

# **2023 National Improvement Framework (NIF) and Improvement Plan**

## **Summary Document**

**March 2023**

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The NIF sets out the vision and priorities for Scottish education that have been agreed across the system, and the national improvement activity that needs to be undertaken to help deliver those key priorities. That information can then be used to support and inform improvement planning at regional, local authority and school or early years' level. The improvement planning has been informed by the fact that the whole education system is continuing to recover from the health, social, and educational impacts of COVID-19.

Scottish Ministers have a statutory duty, introduced by the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, to review the NIF and publish a plan on an annual basis. As part of the review, we provide education authorities, teachers, young people, and parents with the opportunity to express their views, and these have been taken into account in the drafting of this year's NIF and Improvement Plan.

As a result of this year's review, we have amended the vision statement to recognise the need for sustainability to be a core aspect of the learning experience.

### **Our vision for education in Scotland**

- **Excellence through raising attainment and improving outcomes:** ensuring that every child and young person achieves the highest standards in literacy and numeracy, as well as the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary to shape a sustainable future as successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.
- **Achieving equity:** ensuring every child and young person has the same opportunity to succeed, no matter their background or shared protected characteristics, with a particular focus on closing the poverty related attainment gap.

### **Key priorities of the National Improvement Framework**

- Placing the human rights and needs of every child and young person at the centre of education
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children and young people
- Improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people
- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

## The context for delivering improvement in 2023

### Education Reform

Following the 2021 OECD report "[Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future](#)" we have begun an ambitious programme of educational reform to ensure our system remains world leading.

Following the recommendations set out in [Professor Ken Muir's report](#), a national discussion on Scottish Education was launched at the Scottish Learning Festival on 21 September, and closed on 5 December 2022. It was co-convened by the Scottish Government and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). Professor Alma Harris and Professor Carol Campbell from [the International Council of Education Advisers](#) (ICEA) were appointed as independent facilitators. Professors Harris and Campbell were clear from the start of this project that children and young people should be at the centre of the national discussion. The initial findings from the national discussion will be published in spring 2023 and will help to deliver change and drive improvement going forward.

[A review of qualifications and assessment](#) is being carried out by Professor Emeritus Louise Hayward. The aim is to ensure all senior phase learners have an enhanced and equal opportunity to demonstrate the breadth, depth and relevance of their learning.

Professor Muir's review also recommended the creation of three new national education bodies to replace the Scottish Qualifications Agency (SQA) and Education Scotland. These include a qualifications body, a national agency for Scottish education, and an independent inspectorate body. These bodies will reflect the culture and values that we want to be embedded throughout our education and skills system. Work is underway with partners, including a wide range of stakeholders, to ensure these are in place during 2024.

### Local improvement planning

While the 2023 NIF is a national plan, the activity it contains has been informed by local and school level priorities drawn from the regional improvement plans produced by the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) as well as the local authority 2022/23 improvement plans.

The latest RIC improvement plans continue to take account of the ongoing challenges resulting from COVID-19 and have a strong focus on health and wellbeing, equity, curriculum development, early years, and on closing the poverty related attainment gap. Current RIC plans also focus on areas such as supporting learning leadership, research, and collaborative networks in addition to improving attainment literacy and numeracy, and on the digital and virtual learning skills that came into their own while school buildings were closed.

Local authority improvement plans identified a number of common themes reflecting the 5 priorities in the NIF. All local authorities highlighted areas in their plans which demonstrated a commitment to placing the human rights and needs of every child

and young person at the centre of education. The majority also included work with partners to provide targeted health and wellbeing activities that meet the individual needs of children and young people. Plans also set out how local authorities would use Scottish Attainment Challenge funding, to improve attainment and achievement of all learners, and reduce the attainment gap between the most and least deprived.

All local authorities plan to support improvement in skills and sustained, positive school-leaver destinations for all young people. Most local authorities described approaches for working with practitioners to further develop actions to raise attainment in literacy and numeracy.

### **Inclusion, wellbeing and equity**

Scotland is set to become the first country in the UK to directly incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law. We already use the UNCRC as a framework to ensure that we consider children's rights whenever we take decisions, and to help provide every child with a good start in life and a safe, healthy and happy childhood.

We are committed to improving the health and well-being of our children and young people. Wellbeing, alongside literacy and numeracy, is the responsibility of all within CfE and is one of the eight curricular areas. Its substantial importance is reflected in its position at the centre of the curriculum and at the heart of children's learning.

