



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

AGENDA

4th Meeting, 2021 (Session 5)

Wednesday 3 February 2021

The Committee will meet at 8.30 am in a virtual meeting.

1. **Decision on taking business in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take agenda item 4, 5 and 6 in private.
2. **Coronavirus and Education:** The Committee will take evidence from—

John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Scottish Government.
3. **Additional Support for Learning review:** The Committee will take evidence from—

John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Scottish Government.
4. **Review of evidence:** The Committee will consider the evidence it heard earlier under items 2 and 3
5. **Draft Budget 2021-2022:** The Committee will consider the response from Scottish Government on the Draft Budget 2021 -2022.
6. **Work programme:** The Committee will consider its work programme.

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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

Agenda item 2

SPICe briefing paper- Coronavirus and Education ES/S5/21/4/1

Paper from Clerk ES/S5/21/4/2

Agenda item 3

SPICe briefing paper- Additional Support for Learning review ES/S5/21/4/3

Agenda item 4

Paper from Clerk ES/S5/21/4/4

Agenda item 5

Work programme (private paper) ES/S5/21/4/5

Education and Skills Committee**4th Meeting, 2021 (Session 5), Wednesday 3rd February 2021****Note from the Clerk**

1. At today's meeting, the Committee will take evidence from John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, on two ongoing strands of work – additional support for learning, and the impact of coronavirus on school education.
2. While there will be some crossover between these two strands of work, these are two separate agenda items and should be treated as far as they can as two separate evidence sessions. SPICe briefing papers have been prepared for each evidence session and are papers 2 and 3 of this pack.
3. At the time of publication, it is expected that the First Minister will update Parliament on Tuesday 2 February on Covid-19, including any anticipated measures relating to school education. The official report of the First Minister's update to Parliament on 19 January 2021, can be read [here](#).
4. The content of the First Minister's update on 2 February, and the decisions taken by the Scottish Government in relation to school education and other matters within the Committee's remit, may be taken into account by members when questioning the Deputy First Minister at this meeting.
5. Later today, the Committee will discuss the Deputy First Minister's response to the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny letter, which also contains details of the Draft Budget for 2021-22, and consider whether it wishes to undertake any further work on the Budget. Members may wish to refer to this letter during evidence, given the detail it provides on additional support needs and e-learning in particular. The response is included in Paper 4 of this pack.

**Education and Skills Committee Clerks
29 January 2021**

Education and Skills Committee Coronavirus and education 3 February 2020

INTRODUCTION

The Committee will be taking evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. The Committee's session with the Cabinet Secretary will be in two parts: the broad approach to teaching and learning in the current situation; and the broader policy developments in relation to policy on additional support for learning.

This paper is to brief members on schools and teaching and learning. The paper is in four parts:

- The quality and reach of teaching and learning;
- Ensuring equity in access to education;
- Certification; and
- Plans to re-open schools.

It is expected that there will be a statement in Parliament on lockdown measures and schools' opening on 2 February 2021.

The [8th Education Continuity Direction](#) was published on 28 January and comes into effect on 1 February. This ECD provides the legal basis for school buildings being closed to the majority of pupils and in-school learning for the children of key workers and vulnerable workers. The 8th ECD will run to 17 February, unless revoked.

QUALITY AND REACH OF REMOTE LEARNING

In December 2020, the First Minister announced that most children and young people would learn remotely, when they returned from an extended Christmas break. On 4 January 2021, the First Minister announced that school buildings would close to the majority of children and young people, for the whole of January. The period of remote learning is expected to continue to mid-February at least. The Scottish Government keeps these arrangements under regular review.

[Education Scotland published remote learning guidance for practitioners on 8 January 2021](#). This guidance stated that remote learning is not "a substitute for classroom based learning and teaching" but that "effective remote learning can mitigate some of the adverse impact of a reduction in face-to-face learning". (p2) Nonetheless, the guidance concluded "what constituted high quality learning, teaching and assessment prior to the pandemic and what constitutes high quality learning, teaching and assessment now has not changed". The guidance included "key principles" of remote learning and a number of "entitlements" children and young people should expect; these are replicated in the Annex to this paper.

[On 21 December 2020, the Scottish Government published guidance](#) (subsequently updated on 21 January) for the re-opening arrangements in January stated, “pupils should be provided with an appropriate timetable of remote learning during the period from Monday 11 January to Friday 29 January.”

The guidance identified three types of e-learning:

- *Live* – real-time tuition;
- *Recorded* – 400 pre-recorded lessons to be made available through Glow which were developed by teachers covering both BGE and the senior phase; and
- *Supported* – around 14,000 other online resources available on Glow covering 14 subjects. [Education Scotland’s Scotland Learns](#) website also has a range of resources aimed at practitioners and parents/carers.

The ECD requires education authorities to provide education by way of remote learning. ECDs are made under the [Coronavirus Act 2020, schedule 17](#). Paragraph 12 (2) of that schedule provided that operators (e.g. local authorities) must have regard to any Guidance given by Scottish Ministers about how to comply with the ECD.

One of the themes of the Committee’s session on 13 January was that there were inconsistencies in how guidance is being applied. [Richard Bell from the NASUWT said](#)—

“To be honest, a lot of it is down to variation in the culture of leadership and management at both the local authority level and the school level. Where there is a collegiate approach and culture, we are much more likely to get some kind of workable and sustainable solution in place.” (col 29)

Education Scotland has played a key role in supporting the development of online learning materials and platforms. [At the Education Recovery Group on 7 January](#), Education Scotland said that “that remote learning does not only comprise of online learning, and recognising the opportunity to build upon plans from May/June 2020”. The necessity of professional development for staff was also noted at that meeting of the ERG and the written submission from [Education Scotland to the Committee on 8 January](#) said—

“Education Scotland has been supporting teachers to upskill in the delivery of online learning pre and post March 2020. Since March over 7500+ practitioners have engaged in the 134 webinars delivered by Education Scotland Digital Officers, focusing on the delivery and creation of online learningMoving forward, the offer from the Digital Skills Team will focus on supporting practitioners to embed the use of digital in their teaching. This work includes approaches such as ‘mixed delivery’ of live learning, simultaneously in classrooms and for learners self-isolating at home.”

The [First Minister told the Parliament on 4 January](#)—

“We have taken significant steps on online learning. For example, the national e-learning offer, which is a collaborative programme involving the Scottish Government, Education Scotland and local government, has already helped to improve the options that are available to schools and enhanced the provision for live remote learning, recorded lessons and supported learning via online digital learning.” (Col 15)

A need to share best practice and to support the profession at this time was raised by Larry Flanagan [who stated](#)—

“We are at the start of remote learning in this lockdown. We must share good practice as quickly as possible and stamp out any of the nonsense that might pop up. It is in everyone’s interest to ensure that remote learning works as effectively as possible. I know that teachers have put a lot of effort into getting that right for young people. They saw how some particular groups were impacted during the previous lockdown and they do not want that to be repeated. If there are lessons to learn, we should share them. Remote learning cannot be as good as an in-school experience, but it can be effective for a short time and it can keep young people engaged in their learning journey.” (Col 13-14)

The [NPFS issued a media release following the First Minister’s statement on 4 January](#). The NPFS noted a number of concerns including calling for—

- “A need for clear and consistent communication regarding the pandemic and its impact on educational settings from Scottish Government, Local Authorities and Schools
- Assurances around the quality and consistency of remote learning and clarity about how it will be delivered. It is crucial that every child receives the high- quality educational experience that they are entitled to and that measures are taken to prevent the widening of the poverty and attainment gap.”

