

## **EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE**

### **SNSA – ASSESSING THE EVIDENCE BASE AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES**

#### **SUBMISSION FROM EDUCATION SCOTLAND**

##### **Introduction**

1. Education Scotland (ES) has supported the Scottish Government in the policy development and implementation of Scottish National Standardised Assessments since their inception.
2. As a joint partner in the National Improvement Framework programme, amongst other responsibilities ES provided educational advice on:
  - Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA): Educational advice on the implementation and delivery of the SNSA; advice on educational content of assessment questions and how schools can use SNSA information as part of the range of assessment evidence used to support teacher professional judgement.
  - Gaelic Medium National Standardised Assessments: Educational advice on the development, implementation and delivery of the GME SNSA; educational content of assessment questions and advice for implementation in schools as part of the range of assessment evidence used to support teacher professional judgement.
  - Delivery of national quality assurance and moderation support through Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officers (QAMSO) training and advice delivered nationally, at Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC) level and locally.

##### **Policy development and evidence**

3. The proposal to introduce the Scottish National Standardised Assessments, and the evidence base referenced (including international expertise) was led by the Scottish Government. Their submission to this Committee is expected to address these first two focus points and will include reference to Education Scotland where relevant.

##### **Contribution of the assessments to educational outcomes**

4. The Committee's third focus point asks: *'what information the Government's assessments can provide that contribute to improving the educational outcomes of children and young people'*.
5. Education Scotland has worked alongside the Scottish Government through the implementation of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments. Our educationalists and HM Inspectors are witnessing the impact of the assessments and their contribution to Scottish education.

## **Educational context of change**

6. The Education Scotland report [Quality and improvement in Scottish education: 2012-16](#) (QulSE) gave a summary of inspection findings for that period. Within and across all sectors, QulSE highlighted the need for greater consistency, saying: “Scottish education does not yet provide all children and young people with consistently high-quality learning experiences. Unless this variability is addressed we will not achieve the national ambition of excellence and equity for all learners.”
7. The report called for a range of improvements by education providers, including:
  - improving arrangements for assessment and tracking to provide personalised guidance and support throughout the learner journey;
  - improving further the use of self-evaluation and improvement approaches to ensure consistent high quality of provision; and
  - growing a culture of collaboration within and across establishments and services to drive innovation, sharing of practice and collective improvement.
8. Key points highlighted included the need for primary schools to put in place better arrangements for assessing and tracking children’s progress, including having a shared understanding of standards within Curriculum for Excellence levels. It called on them, as a priority, to identify and address any gaps in attainment and achievement between their least and most disadvantaged children. In secondary schools, it found that the quality and impact of assessment, monitoring and tracking of young people’s progress during the broad general education is an area requiring ongoing development.

## **Data available to support teachers**

9. There has been an evolution in the data available to, and requested from, teaching professionals to support improving educational outcomes.
10. Previously, through our inspection and curriculum support activities a picture emerged of how the former Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) was impacting the education system.
11. Anecdotal comments from practitioners revealed that they did not feel that the information from the SSLN was connected to their school or their children. The SSLN worked on a sample basis. Almost all schools across the country were represented, but only a few children from each school were selected to take part in the survey. Practitioners felt that it was not representative of their school cohort. There was a perception that the children selected to take part in the survey were not the ones they would have chosen, with a sense that they did not represent the full spread of ability and support need in the school.
12. The survey did provide a great deal of high quality information at a national level on children’s ability, comparisons of SIMD and performance, and evidence of attainment over time. One of the key features for Education Scotland was the information the

survey provided on answers to individual questions that were scrutinised by the literacy and numeracy teams. This information was used to create professional learning resources, which provided practitioners with examples of questions, types of mistakes children were making, how to teach these areas, and resources to help in the classroom. These were promoted and additional support provided through improvement conferences held for practitioners across the country.

