

**Education and Skills Committee
Scottish National Standardised Assessments**

Professor Claire Wyatt-Smith- Australia

In regard to your government's interest in efforts at improving education and the role of large scale standardised testing, , I hope you may find the following couple of papers and related comments of some use.

Wyatt-Smith, C., & Jackson, C. (2016). NAPLAN data on writing: a picture of accelerating negative change. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 39(3), 233-244.

Big idea: testing does not deliver/support the development of improvement. It does however bring considerable collateral damage and has the potential to diminish teaching and learning opportunities.

This paper draws on evidence from Australia's annual large-scale test of literacy and highlights the negative impact of the testing on the writing performance of Australian school students across the years of schooling. The paper makes clear that the testing, now in place for more than a decade, was initially heralded as informing improvement efforts and supporting equity, the intent being to identify students at risk of not meeting the minimum standard. What is revealed in the paper is the undeniable, accelerating negative change (decline) in writing performance over the years 3, 5, 7 and 9, in all states and territories in Australia. Let me repeat: this phenomenon of decline in writing is across the country. The paper reveals the increasing numbers of young people falling below the benchmark or minimum acceptable level. I suggest caution in considering large scale testing of the type undertaken in Australia and the hazards ahead if the literacy tests from Australia are imported to Scotland and applied as they have been here. Importantly, the purposes of the test have become confused, with the case for measurement accountability and transparency effectively obscuring the original purpose of early diagnosis and evidence to inform intervention. The intelligent accountability argument has not been winning, sadly.

On a related matter, a recently completed study of the teaching of writing that I have recently completed shows that teachers' assessment capabilities are not sufficiently well developed to build young people's knowledge, skills and capabilities in a coherent manner across years. One of the biggest findings is the lack of knowledge about how to link teaching, learning and assessment; use classroom evidence; diagnose learner needs, and plan teaching that meets these needs. There is confusion about standards, with many teachers feeling as though they are confused about the standards they are expected to use Teacher preparation is of course part of this story so I also offer the following paper. (Australia currently lacks an evidence base to show how writing is taught. I have worked with Christine Jackson to develop a survey to generate the evidence and it has now been implemented in 2 states, with a third on the way. It reveals a very interesting picture about the build of capability in writing across phases of schooling.)

Wyatt-Smith, C., Alexander, C., Fishburne, D., & McMahon, P. (2017). Standards of practice to standards of evidence: Developing assessment capable

teachers. *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy and Practice*, 24 (2), 250-270.

Big idea: Initial teacher education gives limited attention to assessment in what is an overcrowded curriculum. Related idea: Australia should invest in doctoral scholarships to build the number of teacher educators with expertise in educational assessment and measurement. This paper presents findings from an analysis of all initial teacher education (ITE) programs in the state of Queensland, with a specific focus on the development of beginning teachers' assessment capabilities. It shows that assessment is not a subject of systematic attention in ITE, and indeed, the development of assessment knowledge and experience occurs primarily/or does not occur during the professional experience placements. It shows that assessment as an area of teacher capability needs far more attention in ITE, and it is now a priority area as a result of the most recent review of ITE undertaken by Crave et al., 2015, *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers*. You may recall that the major concern about beginning teachers' preparation, including in assessment, was one of the main triggers for the development of the **Graduate Teacher Performance Assessment** (ACU), as I presented during my visit with you.

I am also working with Lenore to undertake research on testing and data walls. It seems that when teachers have weakened assessment knowledge and capabilities **and** testing companies are there with powerful messages about data, then schools, systems and teachers listen with big ears about how they can use/post/display data in attempts to inform/improve teaching. What we have learned from the US and Australia suggests that the data walls, data war rooms and data visualisation become raified as ends in themselves. This is also the space where progressions may loom large in Australia, with testing companies already developing banks of tests/assessments for teachers to use.