On 13 January, the Scottish Government announced £45m additional funding for local authorities. The [news release with announcement](#) stated—

“Councils may use the funding – sufficient to fund 2,000 additional teachers - for purposes including recruitment of additional staff, additional digital devices or to provide additional family support. This is on top of £160 million already committed for education recovery since the start of the pandemic, bringing the total additional support provided to more than £200 million since the start of the pandemic. Private and third sector day care of children settings will also receive almost £4 million in temporary financial support.”

It might be expected that local authorities were well-prepared for the move to remote learning. Scottish Government guidance on reducing the risks in schools noted that the contingency for schools would be remote learning. The [guidance stated](#)—

“Schools and local authorities should prepare and maintain clear, strong contingency plans for providing education remotely and should include the possibility of using online national resources such as digital class. Local authorities and schools should ensure that parents/carers are fully informed of the contingency plans in place.”

Where the advice on social distancing would change, the guidance stated that “schools and local authorities must be prepared to enact contingency measures as outlined in their Local Phasing Delivery Plans”. The delivery plans were initially developed to support blended learning which was, at the beginning of summer 2020, the anticipated model for the start of the school year in August.

As with the first lockdown, in-person provision will be made for vulnerable children and the children of key-workers. The [First Minister told Parliament on 4 January](#) that teachers

would be part of the support available to those children and young people.(Col 23) The [SSTA have said](#), “This will cause a major problem for schools as teachers cannot be expected to teach pupils in school and deliver remote learning to those not in school. Additional staff will be required to achieve this expectation.” Scottish Government releases [data on the attendance at schools](#) and this shows that between 6 and 7% of children and young people attended school in the week commencing 13 January. Of those attending school, it was estimated that 37% were vulnerable children and 63% were the children of key workers.

Education Scotland’s Report on Remote Learning

Education Scotland’s [first weekly national report was published on 22 January](#). The first report focused on focuses on local authority planning and guidance. Following weeks are expected to focus more on a sample of schools and then, the following week, the focus will be on produced after engagement with young people and parents ([OR 13 Jan Col 43](#)). Ms Gorman outlined the purpose and importance of these reviews to the Committee, she said—

“It is really important that Education Scotland helps to fill the gap and to share the learning that we, as educators and collaborative practice communities of professionals, know will accelerate our pedagogical approaches during this challenging time, in which teachers, through being at home, are even more isolated from other professionals.” (Col 45)

The 22 January report discussed its findings under the following headings:

- Local authority plans and guidance for remote learning
- Access to remote learning
- Engagement with parents and carers
- Professional Learning
- Children’s and young people’s engagement and participation
- Interactive learning
- Assuring high quality remote learning

In terms of plans being in place, the report stated—

“All local authorities have developed clear, high-level plans and guidance for remote learning that reflect their individual context and take account of local circumstances in both urban and rural settings. Some plans were updates of the local phasing delivery plans of June 2020.”

In terms of access to remote learning, the report stated—

“All local authorities have taken steps to improve children’s and young people’s access to remote learning. A few previously had very well developed implementation plans to increase individual learner access to digital tools and

devices. These local authorities were well-placed to respond quickly to the need to support online and remote learning.”

The report noted that local authorities “acknowledge that engagement with parents and carers is an important feature of supporting learning and health and wellbeing” and expect schools to be in regular contact with parents. A theme of this section is the management of parents’ “unrealistic expectations of remote learning”.

The report noted that work had taken place between the two lockdowns to support digital skills. The report stated, “while a range of different approaches have been put in place, local authorities acknowledge that some staff feel that they do not yet have the necessary skills and confidence to deliver remote learning effectively. The use of remote learning technologies and pedagogies by staff is variable as a result.”

In terms of engagement with learning, the report noted that some local authorities had regular direct contact from staff with individual children and young people, but “daily contact with learners is not yet a consistent feature of practice across all local authorities” Digital platforms allow quantitative analysis of children and young people’s accessing online resources. In terms of the senior phase the report stated—

“Almost all local authorities report that they are concerned about the impact of school closures and remote learning on young people’s access to learning and teaching leading to certification in the senior phase. They advise that many secondary teachers are concerned, particularly about how to generate appropriate assessment evidence from young people in the senior phase during periods of school closure. Local authorities also indicate that teachers are concerned that current arrangements are having a negative impact on the motivation of young people in the senior phase to engage fully in remote learning.”

The report reiterates the guidance that the remote learning offer should include some live learning. It said—

“Local agreements between a number of local authorities and professional associations is resulting in ‘live’ learning only being provided on a voluntary basis. Overall, there is more work to be done to ensure that children and young people experience a balance of live and independent learning activities that will support progress in their learning.”

Education Scotland also noted that “remote learning delivery has been and continues to be, very challenging for staff” and some teachers are finding it very difficult to navigate their way through the plethora of resources and support available and describe feeling overwhelmed”.

The report noted that there is an expectation in local authorities that there will be high quality remote learning. The report discussed the ability of local authority quality assurance teams to support schools; it said that the “capacity of centrally based staff to sustain their normal support and challenge roles” has been impacted and this is an area some local authorities have identified as an area where more support is needed.

The recommendations of Education Scotland’s report were—

- Ensure local authority planning, guidance and delivery for remote learning is updated to reflect the entitlements and expectations published on 8 January 2021.

- Provide further professional learning for staff in local authorities and schools with a particular focus on the pedagogy of remote learning.
- Continue work to ensure equitable access to digital devices and online access for learners and staff.
- Provide ongoing communication and engagement with parents about what remote learning is and the approach being taken by local authorities and schools to ensure a shared understanding.
- Continue to provide health and wellbeing support to learners, parents and staff.
- Develop and implement, at pace, approaches at local authority level to assure the provision of high quality remote learning delivered by individual schools.

The next report is due to be published on 29 January, which is too late to be reflected in this paper.

Members may wish to explore with the Cabinet Secretary—

- **What feedback has there been on the quality of guidance? How is this systematically assessed and by whom?**
- **What work has is being done to support the skills for independent learning? What are the solutions for children unable to work independently, either due to an additional support need or their age?**
- **How well has Education Scotland performed in redirecting its resource to support remote learning in the period between the two lockdowns. To what degree is Education Scotland accountable for the success of learning and teaching in this current period?**
- **How will the recommendations from Education Scotland be followed up?**
- **How is the Scottish Government monitoring engagement with learning, and how does this impact on practice and national policy?**
- **How are teachers being supported to find the time to undertake professional learning and to absorb and apply best practice?**
- **What are the barriers to schools consistently providing live learning and how these can be overcome.**
- **Whether the Education Continuity Directions should be more specific. Whether the Parliament should have an opportunity to influence the content of future ECDs?**

EQUITY IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The Scottish Government published [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): impact of school building closures - equity audit](#) on 13 January. The equity audit focused on the impact of the school closures from March to August 2020. This included a literature review which found:

“Considerable differences between the educational and learning experiences of pupils from more and less advantaged backgrounds. Whilst educational concerns are widespread, as revealed for example by surveys of parents and of pupils themselves, a range of differences in the learning experiences between these two groups are suggested by the literature.”

In this respect, the Equality Audit identified a number of differences between the experience of children and young people from more and less advantaged backgrounds. These included—

- Time accessing learning
- Access to remote learning
- Access to resources to support home learning in relation to children and young people from more and less advantaged backgrounds – this includes digital disadvantage, access to adequate space, and parental support for learning
- children and young people’s concerns about home learning
- parents’ concerns about supporting home learning

The Equity Audit highlighted evidence that suggests that the negative impacts on attainment and “learning loss” is felt more strongly by socio-economically disadvantaged pupils or schools with higher numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged pupils.

The literature review also examined work on how teachers and schools’ practice can be most effective. Key themes that are prominent in the literature on practice responses include:

- challenges involved in moving to online/remote or blended models of teaching;
- challenges in adapting tasks to the online environment;
- the lack of peer support for teachers;
- lack of peer interaction for pupils which is identified as motivation for learning; and
- variation in availability of technology (connectivity and hardware) for pupils, with socio-economically disadvantaged pupils being most affected.