13. The **achievement of a level data**, collected in at P1, P4 and P7 and S3 and based on a teacher's professional judgement, has now replaced SSLN. This provides data from every child and every classroom, rather than on the sample approach used by SSLN.
14. Education Scotland support is provided by National Improvement Framework Advisors (NIF Advisors) through the QAMSO network, building regional and national consistency in teacher's professional judgement of each level, and providing a national picture as well as a local and classroom perspective. This has been supported by the development of a National Moderation Hub available to practitioners via GLOW. It provides a range of high quality advice and guidance which practitioners at all levels can use to improve and support their moderation processes.
15. Evaluation from our QAMSO events in 17-18 revealed growing impacts at school and local authority level, including: assessment and moderation is becoming a priority; clearer focus through local authority steering groups; an increasing shared level of expectation amongst Quality Improvement Officers, Moderation Co-ordinators, Headteachers and teachers, and schools contributing to banks of evidence as reference points.
16. Education Scotland produced National Benchmarks to support practitioners when making decisions of children's progress between levels and achievement of a level. There have been a series of engagement sessions on the Benchmarks.
17. Before the introduction of SNSA, standardised assessments in various forms were used in almost all of Scotland's local authorities.
18. The **Scottish National Standardised Assessments** were introduced nationally in August 2017. They are not a replacement for the SSLN, but instead provide diagnostic information on how each child who took the assessment is performing in numeracy, reading and writing.
19. The information from the SNSA can be used as part of a range of evidence to support teachers' professional judgement on the progress of each child. The assessments enable a standardised score and age-equivalent score to be produced for each learner, placed on a long scale from P1-S3 which will allow teachers to track progress over time. The SNSAs support teachers in identifying key strengths in a child's or young person's progress and crucially identify areas where the learner may need further support. As such, they are designed to be used formatively and not as summative assessments.

20. Practitioners can look at the data from different cohorts of children to identify any patterns in the areas in which they are doing well or need support and can adjust their teaching. Across the school, the establishment can review its data to identify the areas which are being taught well and the areas in which children are not doing so well and can organise whole school professional development in these areas.
21. At authority level, the data can be used as above to identify areas of good practice which can be disseminated across the local authority, for example a school which has an SIMD of 1&2 performing very highly in one or two areas. It also helps identify areas that at authority level can be addressed through providing continuous professional-learning.
22. It is important that the assessments are seen as part of a bigger picture. No decision about a learner would be made on the basis of their SNSA assessment alone. Instead, the SNSA contributes towards a range of assessment information which teachers draw on to develop next steps in learning and determine progress within a level and achievement of a level. At a national level the data from SNSA can be used in a similar way to the SSLN data informing the development and maintenance of support and professional learning materials.

### **Impact of SNSA assessments**

23. For the Scottish National Standardised Assessments User Review Year 1 – Session 2017/18, Education Scotland provided some initial feedback from the sample of school inspections conducted throughout 2017/2018. They noted that 'positive steps are being taken to make effective use of assessment as part of learning and teaching in some schools. SNSA were mentioned positively in that staff were using them to support identification of learning needs'. The inspection evidence highlights that schools need to make use of a range of assessment tools to support the improvement of children and young people's learning.
24. In the review, as Chief Inspector I commented 'The SNSA provide teachers with an invaluable resource to identify key strengths in a child's progress and crucially identify areas where a child may need further support. This is especially valuable in the early years. P1 teachers use the information the assessments provide to tailor support and to personalise approaches to ensure children get the very best start in their education. It can also inform how the curriculum is shaped across a cohort. For example, where a gap has been identified for a number of children, appropriate learning opportunities and support can be developed in a more targeted way'.
25. In addition to the Review, Education Scotland conducted interviews with individual teachers and headteachers on the impact of the assessments in primary 1 settings provide anecdotal evidence which is broadly representative of our data so far. [These case studies have been published on our National Improvement Hub](#):
  - a. "We found that diagnostic feedback from the SNSAs allowed the primary 1 teacher to determine the progress of each pupil in her class against that of their peers, and the year group as a whole. This information helped to 'triangulate' the teacher's professional judgement on children's progress. As

the diagnostic data provided largely matched progress observed from day-to-day assessment evidence, in general terms, it boosted staff's confidence in their own professional judgement.