### **Measuring the attainment gap**

It is important to be able to measure the impact of the system as a whole on progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap. That is why we use a range of measures that reflect the breadth of issues that can impact on attainment.

Of the 11 key measures which have been tracked in previous iterations of the NIF, data is not available to update for one of the measures (Health and Wellbeing: Skills and Development Questionnaire of 13 and 15 year olds). Of the remaining 10 measures, there has broadly been a narrowing of the gap in four of the measures, a widening of the gap in four of the measures and little/no change in two of the measures.

### **Consultation on enhanced data for improvement**

The Scottish Government issued a [consultation on enhanced data collection for improvement in 2022 to gather views](#) on how to ensure that the basket of key measures to assess progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap reflects the wider ambitions of the curriculum.

Based on the 75 responses to the consultation, we intend to add two new key measures. Given the importance of attendance for attainment, it has been included as a new key measure for 2023. We have also added initial positive destinations (3 months after leaving school), as this provides a closer link between school accountability and school leaver destination. This means that there are now 13 key measures in the 2023 NIF.

Most respondents felt that there should be a greater focus on wider achievement and on the whole learner journey from early years onwards (3-18). One clear view was that there should be a single data set used for improvement purposes going forward. Scottish Government statisticians are considering the feasibility of aligning the [Scottish Statistics on Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations](#) (SSAILD) report and the Insight senior phase benchmarking tool, including the addition of a wider range of providers and courses to SSAILD (on top of National Qualifications). In order to create a consistent series of measures, we have decided to wait until the work on aligning the National Statistics with Insight is complete, and then adding it as the new measure of attainment. This should be complete ahead of the next NIF in December 2023.

### **Understanding and addressing variation in performance across the system**

Despite the positive progress made in the first five years of the Scottish Attainment Challenge, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the attainment gap, not just in Scotland but all over the world. The cost of living crisis is also likely to have a more severe impact in communities which are already disadvantaged, so it remains crucial to have a continued focus on closing that gap. Central to achieving this aim will be a rigorous and systematic approach to addressing, but also understanding, variation in performance across the system.

It is important to recognise that not all variation in outcomes across local authorities is bad – indeed, flexibility is fully embedded within the ethos of CfE. In addition, there are a number of societal and socio-economic factors which influence attainment, many of which are outwith the control of the school, but which can have a significant impact on learning and achievement. However, we recognise that there needs to be a more consistent and coherent approach to tackling any unwanted variation in performance. The Scottish Government has been working in partnership with Education Scotland, COSLA and ADES to gain a better understanding of the different approaches to educational improvement in each local authority, and the impact these can have on the outcomes young people achieve. This has led to the development of a joint approach to improving educational outcomes and experiences for children and young people.

### **The Six Drivers of Improvement**

As well as the actions set out below, ongoing improvement actions are set out in [Annex A of the 2023 NIF main publication](#).

#### **School and ELC leadership – improvement priorities for 2023**

Education Scotland will undertake a national thematic inspection in the early learning and childcare sector on progress with implementation of the expansion of funded ELC.

HM Inspectors will undertake a national thematic inspection in 2023 on the subject of inclusion: promoting positive behaviour.

Education Scotland will provide further professional dialogue and support at every level of the system. This will include professional learning [on UNCRC] for elected members and a continuation of the 'train the trainers' approach for those local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs) who have not yet participated, or who have requested further input. Education Scotland will focus its professional dialogue and support with the South West and Tayside RICs, and Moray and Highland councils.

By July 2023, Education Scotland and partners will co-create a prototype of a Making Sense of System Leadership professional learning offer. The prototype will be evaluated by Education Scotland in terms of process, content and initial impact of learning on leaders across the education system by August 2023.

During 2023, Education Scotland will build on its existing professional learning and leadership suite of programmes supporting empowerment and agency, including designing, delivering and evaluating professional learning or working with partners to do this. Where appropriate, offers will be co-constructed with school and system leaders.

Education Scotland will work with excellence and equity leads (EEL), local authority officers and the Scottish Government to increase and diversify the use of the recently created online professional learning community by EELs, for example through increased practice sharing and use of the online networking facilities to support the development and scaling of improvement activity. Future engagement will address the priority areas and other feedback identified through the consultation process. It will continue to include support for collaboration and effective practice sharing between EELs working in the early learning and childcare sector.