In terms of remote learning, the Equity Audit referred to an EEF study which indicated—

“There was a need to support learners to be able to work independently. For children experiencing challenges with self-regulation, they would benefit from more detailed support through, for example, daily plans or checklists.”

The Equity Audit also examined issues such as the use of blended learning, and re-opening schools.

Overall, the Equity Audit identified five broad factors driving the quality of educational experiences and attainment during the pandemic. These were—

- Health and wellbeing support.
- Digital infrastructure and connectivity.
- Support to parents and families.
- Teaching provision and the quality of learning.
- Support for teachers and the wider workforce.

The Equity Audit also listed ways in which the Scottish Government and others had worked to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic under these five themes (see part 4 of the equity audit). Some of the key measures were—

- £80 million additional investment to support the recruitment of over 1,400 additional teachers and 200 support staff in 2020/21.
- £25 million investment for school aged-learners through the Connecting Scotland Programme has delivered over 58,000 devices and connectivity to people suffering from digital exclusion.
- Flexibility to redirect £182 million of Attainment Scotland Funding to help mitigate impacts on the most socio-economically disadvantaged families.
- Provision of free school meals during school building closures and school holidays – with over £37 million in additional funding to support local authorities.
- Increased support for families to engage with learning at home, including via Glow.
- Ensuring access to counsellors in every secondary school in Scotland.
- A £3 million Youth Work for Education Recovery Fund.
- Guidance for school staff on supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools.
- Continuity in Learning Guidance, which offered advice to local authorities as to how to address the impact of interrupted learning and disconnection from school.
- A range of materials to help parents, carers and practitioners support learning at home.
- The £100 million Winter Support Plan to support families on low incomes.
- £1.5 million to help school staff manage additional pressures as a result of the pandemic.

In addition the [National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan published in December](#) reported that, as of the end of November, “over 9,000 connectivity solutions had been distributed to learners across Scotland”. (p15)

Submissions the Committee has received have also received submissions that have raised issues around the equity impacts of responses to the pandemic. The [Govan Law Centre's](#) submission highlighted the differences of interpretation of guidance on vulnerable children and the support provided. The GLC also stated—

“Since schools closed in March 2020 issues such as digital exclusion have remained prominent, this particularly affects children and young people from low-income families, those living in remote areas and the gypsy/traveller community, amongst others. Local authorities do not appear to have the resources to provide all children and young people with sufficient access to devices for remote learning.”

Gayle Gorman told the [Committee on 13 January](#) that there may be a gap of around 20,000 digital devices still required to meet demand. She said—

“After consultation with the Scottish Government around the first lockdown, the analysis from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities was that 70,000 laptops were needed, and 50,000 of those have been delivered. I believe that the funding and delivery of the remaining 20,000 laptops has begun.” (Col 42)

The latest data on the number of devices distributed was released in a Question answered on 27 January 2021 ([S5W-34395](#)). This noted that by the end of December local authorities had distributed 58,698 devices; local authorities had a further 5,569 devices which had not been distributed and were awaiting receipt of a further 8,866 devices.

[On 28 January, the National Foundation for Educational Research and the Education Endowment Foundation published interim results](#) from a study in England assessing the extent to which Key Stage 1 (equivalent of P2) pupils' attainment in reading and maths were impacted by partial school closures during the first national Covid-19 lockdown, and particularly the effect on pupils eligible for free school meals. The study compared data collected in November 2020 to a sample taken in 2017 and assessment data taken in 2019. Its key findings were—

- Attainment in reading and mathematics was significantly lower in autumn 2020 compared to a standardised sample from 2017; representing a Covid-19 gap of around two months' progress.
- The disadvantage gap in reading and mathematics is around seven months' progress, which represents a widening as compared to Key Stage 1 in 2019.

Members may wish to explore with the Cabinet Secretary—

- **How has the equity audit influenced guidance and practice for the current arrangements?**
- **What research plans have been put in place to examine the impact of the current learning arrangements in Scottish schools?**
- **Whether schools will undertake the Scottish National Standardised Assessments this year and whether that data could be used to identify the extent and distribution of lost, or delayed, learning.**
- **How has the Scottish Government monitored local authorities' expenditure of emergency funds to ensure that they are used for the purposes they were provided? Is it possible to measure outcomes of this additional funding?**

- **How is the Scottish Government ensuring that education, social work and the third sector are able to identify and support vulnerable children? How is this being monitored and what lessons were learned from the first lockdown?**
- **Whether the Cabinet Secretary can provide an update on the number of devices issued to pupils?**

CERTIFICATION

The National Improvement Framework described the certification process in 2021—

“The measures being put in place for 2020-21 are: that National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers will be awarded based on an alternative assessment model, rather than the usual exam. An individual pupils’ work and teachers will determine grades, not an exam; with the emphasis being on quality not quantity of evidence.” (p15)

Fiona Robertson told the [Committee on 13 January](#)—

“The committee can be assured that the SQA is working collaboratively to enable the system to deliver in 2021. Back in August, in order to recognise the potential disruption to learners, free up teaching and learning time and reduce the workload of teachers and lecturers while maintaining the validity, credibility and standard of qualifications, we worked proactively with stakeholders, including practising teachers and lecturers, to propose modifications to course assessment for all subjects. The modifications sought to narrow the focus of each course, minimise the evidence requirements and introduce additional flexibility for the gathering of evidence” (Col 32)

The SQA has published individual subject guidance for National 5 estimates. Following the announcement on 8 December that exams would not take place for Highers and Advanced Highers, the SQA stated that subject-specific guidance for teachers and lecturers will be published for all subjects, “on a rolling basis, throughout January 2021”. All the guidance for Higher and Advanced Higher courses is due to be published by 29 January.

The SQA has established a National Qualifications 2021 Group to support the certification of learning in 2021. This group comprises of the SQA, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Scottish Government, National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

The SQA does not publish details or minutes of the meetings of the group. However, it issues regular updates. The most recent was issued [on 27 January](#). This update outlined that the SQA has moved back the final date for submitting estimates from 28 May to 18 June. The SQA stated that “maximising learning and teaching remains the current priority for schools and colleges”. It also noted that “assessment cannot be undertaken unless young people understand the foundations of their course content and have had time to consolidate their learning once they return to school.”

This change to the deadline will affect other aspects of the SQA’s plans and timescale for certification this year. [In December the SQA published](#) details of a planned 5 stage process for the delivery of National 5 results in 2021.

Larry Flanagan told the Committee on 13 January that “January is not a critical month” in terms of assessment for certification. However, he said—

“There will come a point at which, if senior phase students are not back in school, some very practical difficulties will start to emerge around how to produce the evidence on which professional judgment is made. We need to be really clear that what has not been taught cannot be assessed. Teachers are not being asked to speculate as to the potential of an individual, but to make a judgment on the evidence that has been produced, so that there is a sound basis for the accreditation. If we were in a lockdown scenario until Easter, for example, there would be significant challenges around how we could progress even the alternative assessment model.” (Col 16)

A key question that has yet to be resolved has been the position in relation to any appeals of SQA results. A particular issue is about access to remedies for the young people themselves – that is young people being able to instigate appeals themselves. The [SQA's submission to the Committee](#) said—

“Working with the National Qualifications 2021 Group, SQA is considering what the most appropriate appeals process for the 2021 awarding model should be. In addition to co-creating the approach with the group, SQA is engaging with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Scotland and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, to ensure that the approach will be compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. We will also undertake a short public consultation.”

