

SCOTTISH EDUCATION COUNCIL

NATIONAL IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY

Introduction

1. As set out in its role and remit, the Scottish Education Council is asked to provide leadership and advice to Ministers in developing the strategic approach and vision for improvement across Scottish education, as defined by the National Improvement Framework. It is important therefore that the Council has the opportunity to discuss and provide comment on a range of ongoing national improvement activity and to help shape our thinking around the 2019 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan.

2. This paper provides an update and seeks views on four specific areas of improvement activity:

- The 2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan
- The improvement planning cycle
- The Quality Assurance and Moderation programme; and
- The BGE benchmarking tool.

2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan

3. The Deputy First Minister undertook at the March meeting of the Council to provide regular updates on progress made in implementing the actions in the 2018 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan. Attached at Annex A is a highlight report setting out the actions from the Improvement Plan which have already been completed. Activity remains ongoing towards delivery of all the actions in the Improvement Plan and further updates will be provided at each Council meeting.

4. Consideration is also underway about the structure and format of the 2018 NIF Evidence report, including how we will report progress against the key “measuring the attainment gap” indicators. Planning is also underway for the annual review of the National Improvement Framework and the development of the 2019 Improvement Plan – in particular how that national plan can best take account of the progress and priorities in local authority plans and the regional improvement plans (due in September).

The improvement planning cycle

5. The recent consultation on the Education Bill proposed removing the requirement for local authority plans, in the light of the new requirement for regional improvement plans. Consultation responses, particularly those from local authorities, argued however that local authority reports should be retained.

FOR DISCUSSION

6. Now that the consultation has closed, Ministers are considering which Bill proposals will be taken forward. If it is decided to retain local authority plans alongside the new regional plans this would result in 4 levels of improvement planning across the education system: at school, local authority, regional and national levels.
7. This represents a fairly crowded and complex planning and reporting landscape and Ministers are also considering whether annual planning and reporting is the most effective approach at the NIF planning and reporting level.
8. The Scottish Government has committed to introduce an Education Bill in the current Parliamentary year.

The Quality Assurance and Moderation (QAM) programme

9. The overarching purpose of the Quality Assurance and Moderation programme is to support local authorities and schools in their journey towards a clearer understanding of the standards embedded in Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes and their corresponding benchmarks. With a strong focus on the moderation process, this work sits within the context of the National Improvement Framework driver *assessment of children's progress*. Ultimately, it aims to ensure that data on the achievement of a curriculum level in numeracy and literacy is robust and reliably based on a shared understanding of national standards.
10. At the beginning of session 2016/2017, local authorities were invited to nominate Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officers (QAMSOs) to assume responsibility for gathering assessment evidence at a particular level in numeracy or writing. This range of evidence was subsequently used to inform professional dialogue at QAMSO events, planned for key points throughout the session. An important aspect of the QAMSO's role includes sharing key moderation messages with colleagues across their local authority, while local authority Assessment Coordinators also play an important role in facilitating moderation at local level.
11. This session, the same cohort of writing and numeracy QAMSOs continue to be supported in developing a shared understanding of standards. In addition, the QAMSO programme has been extended to include reading.
12. Across the events, evaluation respondents reported they had increased their understanding of achievement of a level, their understanding and confidence in moderation, and their understanding of assessment. For example, 98% of evaluation respondents attending reading events in November 2017 reported an increased understanding of moderation.
13. Evaluation respondents also reported that the time for professional discussion at these events has been a key benefit. For example, all evaluation respondents who attended the 4th level reading event in November 2017 reported that the QAMSO events were the main driver (in comparison to any other support) for increasing their understanding and confidence in assessment and moderation.

FOR DISCUSSION

Many attendees also reported that there is now improved moderation and assessment practice at school, cluster and authority levels.

14. In autumn 2017, Education Scotland launched the Moderation Hub and new moderation cycle illustrative poster. The moderation cycle is designed for use by practitioners to support their understanding of moderation. The Moderation Hub is a virtual learning environment delivering career-long professional learning on all aspects of moderation. It provides professional learning, an in-depth look at each step of the moderation process and a one-stop-shop for key documentation. This approach is designed to support and improve the consistency of teachers' professional judgement, both locally and nationally.

15. Related to this quality assurance activity, over the last year Education Scotland has provided significant support to the development of the educational content and design of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments. Education Scotland – provided quality assurance of assessment questions to ensure these are culturally and linguistically appropriate, and at the right level of challenge, for learners in Scotland, in line with Curriculum for Excellence levels.

