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Convenor
Education and Skills Committee
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
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Dear Clare

Following officials' appearance in front of the Education and Skills Committee on 28 November 2018 on data on school support staff you wrote to the Deputy First Minister asking for further information in a number of areas. Your letter raises a number of points in relation to the processing and publication of official statistics, and it is my role as Chief Statistician to respond to you on those.

Pupil Support Assistants

The changes made to the presentation of data on support staff in schools were made in order to better reflect practice in schools and local authorities. Officials explained to the Committee that the change to the presentation of the Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant category has no impact on the information available on the number of support staff working to support children with additional support needs. This specific role does not exist in all local authorities as this type of support is provided through other means and roles. The assignment of staff to this category in census returns was found in some instances to be entirely arbitrary.

The objective judgment by professional statisticians, based on information supplied by local authorities, as part of additional quality assurance processes, was that the best way to represent the data collected was to present two categories of staff under a new pupil support assistant category. To continue to differentiate between these two school support staff roles (Classroom assistant and Additional Support Needs auxiliaries) would have misrepresented the terminology and practice of support provision in schools.

The Committee asked for other options that were considered for presentation of data on the two categories of school support staff - 'Classroom Assistant' and 'Additional Support Needs Auxiliary or Care Assistant' - and the basis for the option of merging categories being chosen.

The options considered were:

- Not to publish any data on some or all of the support staff categories



- Combine some or all of the categories
- Publish the data as collected
- Add an additional category of 'pupil support assistant' for those local authorities that reported this was the terminology used.

The option to combine two categories was chosen based on information from local authorities about terminology and practice of support provision in schools and feedback from the AGASL.

Stakeholder Consultation

As part of the evidence provided to the Committee, the policy official set out that a wide range of evidence and information is used to inform policy development and implementation. This includes but is not limited to; statistical information, research, discussions with stakeholders on specific topics, and reports like *Not Included, Not Engaged and Not Involved* by Children in Scotland, National Autistic Society and Scottish Autism, and *Included in the Main* by Enable Scotland.

In evidence officials indicated that the issues with the collection of support staff data were discussed as part of broader discussions with the Advisory Group on Additional Support for Learning (AGASL) on data collection and I attach at Annex A relevant extracts of the minutes of these meetings. The Advisory Group Minutes are not published, but are disseminated to group members. Names of group members, other than the policy official who attended the Committee's evidence session have therefore been redacted. You will note that these include consideration of guidance to support improved recording of data, which was produced in June 2018. The implementation report referred to has been prepared and is intended to be published in 2019.

The official report has been circulated to the group and the relevant policy officials will make the group aware of the invitation from the Committee to communicate directly at their next meeting which will be held on 23 January.

I note that the Committee has indicated that the Committee will seek further information from education authorities on specific, related matters.

SSTA and census data on ASN teaching numbers

At the Committee appearance on 28 November, officials agreed to look into the disparity between SSTA figures and census figures on ASN teaching numbers.

The ability of Scottish Government statisticians to scrutinise another organisation's response to a third organisation's request for information is necessarily limited. SG statisticians have been investigating the disparity between the data provided by the SSTA and census data. We have established that the number of ASN teaching staff submitted by Dumfries and Galloway to the Scottish Government as a part of the school staff census has been relatively consistent over the years 2015 to 2017 (39, 38 and 35 FTE). Our investigations suggest that the wording of the FOI request underpinning the SSTA submission used a different basis for counting teachers than that used by the census and this is likely to have contributed to the discrepancy. However, we are continuing to investigate this issue with Dumfries and Galloway council.

Handling requests for data

At the evidence session on 28 November, officials committed to write to you on procedures for dealing with requests for data.

When considering how to respond to requests, Scottish Government statisticians follow guidance from the Office of the Scottish Information Commissioner and make a judgement that is consistent with the pillars, principles and practices of the Code of Practice for Statistics, which are centred around Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.

Education Analysis receives a large number of requests for data throughout the year, including ad hoc or routine requests and more substantial requests for datasets for statistical and research purposes.

Education Analysis has a robust process in place for accessing and sharing datasets, predominantly for statistical and research purposes. Full details can be found on the SG website at <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/DataAccess>

A significant number of the routine requests form part of normal business and we respond accordingly. This may be the case where, for example, the data is published, it is a regularly received request or time is required for technical discussions with the requester about the exact details of the request.

In other cases, the use of FOI procedures is appropriate. Where requests are explicitly made under FOI, then these are dealt with through the FOI process. Where requests are made, but not under FOI, these may be treated as FOI in order to benefit our users, in terms of utilising a formal and transparent publication process, enabling equal access, and with the opportunity for the requester to seek a review, if required. This is in line with Code of Practice principles Q1 and V2.1 on quality and equal access to all.

As stated in the submission to the Committee ahead of the evidence session on 28 November, the arrangements to provide school support staff data on request were a temporary measure while statisticians undertook further quality assurance and considered the most appropriate method of publishing these data.

The data request of 31 July 2018 instigated the first release of these data. It was appropriate to treat this as an FOI request, in order to follow a formal process, with the benefits to the requester, as set out above.