Dr Tracy Kirk's submission criticised the approach of the SQA's engagement. She said—

“The individualised nature of examinations requires the SQA to engage with a wide range of young people, including those disproportionately disadvantaged, to ensure mitigations have been put in place. This has not occurred and it is important that the SQA realise that they should not use engagement ‘with representatives from Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young People's Commissioner to understand the views of young people’, there needs to be engagement with the individuals themselves, at local authority and national level.⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law it is important that the SQA approach to grade allocation meets with the current legal obligations which the Scottish Government and public bodies have to children and their rights.”

While the focus is on schools, certification and learning in colleges has similar challenges. Larry Flanagan also noted that learning and certification in schools is not the totality of a person's education and opportunities. He said—

“In short, people too often talk about lost learning, but it is delayed learning— nothing is irretrievably lost. It might mean that we have to work hard to catch up, but if we are committed to the idea of lifelong learning, we should not give the message to young people that it is the end of the world if their exams do not work out in the way that they had hoped they would this year.” ([Col 23](#))

This pandemic and disruption to traditional models of certification is occurring at a time when school qualifications in Scotland are under scrutiny and review. The OECD is in the

process of undertaking a review of Curriculum for Excellence and particularly the Senior Phase. The [ICEA's recent report](#) stated—

“High school examinations are essentially an out-of-date 19th and 20th century technology operating in a 21st century environment of teaching and learning. Digital technology is transforming our capacities for self-assessment, peer assessment, shared assessment and continuous assessment. Assessment and examinations can now be more continuous, rather than episodic. They can provide capacities for continuous self-assessment and self-directed progression in learning. They can enable transparent sharing of assessments with pupils, parents and professional colleagues that will lead to timely teacher assistance and intervention. Algorithms can be useful in digital self-assessment processes, though their current capacity to provide valid feedback of complex writing and reasoning skills is sometimes over-claimed. Few of us would want to invest our all in creative writing exercises that had only an algorithm for an audience, for example. Therefore, teachers’ professional judgement, use of formative assessments, and teacher moderation are also key aspects of assessment systems.” (p14)

In [evidence to the Committee](#), Gayle Gorman welcomed the debate around the future of assessment and qualifications. She said that the assessment techniques should reflect the skills required in the workplaces of the future and that Scotland is well-placed as it has a mix of assessment practices both in school and college. (Col 52)

Members may wish to explore with the Cabinet Secretary—

- **Whether the National Qualifications 2021 Group should work transparently and publish papers and minutes of its discussions.**
- **How the three week delay in providing estimates to the SQA is likely to affect the learning time for students in the current academic year. How it will affect time to cover content for certification in the 21/22 academic year?**
- **Is the Scottish Government expecting results day to be delayed in 2021?**
- **How will the Cabinet Secretary ensure that the certification process respects individual young people’s rights to an education and to be heard in matters relating to them? How much say should young people have over certification of their own learning?**
- **What the Cabinet Secretary’s view is on the role of exams in certifying learning at the end of secondary education?**

REOPENING SCHOOLS

A key question in the past year has been how to re-open schools to ensure that universal provision of education continues, but to do so safely. The Scottish Government produced advice last summer on how to re-open schools safely; this advice has been updated several times and in October 2020 was re-titled “[Guidance on reducing the risks in schools](#)”.

The [Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland](#) argues that “children’s human rights need to be protected, despite the prevalence of coronavirus in Scotland”. The Commissioner stated—

“Closing schools presents a serious risk of harm to the wellbeing of children and young people, and to the fulfilment of their rights. The closure must be limited and defined and under review.”

The minutes of the Coronavirus (COVID 19): Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children’s Issues meeting on 6 January 2020 were published on 15 January. These minutes noted that part of the sub-group’s role is to “look at in more detail is the evidence required to decide when it will be appropriate to reopen schools more widely for face-to-face teaching (beyond vulnerable children and those of key workers.)”

A key issue has been whether and when teachers should be vaccinated to support a prompt and safe return to in-person education. Seamus Searson from the SSTA said

“Given the circumstances that teaching staff and other school staff are operating under and the difficulties that there have been until now in relation to there being a consistent approach to the guidance around health and safety mitigations in the school environment, we would like to see a prioritisation of school staff similar to that which applies with regard to health workers, when and if they are asked to go back into the school environment.” ([Col 6](#))

A particular case has been made for teachers and staff working in ASN schools. Larry Flanagan told the [Committee on 13 January](#)—

“We have raised a specific concern with the Scottish Government about addressing ASN settings in a different way from mainstream schools, because in lots of ways they are closer to the situation in care homes due to the close proximity of people. There is a strong case that, if any group of teachers were to be prioritised for vaccination, it should be those in ASN settings. There is a lot of concern about that among our members.” (Col 3)

The First Minister told Parliament on [19 January](#) that the Scottish Government was considering whether ASN staff could be categorised as social care staff for the purposes of vaccine prioritisation. (Col 28) More broadly, the First Minister said—

“As the vaccination programme rolls out in this first phase of the JCVI priority list, many teachers will be in the priority groups. As I have said before, when it rolls out to the rest of the population, I hope that we can see teachers vaccinated as well in an early phase of that next part of the programme. We are also planning—we will do this on a test basis over the next period—in-school lateral flow testing and at-home polymerase chain reaction testing for school pupils and staff. We hope to have a more widespread testing approach in schools when schools return.” (Col 21)

In December, the Education Recovery Group discussed testing in schools. [Minutes from the meeting on 10 December](#) noted that pilots were intended to begin in January and that “scalability of options [was] a key concern”.

Vaccination and testing was only one part of the discussion the committee held with trade unions on 13 January. The panel also indicated that community transmission would need to be relatively low, and risk mitigations put in place, including social distancing. The panel considered the new more transmissible variant of the virus as a “game changer”. Richard Bell from the NASUWT said—

“Certainly, the guidelines that were in place previously, which I think have not been updated since December, are not in the place where we need them to be for what

we are dealing with at the moment. They are predicated on the original virus, whereas, as I said, the new variant increases significantly the risk of transmission in schools. We need to have much stronger mitigations in place to ensure that people are protected in that environment.” (Col 9)

Seamus Searson highlighted the need for clear plans and noted that teachers and schools had had to adapt to a changeable policy environment. The Scottish Government published updated advice on 21 January entitled, [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): school re-opening arrangements for January 2021](#). Under the section “Schools opening timeline” the guidance states, “Local authorities and schools should continue the following exceptional arrangements for a phased return to schools in January/February.” The remainder of the section refers to arrangements for the current situation (e.g. provision for vulnerable children, updating risk assessment, etc.). These guidance pages are live documents and are updated; the guidance stated—

“Regular reviews of these arrangements will be undertaken, taking into account the latest evidence about the new variant and progress in reducing community transmission levels. Arrangements following these reviews will be communicated at the earliest opportunity.”

The guidance also refers to the current [Education Continuity Direction](#) which says—

“Each education authority is required to plan and prepare for children to resume attendance at schools (including nursery schools and nursery classes) under the management of the education authority at the earliest time it is safe to do so, having regard to any guidance issued by the Scottish Ministers.”

The past nine months have been a significant challenge for the teaching profession and other workers in education. [Mr Searson said](#) that the teachers are “end of their tether and are struggling considerably”. (col 10) [The report of the International Council of Education Advisers](#) stated—

“International evidence is clear that combinations of remote learning, online learning, hybrid learning, in-person learning, and the health and safety protocols and procedures associated with COVID-19 have resulted in increased workload, work intensification, and challenges of work-life balance for educators and support staff.” (p24)

Minutes from [Advisory Sub-Group on Education and Children’s Issues meeting on 12 January](#) stated—

“The sub-group felt it was unlikely that all schools would be able to return to in-person learning for all pupils at the same time. There will need to be an incremental approach to school reopening, based on a range of considerations, including what the evidence is telling us about the level of community transmission, the positivity rate and the prevalence of the new variant of the virus among children and young people. However, it remained essential to focus on what needs to be done to mitigate the worst impacts of school closures.”