Education Scotland will work with local authority Assessment Co-ordinators to support the delivery of the Quality Assessment and Moderation Officer (QAMSO) programme and to build capacity in existing networks, increasing practitioner confidence in exercising their professional judgement.

### **Teacher and practitioner professionalism – improvement priorities for 2023**

As part of the Future of Gaelic and Scots consultation, we have identified the need to enable teachers to improve their confidence in Scots and Gaelic for Learners skills by expanding the Continued Professional Development (CPD) opportunities available. The Scottish Government will work in partnership with local authorities, Gaelic training institutes and other partners to identify what CPD training is already available and to establish what work is required to expand CPD opportunities.

As part of the refresh of the Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan we have engaged with educators to gather their views on LfS. A better offer for Career Long Professional Learning (CLPL) has been identified as one of the key themes on our engagement exercises. SG is working with ES to develop an LfS Professional Learning Directory, from which all the training and resources that are already available can be accessed centrally. This will provide practitioners with readily available CLPL resources on LfS which will ensure they are better able to embed LfS

in their practice and ensure that children and young people receive their entitlement to LfS.

Education Scotland will build capacity through the development and refresh of the suite of inclusion, wellbeing and equality professional learning information, resources and opportunities through the lens of:

- Relationships
- Wellbeing and care
- Inclusion and targeted support
- Rights and Participation

Education Scotland will participate in education reform work streams, working in collaboration with Scottish Government officials to progress the ASL Action Plan, facilitating national networks and local authorities to 'Keep the Promise'.

Education Scotland will continue broadening its work with ELC and Community Learning and Development (CLD) practitioners. Taking a service design approach to designing and delivering professional learning. Throughout 2023, Education Scotland will continue to offer bespoke professional learning and leadership opportunities for Scotland's teachers, ELC practitioners and CLD practitioners including support around educational reform, curriculum design, and work to build racial literacy amongst the workforce. This action will include the design, delivery and evaluation of Education Scotland's professional learning offer, or working with partners to do this. Where appropriate, offers will be co-constructed with teachers/practitioners.

Education Scotland will work with partners, including local authority, RIC and private and third sector ELC leads and practitioners, to design and deliver improvement support to the early learning and childcare sector at national, regional, local and setting level during academic session 2022-23.

Education Scotland will work with stakeholders to design and deliver targeted professional learning to support recently appointed ELC practitioners and leaders.

### **Parent/carer involvement and engagement – improvement priorities for 2023.**

Education Scotland will review and refresh [parent council resources](#) as and when updates emerge. Education Scotland will continue to raise awareness of the Parent Council resource across local authorities, Regional Improvement Collaboratives and relevant internal/external audiences as appropriate.

Education Scotland will disseminate the findings of the various equalities and equities projects internally to colleagues and externally to practitioners across Scotland - through webinars, networks, case studies and links in key documents as appropriate.

Education Scotland will hold a series of awareness raising activities to highlight the British Sign Language toolkit to practitioners across Scotland who work with, or have the potential to work with, deaf children, young people and their families and/or

parents and carers who use British Sign Language (BSL) and Tactile BSL in education.

Education Scotland will work with the Campaign for Learning, a UK wide Lifelong Learning charity, to develop a data sharing agreement ahead of planning for the 2023 Scottish Family Learning Festival. This will highlight the breadth of where family learning is being delivered across Scotland, by who. It will also identify emerging trends and gaps in provision. This will inform Education Scotland's planning in relation to support and development at a national, regional and local level. A strategic working group has been established which will act in an advisory capacity to influence the direction of the Festival.

Education Scotland will raise awareness and promote the new Strategic Framework for Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home across all sectors involved in delivering career long professional learning/continuous professional learning (CLPL/CPL) in this area. Education Scotland will work with practitioners delivering professional learning to support them in reviewing their existing offer and work collaboratively with partner and stakeholder groups to embed consistency in the CLPL/CPL offer.

Education Scotland will continue to work with local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives to deliver a bespoke Parental Involvement, Parental Engagement, Family Learning and Learning at Home offer based on their identified needs and national priorities. Work is already underway with several local authorities and Regional Improvement Collaboratives.

In 2023 the Scottish Government will consider the recommendations from the co-design phase of the Learner Participation Project, with a commitment to launch a new co-created learner participation mechanism that protects and promotes children's rights by embedding the voice of children and young people into education policy development and decision making.