- b. "As part of last session's school improvement plan, there was a focus on the development of non-fiction reading. Given that some of the questions in the literacy assessment were based on non-fiction texts, for us, this will mean having a continued focus on ensuring that pupils at all stages are given opportunities to access a range of both fiction and non-fiction texts throughout the year." **Tarbolton Primary School, South Ayrshire**
  
- c. "The assessments ... proved useful in identifying areas of literacy and numeracy that, in certain classes, had not been learned in enough depth. Consequently, we were able to focus on these areas during the summer term. An analysis of individual learner feedback also provided next steps in learning for specific children. Overall, diagnostic feedback was mostly consistent with teacher expectations/professional judgement. Inevitably, there were a few 'outliers' – those children who did better or less well than expected. In such cases, this prompted further reflection and discussion on the progress of these individuals." **Corpus Christi Primary School, Glasgow**
  
- d. "One of the benefits that emerged was when children did not perform in line with teacher judgement. This led to questioning why this might have been the case. On further investigation into the circumstances, it became clear that there were other issues having an impact on the child. This really helped to reinforce the importance of being aware of all the factors that affect children's learning and staff were then in a much better position to provide the right support ... Looking forward, the Scottish National Standardised Assessments will help identify aspects of learning that may have been missed and pick up any patterns within particular cohorts of learners. They will help to redirect learning and support teachers in looking at how certain groupings might be working. They have already supported staff to challenge perceptions about learners and shine a light on areas that might have been missed." **Fettercairn Primary School, Aberdeenshire**
  
- e. "The data has ... helped to identify learning needs for each child and has made it very easy to create groupings of children who require support in a particular area, thereby allowing a more personalised approach to learning and teaching. An analysis of the diagnostic feedback has allowed interventions to be introduced early and for these to be reviewed to show the impact of addressing the needs of the child. This means that issues in learning do not go unnoticed and develop into a major area of difficulty for a child. This was not the same with previous assessment types, as it was not possible to see how a child had responded to individual questions.

"The data has made tracking and monitoring and professional dialogue much richer, with subsequent interventions being much more effective and tangible. As a cluster, staff have worked together to identify those areas where pupils performed less well than expected and have worked together to improve learning and teaching in these areas...Overall, the whole process has helped

to identify children's needs – not just those who are not 'on track'. Consequently, the Scottish National Standardised Assessments are helping to improve learning and teaching through the analysis and discussion of the diagnostic information they produce." **Peel Primary School, West Lothian**

26. The [case studies on Education Scotland's National Improvement Hub](#) also contain advice from the featured schools and from Education Scotland on the successful administration of the assessments. This includes ensuring that pupils are 'PC-ready', not putting a huge emphasis on the assessments, keeping the children relaxed and allowing them to stop and start the assessment at any time.

### **The future of assessments**

27. The Deputy First Minister has announced an independent review of the approach to P1 assessments within the context of the National Improvement Framework, to report by May 2019. In my role as Chief Advisor, I was involved in advising the Deputy First Minister on the appointment of David Reedy, who will lead the review.
28. A new SNSA P1 Practitioner Forum has recently been formed, which will include ES NIF, Early Years, and literacy and numeracy officers. The main function of the practitioner forum will be to share experiences and offer advice and support, and it will evaluate and be informed by a range of evidence including; the opinions of practitioners; parents; professional associations and other key stakeholders. An important focus will be ensuring an appropriate balance is struck between assessment as part of on-going learning, within a play-based learning environment, and the need to ensure teachers are supported in making nationally consistent judgements about children's learning and progress.

### **Conclusion**

29. Eighteen months after the introduction of SNSAs, we are seeing evidence of the value that they are bringing to schools and how practitioners are beginning to use the information to improve educational outcomes. Schools are beginning to use the information from the SNSA to support identification of children's next steps in learning.
30. While standardised assessments were previously well established as an educational tool in Scotland, creating the SNSA has allowed a national picture to be compiled. This contributes as part of a range of evidence to support teachers professional judgement of achievement of a level.

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