The Scottish Government Research and Analysis team have [produced a summary of the available evidence on the COVID-19 mitigation measures aimed at children and young people](#). This is wider than just schools and looks at issues such as attitudes and compliance.

Members may wish to explore with the Cabinet Secretary—

- **How are the harms caused by the current move to, largely, remote learning being monitored and quantified?**
- **How will these harms be remediated in the short and long terms?**
- **What are the options for a return to school being considered, e.g. blended learning, prioritising certain cohorts?**
- **Is the Scottish Government only planning to seek views of the Education Recovery Group on these plans or will there be wider consultation? Does the Cabinet Secretary plan to consult the Parliament on options being considered?**
- **How can teachers be supported to ensure their workload is manageable through another significant change in their professional practice?**
- **Has there been any progress in prioritising the vaccination of education workers in ASN settings? What would be the impact on other measures to suppress the virus if all teachers and education staff were prioritised for vaccinations?**

**Ned Sharratt
SPICe Research
29 January 2021**

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

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ANNEXE

Extract from Education Scotland's remote learning guidance.

Key principles for remote learning include:

- remote learning will not replicate face to face in school teaching – in style, approach or hours of delivery
- class teacher retains responsibility for planning and organising children's and young people's learning, with learning supported by parents and carers
- opportunities for learners to progress and extend their learning
- approaches to assessment of learning and providing feedback that support and capture children's and young people's achievements in school and at home
- provision of learning activities to ensure engagement for all, considering the age and stage of development of learners, and introducing increasing opportunities for independent study as appropriate
- provision of learning activities for learners who require additional support for learning and any learners who may be particularly vulnerable or disadvantaged
- a shared understanding between home and school of the remote learning approach and the respective roles and responsibilities of all involved
- continued endeavours to tackle digital exclusion, including the provision of devices and connectivity solutions to support learning
- partnership working with community providers and third sector organisations to support provision.

In line with these key principles, children and young people are entitled to:

- learning opportunities which reflect the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, allowing learners to develop their knowledge, skills and attributes in a variety of relevant contexts and across curriculum areas
- access to appropriate physical resources where needed – this might include learning materials, textbooks and / or digital devices
- on-line resources that will be consistently used across learning to aid interaction, assessment and feedback
- regular high quality interactive learning and teaching using technology or other remote methods
- a balance of live learning and independent activity
- access to key learning which is available for learners to revisit as often as necessary

- ongoing dialogue, reflection and feedback with practitioners in relation to their own learning
- daily registration/check in for every learner, recognising that the format for this may vary depending on the age and stage of learners
- regular opportunities for engagement with other pupils to support learning, as well as informal engagement
- due regard for their well-being and safeguarding.

<https://education.gov.scot/media/hblh4yy0/cerg-remote-learning-080121.pdf> (p3)

Education and Skills Committee Additional Support for Learning 3 February 2021

INTRODUCTION

The Committee will be taking evidence from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. The Committee's session with the Cabinet Secretary will be in two parts: the broad approach to teaching and learning in the current situation; and the policy developments in relation to policy on additional support for learning.

This paper is to brief members on Additional Support for Learning for those children and young people with additional support needs. In the context of the Morgan review and the Scottish Government's response to it.

The independent review was announced by the Scottish Government in January 2019. The review report, '[Support for Learning: All our children and All their Potential](#)' ("The Review") was published in June 2020. The [Scottish Government published an Additional Support for Learning: Action Plan on 21 October](#).

The Committee took evidence from Angela Morgan on [18 November 2020](#). Ms Morgan led the review of the implementation of additional support for learning (ASL) in schools. On [20 January](#), the Committee took evidence from GTCS, EIS, Connect, and NPFS, followed by ADES and Education Scotland.

The Committee has also received submissions from [Connect](#), [A24 Scotland](#) and the [Socialist Educational Association Scotland](#) prior to the evidence session in November. The Committee also received submissions from [Education Scotland](#) and [EIS](#) before the meeting in January.

This paper does not seek to provide a briefing on the Review, rather it is to support members to explore the Scottish Government's response to the review and highlight some of the themes that arose during the evidence session on 20 January.

This short paper is in two parts:

- Response to the Morgan Review; and
- Resources.

RESPONSE TO THE MORGAN REVIEW

The report made a number of observations and recommendations. One of the thrusts of the report was that a change in culture and approach is needed. Eileen Prior reflected on the fundamental change she saw as being required and told the Committee—

"We have to reset what the education system is about and what it is for. As a parent, I believe that it is about preparing young people for their future and enabling them to sustain themselves and to be contributing adults. For some, supporting

them in that way will mean qualifications and university, but for a whole load more it will mean other things. We have to reset our approach and our aspirations for young people.” (Col 26)

[Laura-Ann Currie from Education Scotland said](#) that there is a need to strengthen the universal offer in schools, “the quality of teaching, learning and pedagogy that is at the crux of some of the issues that have been raised [by the earlier panel]. If we do not get that offer right, we create barriers to learning and more additional support needs that we cannot meet.” (Cols 42-43) Ms Currie also stated—

“I have worked in the area for 35 years, as an educational psychologist and a manager of services. Some of the issues that have been raised today are exactly the same issues that I came across when I started out in my career, which is disappointing. However, we have made a lot of progress, which gives me hope that we can continue to develop our new vision. In fact, it is perhaps not a new vision, but a refreshed vision that can give us clarity about the journey that we need to be on to implement the aspirations for the legislation and the guidance that accompanies it.” (Col 52)

The Scottish Government stated that it, COSLA and ADES are “collaborative partners in this action plan” taking forward the response to the review. Many of the recommendations will be considered by the [Additional Support for Learning Implementation Group \(ASLIG\)](#). The group’s purpose is to “provide advice to Scottish Government, the Scottish Education Council and Scottish Ministers on key issues relating to the implementation of Additional Support for Learning.” The Implementation Group will “agree robust implementation and outcome measures for each recommendation which relate to the National Improvement Framework. Progress against these measures will be reported on by October 2021.”¹ Other actors in the education system also have specific actions against them.

The membership of ASLIG is—

- Chair/Enable Scotland – Jan Savage
- ADES – Jennifer King
- COSLA – Eddie Folan
- Association of Scottish Principal Educational Psychologists – Lynne Binnie
- EIS – Andrea Bradley
- UNISON – Sylvia Haughney
- Education Scotland – Laura-Ann Currie
- NPFS - Cheryl Burnett
- Children in Scotland - Sally Cavers
- Scottish Government - Melanie Lowe

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/additional-support-learning-action-plan/>

ASLIG's first meeting was in October 2019. The intention was that ASLIG would meet every three months and there are published detailed minutes for the meetings in October 2019 and January 2020. These are the only two meetings where there are minutes published.

One of the recommendations in the action plan is to produce a new vision statement. ASLIG was to work with the Youth Ambassadors for Inclusion to do so by the end of 2020.

ASLIG will also monitor progress and set out outcome measures for work on the action plan. Under "Actions to be taken" for recommendation 9.1, the Action plan stated—

"As part of their Workplan, ASLIG will review progress against the recommendations on an on-going basis. As members of ASLIG, the Scottish Government, ADES and COSLA will contribute to the monitoring of implementation of the Workplan.

"A progress Report will be provided to Scottish Ministers and COSLA's Children and Young People Board.

"To support this work, ASLIG will develop outcomes measures against each of these actions, setting out how progress will be measured. ASLIG will provide further detail on this by the end of 2020."

