assessment arrangements for new National Qualifications. We have argued that many of the difficulties faced by Higher Still hitherto have resulted from a lack of clarity about its basic vision and strategy, and a failure to reach agreement on this vision. The concepts most directly touched by the suggested changes are those of parity of esteem and of a unified system. Yet as we

have seen these two aims attract less support than other aims of Higher Still, and – although this is less directly shown by our survey – we suspect that there is less agreement on what they mean in practice and on why they might be desirable. For example, is parity of esteem primarily a means to achieve a seamless progression framework, because it removes barriers arising from the differential status or the different assessment and certification arrangements for different types of learning? Or is it seen as desirable – or indeed achievable – for more intrinsic reasons? Do we need a debate about which aims are integral to the Higher Still vision, and the significance of parity of esteem and of the common design rules, before making basic changes to the model?

The current consultation about assessment may be the critical turning point in the development of Higher Still. In particular, it may determine whether Higher Still develops primarily as a reform of the school curriculum or as a framework for lifelong learning. The reform's starting point was the need to rationalise the school curriculum, and the reform process started with the Howie Committee of 1990-92 whose initial remit covered schools only. Only later was the agenda widened to include colleges and adult learners. The focus may now be moving back towards the school sector. The uptake of new National Qualifications has been most rapid in schools, and they are moving down the age range as they are used to enhance the S3/S4 curriculum. The uptake in colleges has been much slower, and there have been difficulties in delivering new National Qualifications to adults and part-time learners. Political leadership of the reform has been re-located in the Scottish Executive Education Department which is responsible for schools rather than in the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Department which is responsible for colleges and for vocational training. Many colleges perceive that schools dominated the Higher Still development process, and nearly three quarters of our college respondents consider that Higher Still responds more to the needs of schools than of colleges (Table 8 above). But, ironically, colleges are more likely than schools to support the full range of Higher Still's aims, and they are more supportive of the aims of parity of esteem and of a unified system, which are at the heart of the current consultation. If either Option A or Option B were supported, and a two-tier assessment structure emerged, would the college sector fade out of Higher Still? Would it remain a credible policy for lifelong learning, and would it represent any advance on pre-existing provision? We already perceive a tendency to exclude Higher Still from policy debates on lifelong learning, for example in the evidence submitted to the current Parliamentary Inquiry, and to assume that the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, despite its very different objectives, can somehow achieve the same results.

How will these questions be resolved? During our research on the development and implementation of Higher Still we have encountered four different models of the change process. The first can be called the *genetic code* model: this model, implicit during the development phase, assumed that the blueprint developed during the development phase would translate more or less directly into reality. When implementation began we met policy-makers who expressed a *market flexibility* model. Unlike the genetic code model, this perceived Higher Still as a relatively loose framework which could evolve in different ways according to the needs of students and stakeholders; but like the genetic code model, it did not require central intervention to shape its development. The third model is that of the *chartered bus*: it can be steered, provided the driver and all the passengers agree on where they want to go. In other words, if agreement on the vision of the reform can be reached, then

it can continue to develop as a unified system. If not, then the model most likely to describe the development of Higher Still is that of *private taxis*: people cannot agree, and they go off in their own directions.

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