Following user feedback, 2018 support staff data will be published for the 21 additional categories in March 2019 as management information. It will be accompanied by information on the nature and limitations on use of this data.

Yours sincerely,

ROGER HALLIDAY

Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning (AGASL) Meeting

22 February 2018

“3. Report to Parliament

The group had an extensive discussion on the content and presentation of the draft Report to Parliament. Laura noted that it was intended that the report be a short and snappy summary of the implementation of ASL. It was noted that some of the information that she would like to include in the infographic was not available at the time of drafting. Due to this, it is expected that the report will be published by the end of April.

The group had a detailed discussion about the infographic. It was agreed that an infographic may not be the best tool to present the statistical information in the report. Laura agreed to look again at this and will consider presenting the statistical data with a light narrative to ensure that all the relevant information is included. She will also consider producing an amended infographic as a standalone document.

Other key discussion points were:

- There needs to be more detail throughout the report, particularly to highlight the breadth of ASN, including a more detailed breakdown of the factors which give rise to an additional support need, including complex factors.
- The links between ASN and disability should be drawn out in more detail.
- Further consideration needs to be given to the section which describes the developments to the Education Bill, particularly some of the risks which were highlighted in response to the recent consultation.
- Include details on the work of the Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning within the report.
- Include the more detailed, supplementary data on the number of children attending mainstream classes to more accurately reflect the implementation of the presumption of mainstreaming.
- Consider drawing out the links between ASN and poverty and investigate the use of Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) data. Also consider using the Joseph Rowntree Foundation research to provide context.
- Provide more context around the link between exclusions and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.
- Broaden out the data on outcomes to highlight that achievement may look different to some children with additional support needs.
- Provide more information on the Doran Review and its implementation. This can also be used to provide more detail on complex additional support needs.
- Provide more detail on the Young Ambassadors for Inclusion and their recent and forthcoming work, including linking to the film that they have produced. This can also be used to highlight the Year of the Young Person.
- Provide further reflection on areas of challenge such as resourcing and children missing from education.
- Highlight the importance of partnership working and provide examples of this in practice, for example the collaboration with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists on the communication summit work.
- Provide more information on the support that is being provided, rather than the need for support.

Laura will consider the group's comments on the draft report and will update it as appropriate. A further draft will be circulated to the group by correspondence for sign off prior to publication."

Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning 26 April 2018

Update to guidance on data collection (Paper 2)

██████████ led the group in a discussion on data collection. ██████████ has undertaken work in relation to the technical specification which goes out to education authorities on the information collected on additional support needs within the pupil census.

██████████'s work has been to draft definition of the categories of additional support need against which data is collected. The group discussed the definitions.

Members advised that this work could benefit from a broader view, however, it was recognised that this may be a discussion for a future time. Members highlighted the need to collect data accurately. It was noted that this was welcomed from a LA perspective, to support improved accuracy..

The group discussed concerns about needs not being recorded due to a lack of formal diagnosis. Laura advised that it is not necessary for there to be a formal diagnosis, the requirements of the Act enable support to be provided on the basis of what is known about the child or young person's needs, whilst a diagnosis is being sought, if that is needed.

The group also noted that some of the language has moved on, and that this should be addressed within the document. Where the categories within SEEMIS use historic language this will have to remain at this time, as there is not the intention to change the SEEMIS system at this time. The focus of ██████████'s work has been to update the guidance on the system.

The group noted that it has not been agreed who will be inputting the information in the system. Laura advised that those completing this information should have a basic understanding of additional support needs.

██████████ highlighted the usefulness of the guidance accompanying this document. It was noted that in addition to agreeing the definitions, thought should be given to how this information is disseminated. While the main focus is on collection of data within schools, it was noted that it may also be useful to share this with health and Skills Development Scotland to ensure a shared narrative around the issue. Laura indicated that the primary audience for the guidance is those in education authority and schools who record the data. The guidance is not intended as a general guidance document, but is instead specifically about recording of data within the pupil census.

██████████ asked the group to contact her by the end of the week about specifics within the documents and any other feedback. The secretariat will send out ██████████'s email address to the group."

ASL Implementation Report (Paper 3)

"Laura provided an update on the progress and changes made since the last meeting. At the previous meeting, the group made several recommendations which Laura has incorporated into the revised report.

The group provided some additional feedback and these suggestions will be considered in the next draft. Laura agreed to include links within the report to the section on the Young Ambassadors for Inclusion on the ES Hub.

Laura thanked members for their contributions and agreed to circulate an updated report to the group via correspondence.

Laura advised that the report will be published on SG website, sent to Education Committee, and disseminated through SG networks.”

Advisory Group for Additional Support for Learning 29 August 2018

“SG Updates

■■ invited ■■■ and Laura to provide updates from the Scottish Government.

Report to Parliament

Laura provided an update on the Report to Parliament. Some members provided additional comments and suggested amendments. Laura agreed to fully consider these.

Following these final amendments, the group agreed they were content with the document and stated it could now be published.”