Co-ordinated Support Plans

Co-ordinated Support Plans (CSP) are statutory plans. The [Education \(Additional Support for Learning\) \(Scotland\) Act 2004](#) states that a child requires a CSP where the individual has additional support needs: arising from one or more complex factors or multiple factors; those needs are likely to continue for more than a year; those needs require significant additional support to be provided by the educational authority in the exercise of any of its other functions (e.g. social work) as well as in the exercise of its functions relating to education (or along with other agencies). (S.2) May Dunsmuir, president of the Health and Education Chamber of the First-tier Tribunal for Scotland, [told the Committee in February 2019](#), "when the criteria are met, there is an obligation to provide a CSP". (col 6) Section 2 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, which provides for CSPs, came into force on 14 November 2005.

The response to the Review confirmed that a review would take place of the use of CSPs. The Cabinet Secretary wrote to the Committee on 8 December 2020 and provided further detail. He said—

"Scottish Government and COSLA will establish a short-life working group to progress the CSP review. The CSP short-life working group will be comprised of representatives from across education, health and social work and will include representatives of children and young people, parents and carers, teachers and other staff who are involved in planning the support that children and young people need. The group will meet for the first time early in the new year."

The Cabinet Secretary's letter continued—

"Specifically, the recommendation asks that evidence heard by the wider review is used to inform this work, in addition to consideration of:

- planning mechanisms within a whole life perspective for children and young people with lifelong conditions including transitions between and beyond education settings.
- clarifying the interaction between CSPs and child's plan and GIRFEC
- the relationship between education and partners in health, social work and other agencies to identify where re-alignment is needed in the preparation and delivery of support.
- where improvements are needed in the availability and accessibility of information and guidance about planning and its processes for all parents and carers and children and young people.”

The short life working group will feed in its work to ASLIG to “allow that group to oversee progress against the wider action plan and report to Ministers and COSLA by October 2021.”

Laura-Ann Currie said that there is confusion between the CSP and the Child's Plan, which is the planning mechanism under GIRFEC. Jennifer King from ADES said that following the passing of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, local authorities, the “introduction of many aspects of GIRFEC was a big focus in all local authorities, with regard to the assessment of children's wellbeing and how we met those outcomes.” (Col 48) Ms King said—

“[A CSP] involves a level of administration and bureaucracy that a child's plan does not. I fundamentally disagree with the comment that was made in the previous evidence session, that local authorities do not co-ordinate the support plans because they are gatekeeping and preventing the allocation of resource. That is not my experience or the experience of the members that I work with in the ADES network.” (Cols 48-49)

Child Plans are provided for in Part 5 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014; the relevant sections are not in force². However, the Ms King implied that CSPs are “overly complicated” and therefore not what parents and carers want. She also said, “we do not really have any evidence to tell us what planning format actually makes a difference to a child's progression and development”. (Col 49)

During evidence in the panel preceding Ms King and Ms Currie, Andrea Bradley said—

“Because of that enhanced scrutiny of CSPs, there is perhaps more of a reluctance to open them for young people than is the case for child plans, which are not statutory. That is one issue that members have reported to us as an element of the kind of manoeuvring and perhaps massaging of the bureaucracy to manage what are scarce resources and slow down or inhibit access to the limited resources that are available.” (col 19)

The Review highlighted that parents and carers often referred to having to battle for support for their children. This language was reflected by Cheryl Burnett who told the Committee—

² Section 33 is partially in force, but only insofar as is necessary to enable the Scottish Ministers to make orders under s.33(6).

“As parents, we find that the process is a challenge—it becomes a battle or fight. To be quite honest, as a parent, you feel like a washing machine on a rinse-and-repeat cycle. Every year, you go through the same situation—you set out what your child’s issues are and hear, “That’s great—we’ll put something in place.” It then comes down to the fact that the funding is not ring fenced so the support goes, or you lose the member of staff who understands your child.” (Col 20)

Members may wish to explore with the Cabinet Secretary—

- **Whether the Cabinet Secretary considers the recommendations of the Morgan Review as a fundamental shift in Scottish education?**
- **Whether the Cabinet Secretary would expect specific actions following work on the Morgan Review to be agreed at a policy level between representatives of local and national government? Should these actions be subject to open consultation?**
- **Have the actions that were due for the end of 2020 been completed? How realistic is the timescale for progress to be made by October 2021?**
- **Whether, since 2005, the Scottish Government has undertaken any research or evaluation on the benefits of the CSPs or other planning mechanisms in relation to ASL.**
- **Whether the statutory and mandatory nature of CSPs is well enough understood?**
- **Whether the short life working group will consider the remedies available for parents when in dispute with their local authority and how any apparent reluctance to use CSPs affects parents’ options in this respect?**
- **How parents and carers’ and young people’s experiences will feed into the work of the short life working group. Whether the ASN tribunal will support the work of the group?**

RESOURCES

The remit of the Review asked Ms Morgan to consider the relevant issues within existing resources. The Review nevertheless recommended that Audit Scotland should assess spend on ASL and its impact on outcomes.

The [EIS’ submission to the Committee said that it believes](#) that “the Review ought to have focused directly on the issues of underfunding and the key issue of the need for more support staff, more specialist teachers and greater dedicated resources”. Andrea Bradley told the Committee—

“For many years, the EIS had been raising with national Government, local government, and anybody else who would listen the concerns that our members had about under-resourcing. We were initially reluctant to give our support to the advisory group for additional support for learning, as it was formerly known, and for the review to go ahead because we thought that it would stall on a question to which we already knew the answer.” (Col 27)

The Scottish Government has included additional funding of £15m in order to employ 1,000 extra classroom assistants to work with ASN pupils in the local government. The Review recommended that this investment “must be measured for impact and improvement on children and young people experiences and achievement.” ASLIG have been tasked to consider how to do so.

Schools may also use Pupil Equity Funding to support children with ASN, directly or indirectly. Headteachers should have agency of how PEF is spent in their own schools. Otherwise local authorities use their own budgets to support ASL as part of its education service budget. In 2018-19, the total spend identified as on ASL by local authorities was £661m, of which £535 was funding on Special schools, £8m on ELC settings, £67m on Primary Schools, and £51m on Secondary schools.³ It is clearer to identify ASL spend in Special schools than other sectors and the variations in local authorities individual returns suggest different approaches being taken. Local authorities’ Net expenditure on education in 2018-19 was around £5bn.

Laura-Ann Currie from Education Scotland suggested that there is scope to be more creative using existing resources. She said—

“We also need to think about how to use those resources creatively. I know, from our inspection evidence over a long period, that that happens in education authorities. Authorities are very creative in using specialist provision and special school staff to support mainstream teachers by giving advice, sharing resources that are used in special schools and coaching and mentoring mainstream teachers. That is an example of how what is, in essence, a special school resource can be seen in a wider context. That also needs to be taken into consideration in terms of professional learning, to inform teachers across the special and mainstream sectors.” (Col 33)

Ken Muir told the Committee—

“It is important to understand that, although teachers have a critical role to play, because they are face to face with the children and young people in their classes, dealing with additional support needs goes beyond just education.” (Col 9)

There has been a longstanding ambition to break down barriers of service provision. For example, one of [the 2011 Christie Principles](#) was that “public service providers must be required to work much more closely in partnership, to integrate service provision and thus improve the outcomes they achieve.”

