

From: [redacted – exemption applies]
Sent: 16 October 2018 09:14:33
To: Public Engagement Unit
Subject: FW: FAO. John Swinney (Education): Diagnostic Assessment

For maccs please

[redacted – exemption applies] |Deputy Private Secretary to John Swinney MSP |
Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills |
Scottish Government | St Andrew's House | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | T: 0131 244 4005
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From: [redacted – exemption applies]
Sent: 09 October 2018 11:43
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
<DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Subject: : FAO. John Swinney (Education): Diagnostic Assessment

Dear Mr Swinney:

I am a supporter of diagnostic assessment in Primary school. As a senior lecturer in teacher education (1971-1992) and with a background in speech and language therapy

I introduced courses on diagnostic assessment on language and communication into the special educational needs/ specific learning difficulties courses at Moray House Institute of Education during that period. I was also instrumental in setting up the dyslexia unit at Moray House.

I was surprised when I first became involved in teacher education to find that teachers did not inquire about their pupils' language abilities as a matter of course when they began working with them. A therapist would always engage in therapeutic observation, diagnostic assessment and case history taking at the outset when working with a child so that therapy met the child's needs. Teachers seemed to try the programme first and then ask questions afterwards if there seemed to be problems. This is something we explored progressively while I was at Moray House.

I remember applying my hypothesis, that diagnostic assessment was useful, with secondary school pupils. I initiated assessments of spoken language in S1 in various Edinburgh schools (eg [redacted – exemption applies]) and developed an oral curriculum. We found a great variety of outcomes within S1 classes, some children functioning at a level just above a diagnosis of special educational need, others functioning at near adult level. A very difficult task for the teacher to match the curriculum within such a wide spectrum of achievement. We provided inservice courses to help with this.

Communication of the purpose of diagnostic assessment has obviously been flawed and mishandled. The emotive word 'test' is typically used with all its negative connotations. Diagnostic assessment should be embedded into normal teaching practice without fanfare. It is an appropriate professional approach.

I wish you well in persuading your colleagues in the Scottish Parliament that your policy is responsible, progressive and necessary. Ask them to imagine a health service without diagnostic assessment. Why then should we embark on the most critical learning years of a child's life without a description of the communicative abilities the child brings to school ?

Yours sincerely, [redacted – exemption applies]

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From: [Redacted – exemption applies]
Sent: 19 September 2018 16:56:41
To: Public Engagement Unit
Subject: FW: National Assessments (SNSA)

For MACCS please

[Redacted – exemption applies] Assistant Private Secretary (Correspondence) to John Swinney MSP | Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary Education and Skills | Scottish Government | St Andrew's House | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | Ext [Redacted – exemption applies]

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From: [Redacted – exemption applies]
Sent: 14 September 2018 14:47
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Cc: [Redacted – exemption applies]
Subject: National Assessments (SNSA)

Dear John Swinney,

Re: Scottish National Standardized Assessments

I am writing about the Scottish National Standardized Assessment, and more generally about how the Scottish Government manages assessment processes and results. This is not a letter of complaint, but an offer of assistance.

I am an academic research and practitioner. [Redacted – exemption applies – three sentences]

I have followed the turbulent reception of the Scottish National Standardized Assessments. I have read the news coverage (and that of the parallel development of similar assessments just being rolled out in Wales). I also followed with some interest, the previous 'scandalization' (to use the academic phrase) of the last Scottish PISA results, and watched with some dismay at how vulnerable Nicola Sturgeon was on the topic. That, I think was a real shame, as it seemed entirely unnecessary, unjustified, and avoidable. It seems to me that with better management of the public reception of assessment results, the Scottish Government would be much less vulnerable on education, and much better placed to make the most of assessment data. I have two suggestions:

1. It seems to me that the Scottish Government could significantly improve its capacity to manage assessment project and the professional and public reception of assessment data (both national assessments and international large-scale assessments). Those (latter) will keep coming, and without an improved response, it seems likely that the government will continue to be vulnerable, and continue to get hammered by the opposition. The field of public reception and public opinion on assessments is a new, but growing field. [Redacted – exemption applies – one sentence]. I am in touch with all the international researchers on that field. I know that some of them regularly meet with government ministers and advise on the topic. Even countries that do well on PISA can get criticized if they don't do a good job on management of public reception.

2. On public reception of SNSA, I have some ideas and thoughts. The first, is that the public have a legitimate right to information (as their democratic rights) on new assessment programmes, and it is the obligation of those who produce them to actively manage that process. What I mean by that, is not 'propaganda'. Rather, I am suggesting that classroom based research, and research with teachers (and teaching unions) needs to be conducted to present the realities in ways that avoid misrepresentation by the media (who sense a 'story') and by politicians (who smell blood). On SNSA, my sense is that the process could have been better managed. Candidly, I suspect that [Redacted – exemption applied] (or at least the individuals responsible) were not up to the job. Now the situation is a bit dire in terms of the necessity to respond. However, I think of a few ways forward:

2.1. I work with some of the world's leading testing organizations. They are all actively involved in involving stakeholders (parents, children, teachers, unions) in engagement activities so that they are well-informed and positive about the new developments in assessment. I think there is still time (perhaps as a response/review process) to instigate that kind of process.

2.2. I think there is a need for rapid classroom based research on how pupils and teachers engage with and use the new SNSA. I specialise in that kind of research and would be happy to discuss it with you.

1. I know the various academic researchers in Scotland who work on these themes. I can tell you that many of them are essentially hostile to large-scale assessments, and to the development of technologies of standardized assessment. So I would advise candidly that you are careful who you involve!

I hope these thoughts and ideas are of some use, and I hope that you might make time in your busy schedule for some email correspondence or perhaps a call. I am in [Redacted – exemption applies] this week, but I will be back in the UK from the week of the 24th September onwards.

With best wishes,

[Redacted – exemption applies]

[Redacted – exemption applies]

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