### **Curriculum and assessment – improvement priorities for 2023**

Professor Muir's Report highlighted that the current generation of learners sees climate change as one of the most significant issues facing their futures. At the COP26 young people called for a greater emphasis on climate education, Learning for Sustainability (LfS), biodiversity and youth participation. Despite the very strong policy framework of LfS, there is still variation in the quality of learning that children and young people receive. A new refreshed LfS Action Plan will be published in March 2023. This is being developed in collaboration with children, young people and their educators, and the LfS Leadership Group. The LfS Leadership Group will work on the development and delivery of the refreshed Action Plan and will monitor its implementation through the development of a new Key Performance Indicators system.

SQA manages the National Qualifications Group, which facilitates discussions with stakeholders about the approach to exams post-pandemic. In recognition of the ongoing impact on learning as a result of the pandemic, SQA will engage with partners to monitor the position and agree any adjustments to approach and



additional support needed for learners - to ensure fairness for learners and credibility with the system, whilst ensuring delivery of robust, valid, evidence-based attainment in academic year 2022/23.

Education Scotland will undertake a national thematic inspection on the subject of curriculum design.

The 'National Discussion' on the future of Scottish Education took place from September to December 2022. Between December 2022 and March 2023, independent analysis will be carried out to evidence the key themes emerging from the extensive range of views received. This will inform early drafts of a vision, which will be discussed and tested with children and young people, parents and carers and teachers and practitioners.

A consensual vision, which provides Scottish Education with the right platform to set the direction for the future, will be delivered in Spring 2023. This vision will help to shape the other strands of education reform.

Alongside the vision, the independent co-facilitators of the National Discussion will set out a 'Call to Action' with short, medium and long term goals for the next 20-years.

### **School and ELC improvement – improvement priorities for 2023**

Education Scotland will support and work in collaboration with local authorities and schools to deliver an agreed plan which provides intensive, targeted and universal support as required to ensure recovery, progress and achievement of stretch aims. Consideration for support will be based on levels of deprivation, progress, data and contextual analysis. The Accelerating Progress Forum will review action plans and consider how Education Scotland resources are allocated and deployed.

Education Scotland will collaborate with system leaders on the effective use of context specific data to support self-evaluation for improvement, and inform setting and monitoring the progress of local authority stretch aims. The Accelerating Progress Forum will review action plans and consider how Education Scotland resources are allocated and deployed. Action plans will be focused on improving performance and outcomes for children and young people.

Before the end of 2022, we will announce the successful projects which will be included within Phase 3 of the Learning Estate Investment Programme.

As part of earlier phases of our £2bn Learning Estate Investment Programme, which is being delivered in partnership with local authorities, 17 school projects will have started construction by autumn 2023.

### **Performance information – improvement priorities for 2023**

In 2023 Scottish Government will look at the feasibility of aligning the National Statistics SSAILD report and the Insight tool, including the addition of a wider range of providers and courses to SSAILD (on top of National Qualifications). This will

include a programme of comprehensive user engagement and development work, as well as technical aspects which will need worked through to ensure the methodology is sufficiently robust for a National Statistics publication.

Working with partners, Scottish Government will develop options for the enhancement of the Insight benchmarking tool in line with the recommendation in the Muir report. Initial proposals will be developed by spring 2023.

Scottish Government will work with Education Scotland and authorities to support progress towards local authority stretch aims. This will include work to:

- Develop an enhanced guiding coalition to support an acceleration of progress towards achieving the mission of the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
- Develop partnership working across services and the third sector to improve outcomes for children and young people impacted by poverty, with a focus on engaging children and young people for their views on this work.
- Develop and publish an updated Framework for Recovery and Accelerating Progress for 2023/24, reflecting learning from 2022/23 and the 2022 NIF.
- Develop and undertake refreshed evaluation strategy for 2022/23 through to end of parliamentary term.

We will continue to work with HMRC to gain access to employment data for 16-24 year olds for statistical purposes to support the Annual Participation Measure.

Linked to the work to support the Annual Participation Measure (above), we will support service delivery and reform by sharing individual level employment data with partners for operational purposes.

## **Conclusion**

This year's National Improvement Framework demonstrates our long term commitment to a collaborative approach to improving Scotland's education system. New initiatives build on earlier ones, learning from what works and what teachers, schools and young people tell us they need.

This collaborative approach will help to ensure that Scottish education remains a world class system which places the needs and voices of children and young people at the very heart of education.



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