The need to take a holistic view was highlighted by Ms Morgan who [told the Committee in November](#) that the level of need and the numbers of children with additional support needs are both increasing and this was due to “the pressures [...] such as social media, the higher rates of mental distress that that causes, and increasing inequality.” (col 8)

Members may wish to explore with the Cabinet Secretary—

- **Whether the Cabinet Secretary considers the policy issue as primarily about a lack of resource or how the resource is used.**

³ LFR01 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-local-government-finance-statistics-slgfs-2018-19-workbooks/>

- **How successful has the Scottish Government been at integrating services to support young people with additional support needs?**
- **How is policy and resource allocation supporting young people to reduce or prevent, where possible, children and young people having barriers to learning?**

Ned Sharratt
SPICe Research
29 January 2021

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Education and Skills Committee

4th Meeting, 2021 (Session 5), Wednesday 3rd February 2021

Budget scrutiny 2021-22

1. Yesterday, the Scottish Government published its draft budget for 2021-22. All of the documents relating to the Budget can be found [here](#).
2. As part of the pre-Budget scrutiny process, the Committee took evidence from the Deputy First Minister on 9 December 2020 and then wrote to the Deputy First Minister. Copies of the letter to the Deputy First Minister and the response can be found below.
3. As part of the Budget process, the Committee is required to consider the response from the Deputy First Minister and agree whether it wishes to take further evidence on the Budget at Stage 1, as well as whether or not it wishes to propose an alternative revenue and spending proposal by lodging a reasoned amendment to the Scottish Government motion on the general principles of the Bill.
4. The Stage 1 debate on the Budget is currently expected to take place on 25 February. If the Committee did wish to take further evidence from the Deputy First Minister on the Budget, it would have to do so on either 10 or 17 February, dates on which it has already agreed to consider Stage 2 amendments on the Redress Bill.
5. **The Committee is invited to agree whether it wishes to take further oral evidence on the Bill.**
6. **If the Committee does not wish to take further oral evidence on the Bill, the Committee is therefore invited to agree not to propose an alternative revenue and spending proposal by lodging a reasoned amendment.**



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

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7 January 2021

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Thank you for giving evidence to the Committee on 16 December regarding the upcoming Budget. The Official Report of this meeting can be read here:

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=13027&mode=pdf>

At this meeting, you committed to providing updates on the following issues:

- Further details of the extension and uptake of e-learning in schools (Cols. 13/14)
- Confirmation of the completion date of the previous schools for the future programme (Col. 18)
- The recruitment of 1,000 classroom assistants to support children with additional support needs (Col. 21)
- An up-to-date figure of the Scottish Government's cash reserves, and the length of financial cover these reserves equate to (Col. 22); and
- An update on the consideration given to NUS Scotland's request for additional discretionary funding to support students prevented from working due to the pandemic, as well as how much of the current discretionary funding has been used and in what ways (Col. 22).

I would be grateful for a response to this letter along with confirmation of the Scottish Government's budget plans within the Committee's remit when the Budget is published on 28 January 2021.

Yours sincerely

CLARE ADAMSON MSP
CONVENER



John Swinney BPA/MSP

Clare Adamson MSP
Convener, Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament

By Email - es.committee@parliament.scot

28 January 2021

Dear Clare

SCOTTISH DRAFT BUDGET 2021-22 – EDUCATION AND SKILLS PORTFOLIO

Thank you for your letter of 7 January 2021.

Before turning to the specific points that I committed to write to you on during the evidence session on 16 December 2020, I first wanted to provide you with a brief overview of the spending priorities for the Education and Skills portfolio that were reflected today in the Scottish Draft Budget 2021-22.

In 2021-22, the Scottish Government intends to provide £4.2 billion across the Education and Skills budget to deliver on our ambition to improve the life chances of our children and young people through excellence. The 2021-22 budget, including funding delivered through the local government settlement, will:

- Invest over £30 million to support our schools to mitigate the impacts of COVID on the learning experiences of our children and young people.
- Invest a further £59 million to deliver on our commitment to expand funded early learning and childcare from 600 hours to 1140 hours to all three and four year olds and eligible two year olds, bringing our additional annual revenue investment to £567 million.
- Work to deliver a statutory financial redress scheme for survivors of child abuse in care and to make advanced payments to elderly and ill survivors.
- Keep The Promise to implement the findings of the independent Care Review.
- Provide over £1.9 billion to the Scottish Funding Council, to fund our university and college sectors, including £0.7 billion for colleges and £1.1 billion for universities.
- Invest over £60 million of additional resource and capital funding in universities and their students to support the development of well-educated, highly skilled people and securing world-class research and cutting edge innovation. This is in addition to the £30 million student hardship package which I announced to Parliament on Tuesday

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and a further £20 million to be allocated to the university sector from the remaining 2020-21 Covid consequential which the Cabinet Secretary for Finance confirmed in her statement this afternoon.

Pre-Budget Scrutiny Evidence Session

When I appeared before the Committee on 16 December to give evidence as part of the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny, I committed to providing updates on various topics. These updates are provided below.

Further details of the extension and uptake of e-learning in schools (Cols. 13/14)

The provision of remote learning (and e-learning as part of that offer) has expanded significantly since March 2020. The e-learning offer will vary from place to place as each local authority, school and educator adapts provision to best suit their contexts and the needs of individual young people.

Notwithstanding the above, the Scottish Government would expect that educators are using digital tools and services to support remote learning whilst school buildings and other settings are closed. To support this work the Scottish Government has, in recent years, invested heavily in Glow, Scotland's online learning environment. Glow now has tremendous functionality providing all educators and learners in Scotland with free access to all of the resources contained with Microsoft Office 365, Google G-Suite for Education and Wordpress Blogs. Moreover we are investing £25 million to help ensure digitally excluded learners are digitally connected and can access digital devices to support their education at home.

The usage of Glow provides a useful indicator of the extent to which the e-learning offer has expanded across Scotland. For example, in February 2020 Glow recorded approximately 271,000 individuals logging in just under 3.7 million times. By the end of March 2020 those numbers had increased to show approximately 492,000 individuals logging in over 10.5 million times. Glow statistics not only show a month-by-month increase in usage but a significant increase on the same period in 2019. March 2020 showed over a quarter of a million more people logging into Glow, compared to March 2019, and an increase of 7 million log-ins over the same period. Across the whole of 2020, average monthly glow users increased by approximately 157,000 while average monthly log-ins increased by around 4.2 million when compared to 2019. We can therefore be confident that educators are working hard to provide e-learning opportunities to children and young people across Scotland.

Since the initial closure of schools in Spring 2020, the Scottish Government has been working with partners to supplement the e-learning offerings provided at a local level. This work has operated under the banner of the National e-Learning Partnership from June 2020. We have worked with Education Scotland, Directors of Education and the Western Isles e-Sgoil to develop the National e-Learning Offer. This offer features live, recorded and supported content all of which can dovetail with local offerings.

In relation to live content, the e-Sgoil has rolled out a package of live, interactive online study webinars for senior phase pupils. This is in addition to programmes in place for each level of the broad general education. Programmes are also available in Gaelic as required.

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In response to demand for additional e-learning provision to complement the learning opportunities facilitated by schools themselves, the package of senior phase study webinars was expanded in November 2020 to cover 27 courses ranging from National 5 to Advanced Higher. As at 16 December 2020, 3,023 young people from 275 schools across all 32 local authorities in Scotland had signed up and took part in two or more study support sessions. In total there were 7,546 sessions booked.

The feedback from learners has also been very positive with 85% of learners saying they wanted to see the e-Sgoil provision continue beyond December. e-Sgoil have responded by launching their 'lockdown live' offer on Monday 11 January 2021. This offering will run to the end of the current period of restrictions.

As part of the 'lockdown live' offering, live sessions for primary, S1 to S3 and the senior phase are running at set times each day and are recorded for 'on demand' access at any time via the e-Sgoil website. Furthermore, the Early Years (including P1) learning space is available at any time, as are similar learning spaces which accompany the webinars for first, second and third level learners. In addition, 16 of the expanding senior phase study support webinars are now available during the day and a programme for Gaelic Medium and Gaelic Learners is also in place.

Initial viewing figures for the Early Years Learning Space at end of week 1 show that there were 3,148 visits to the site with 517 of these being to the Gaelic medium site. There were also 3,562 visits to the P2 to S6 sites in the same period. Most recent usage figures suggests that this number has seen a fourfold increase in the second week of the offering. Registrations for the Gaidhlig Bheo offer sit at 773 from 232 learners across 17 schools. The Senior Phase Study Support webinars which have been in place as an after school offer since September 2020 are also being expanded to offer daytime access as part of Lockdown Live. In addition, the number of subjects being made available is expanding. Registrations for the Study Support webinars sit at just over 10,000 from over 4,000 learners.