Broad General Education Benchmarking ToolContext

16. Within the first phase of the roll out of the Broad General Education (BGE) Benchmarking Tool, which was designed to both raise awareness and secure important stakeholder feedback for future product development (both on the component make-up and its user interface) direct engagement meetings have been held with improvement and performance colleagues in all local authorities, involving almost 200 senior officers, including a number of primary and secondary heads.

17. Additionally Scottish Government has engaged with the ADES Performance Improvement Network and Curriculum, Assessment and Quality network, the Improvement Service, Education Scotland's Regional Advisors and a group of over 70 QAMSOs. The first direct workshop for headteachers took place in Falkirk on March 15th with 80 colleagues attending, including 70 headteachers.

18. The Tool is being brought forward in context of both the wider objectives and outcomes envisaged in the National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan and the relationship between this piece of work and on-going work to take forward progressive, child centred education through Curriculum for Excellence. The Tool helps to support work being done to help teachers be more confident in deploying professional judgements and the work of Education Scotland in quality assuring and moderating standards of assessment in relation to national benchmarks. This work is also supported by SNSA.

FOR DISCUSSIONFeedback

19. Broadly, the approach being taken to developing the Tool has been welcomed as a positive step, with acceptance that the creation of a mechanism to support benchmarking for schools and local authorities is something positive to introduce into the system. The comprehensive nature of the tool and the specific features within it have been welcomed. The specifics around the school and comparator scores have also been broadly welcomed, when people have understood what they both signify and what the potential of the approach is to support improvement conversations.

20. A number of questions about the Tool have also been raised, relating to national practice in parental selection of schools, the recording of additional support needs and planning for care-experienced children. In some authorities, there was significant debate about inclusion of denominational education and Gaelic Medium Education as part of the comparator methodology and this is a factor that will continue to be reviewed in discussions between local and national government and within future governance arrangements.

21. It is important, however to recognise the difference between benchmarking for a few indicators at a distance, as evidenced in the Tool, and the kinds of forensic performance improvement systems that are required locally, which can include a whole range of other factors and which can indeed draw on information from the BGE Tool. It is also important to recognise the difference between the Tool's purpose and functionality compared to the senior phase benchmarking tool, INSIGHT.

22. An important ask in terms of data expression from local authorities has been in relation to small schools which may not have enough pupils in the cohort to be shown. Local authorities have requested pupil level data be given to them so that they can compile their own analysis.

23. Some graphs from the BGE Tool showing comparator data will be pulled through into the public facing dashboard, hence creating a particular pressure in some places – especially where school performance looks less than comparators and perhaps issues with a particular teacher or headteacher are highlighted. Colleagues in the ADES PIN have recommended a concerted national communications approach for this in advance of the dashboard going live.

Capacity Building

24. The engagement of headteachers and the building of capacity to understand and use data about the BGE has been highlighted by local authority colleagues as a critical issue to address in any future planning. The second phase of the BGE Benchmarking Tool roll out has identified engagement with headteachers as a priority. There is also both the opportunity and challenge of helping headteachers understand the nature and potential impact of data that will be in the public facing dashboard, expressed in a user friendly fashion to enable deeper engagement of parents.

FOR DISCUSSIONGovernance

25. There are plans to establish a reference group for this programme to enable future development of the Tool to be informed by systematic feedback from stakeholders and greater ownership of it by the profession. Issues relating to capacity building and communications will also be led by this group. It is suggested that such a group could develop and oversee the principles and purposes of the Tool and could have an oversight function for future developments. Notably, in a meeting of the Regional Advisers from Education Scotland, the importance of linkage this piece of work to that of the national agency was highlighted.

26. A letter has been issued by Graeme Logan and Mick Wilson (Head of Education Analysis) to local authority Directors inviting nominations for the group. It is intended to have the first two meetings of the group on 11 May and 11 June.

Next Steps

27. Priority moving forward will be the establishment of the reference group for the Tool and getting Phase Two of the project fully underway, in particular the direct engagement with headteachers prior to the launch of the public facing dashboard in August 2018.

Conclusion

28. The Council is invited to note the updates provided and to offer any comments. In particular, comments are invited on:

- **The development of the 2019 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan and the most effective way for the Council to contribute to that;**
- **Proposals for the NIF planning and reporting cycle moving forward; and**
- **The proposals for the ongoing development and roll out of the BGE benchmarking Tool.**