It is important to reinforce that the national offer available via e-Sgoil is intended to complement and support what is available via class teachers themselves.

In relation to recorded content, teachers in the West Partnership and Tayside collaboratives have developed a bank of recorded lessons. A first set of 600 videos are now available across Scotland with plans to add more in the coming weeks. Teachers in other regional improvement collaboratives are now also contributing to the development of this resource and several hundred practitioners from local authorities across Scotland will continue to prepare, quality assure and share materials. All of this content can supplement and enhance local remote learning offerings.

Similarly, teachers within subject networks have shared and developed resources for online access and use. These resources are curated by Education Scotland and nearly 14,000 supported resources are available across 14 subjects through Glow. In addition, teachers can access a bank of home learning ideas and activities across the curriculum themes of health and wellbeing, literacy and numeracy through the Scotland Learns website. Parents

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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and carers can also access in-depth newsletters with additional home learning activities. There have been 11 editions since Spring 2020 with more planned in the months ahead.

Education Scotland have also committed to supporting the skills and confidence of educators in respect of digitally enhanced remote learning. Since March 2020, over 7,500 practitioners have engaged in the 134 webinars delivered by Education Scotland Digital Officers. The Education Scotland digilearn.scot website also allows access to a range of support such as live and record webinars, practitioner learning pathways and practitioner blog posts. These have had over 183,000 views. The Education Scotland YouTube channel, which hosts all video content, has also had 3,100 hours of videos viewed since April 2020.

The e-learning offer is therefore significant but it is important that it continues to grow as practitioners become more skilled in remote delivery and are able to share knowledge and experiences. It is equally important that we ensure that high quality remote learning continues to be commonplace right across Scotland. That is why Education Scotland is undertaking a national overview of remote learning practice. HM Inspectors of Education (HMIE) are engaging with local authorities, schools, parents and learners to provide an insight into how remote learning is being delivered across Scotland. The first report of the national overview of practice focused on local authority planning and delivery. It was published on Friday 22 January and can be found here - <https://education.gov.scot/media/poqfxt21/national-overview-of-practice-in-remote-learning-1-local-authorities.pdf>.

A further two reports focusing on schools and the experiences of parents and learners will be available by Friday 29 January. This work will help to draw out common themes; it will exemplify approaches being used to address local need; and it will identify any further support and any areas for improvement required.

It is important that the oversight of remote learning, is undertaken in a way that seeks to minimise burden and supports and enhances approaches to providing high quality learning experiences. Therefore HMIE is engaging with schools in all local authorities and this will include a combination of primary, secondary and special schools. Schools will be agreed in advance with local authorities and the focus will be on the delivery of remote learning. It is important to note that this will not be an inspection of an individual school and there will be no grading or individual school report. Evidence will instead be collated into one national overview report made up of the three aforementioned reports. Where effective practice is identified, HMIE will work with the school and local authority to capture this and share it more widely.

Confirmation of the completion date of the previous Schools for the Future programme (Col. 18)

I can confirm that of the 117 projects within the £1.8 billion Scotland's Schools for the Future programme, 116 are complete and the final project is expected to open to pupils in April of this year.

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The recruitment of 1,000 classroom assistants to support children with additional support needs (Col. 21)

We have ensured through a joint agreement with COSLA that the additional recurring £15 million will build capacity within education authorities and schools to respond more effectively to the individual needs of children and young people. The additional frontline support staff provided will further enhance support for the implementation of additional support for learning by improving and enhancing capacity of education authorities to deliver services through increased frontline staff, leading to better experiences for children and families ensuring they receive the right help at the right time.

Statistics on support staff working in September 2020 will be published in Spring 2021. Staff employed as a result of this additional funding will not be separately identified.

In calculating the cost and number of support staff likely to be supported, an average salary including 'on costs' was established for a full time member of support staff, using a range of job adverts from across Scotland. This average salary for around 1,000 FTE equates to £15 million.

An up-to-date figure of the Scottish Government's cash reserves, and the length of financial cover these reserves equate to (Col. 22)

All sources of funds available to the Scottish Government are deposited into the Scottish Consolidated Fund, this includes block grant cash funding which is determined on a monthly needs basis.

As part of the UK Cash Management system the Scottish Government can drawdown cash on a monthly basis provided it remains within its annual cash authorisation limits (derived from budgetary limits). The UK cash management system is not designed for participants to hold excess cash reserves, and whilst some working capital is necessary, the size of this balance does not represent additional funds available to the Scottish Government.

An update on the consideration given to NUS Scotland's request for additional discretionary funding to support students prevented from working due to the pandemic, as well as how much of the current discretionary funding has been used and in what ways (Col. 22)

I recognise that the Covid-19 pandemic has been an extremely difficult time for students, particularly for those who would have normally taken up part-time employment opportunities during their studies. Throughout the pandemic, eligible students in Further (FE) and Higher Education (HE) have continued to access bursary, grant and loan payments.

In addition to that, the Scottish Government provided emergency funding in April last year of £5 million to support FE and HE students impacted by the pandemic. We also provided early access to £11.4 million of HE Discretionary Funds in June 2020 to support students over the summer period and into this academic year.

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A Digital Inclusion Fund of £5 million was announced to support students who required access to digital equipment to help with remote learning and the First Minister announced £1.32 million of additional funding for this financial year to help students deal with the mental health impacts of the pandemic. We have also announced funding of £750,000 for this financial year to support NUS Scotland and student associations for vital welfare support for students in colleges and universities.

More recently, in December 2020, we announced an additional £5 million of Discretionary Fund support to further support students in financial hardship.

We are continuing to undertake spending analysis on the Discretionary Funds to monitor any financial pressures across colleges and universities. The most recent analysis of the Higher Education Discretionary Funds showed that approximately 75% of the £11.4 million issued in June, remained available as of 31 October. The Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS), will aim to gather further analysis starting from the end of January. Earlier In January, universities and colleges also received access to the second instalment of the main 2020-21 HE Discretionary Funds. This was a further £4.9 million of support.

On the 26th January 2021, the Scottish Government announced £30 million of additional funding to provide further support for affected students and to support universities and colleges for income lost in providing rent refunds or rebates. £20 million will help to alleviate the financial pressure and stress facing many of our students and £10 million will support institutions, many of which have lost revenue by giving students rent refunds or rebates.

To complement the additional £30 million, the Scottish Funding Council is also repurposing £5 million of student support funding towards discretionary funding for FE students in the college sector.

As part of guidance issued on Discretionary Funds, universities and colleges were asked to consider the following scenarios specifically, when making decisions to offer Discretionary Fund payments to students, in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic:

- Students who have lost employment or face reduced hours/pay
- Students whose parents/partners have lost employment or face reduced hours/pay.
- Students who incur additional childcare costs where they may have had to remove their child/children early from the provider.
- Students having to care for a family member or neighbour which has impacted on their ability to work.
- Students who are incurring additional accommodation costs.
- Prior to the availability of the Digital Poverty Fund, the DF could be used to support students who needed digital support to study remotely.
- HEI's were also allowed to consider using the funds for other adhoc measures to support students. Examples included supporting student associations to assist with wellbeing or supporting foodbanks for students to access.

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I will ensure that we continue to monitor the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on students on an ongoing basis, through regular contact with NUS Scotland and the Further and Higher Education sectors.

I thank the Committee for its continued interest in the portfolio budget and would be happy to provide further information on our spending plans for 2021-22 if the Committee would find this useful.

Yours Sincerely

JOHN SWINNEY

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