

COVID recovery: excellence and equity in Scottish education

“That the Parliament recognises the difficult circumstances which children, young people and parents have faced over the course of the pandemic; commends the extraordinary work done by university, college, school and childcare staff over the past year to maintain education and childcare; recognises that the pandemic has nevertheless had an impact on the health, wellbeing and education of many children and young people across Scotland, particularly the most disadvantaged; agrees that work to address these impacts, and remove the barriers to learning that too many still face, should be at the heart of Scotland’s COVID recovery efforts; and welcomes the government’s commitment to implement ambitious plans to support our education system during its first 100 days.”

Introduction

Presiding Officer, following my statement yesterday on qualifications, I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to Parliament again today.

Rather than recapping points rehearsed yesterday, I intend both to highlight the exceptional efforts that continue to be made across our education sector to support learners during this pandemic, and to begin to outline the steps we will take to ensure positive – the best possible outcomes for all of Scotland’s children and young people over the coming years.

In doing so, let me first take you back to 2015, when the First Minister underlined this Government’s commitment to education with the ambition that all children in Scotland should have the best start in life, and that there should be no better place in the world to be educated than here in Scotland.

That is still remains the commitment of this Government – and that it is my personal commitment to make this a reality for children across Scotland – as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Building on existing successes

In taking forward this agenda, I am mindful that we are building on many significant achievements of recent years. These start in the early years, where we are delivering transformational change through the expanded provision of early learning and childcare. I will say more about that shortly.

That ambition flows throughout the whole education system, where our policies – including the initial £750 million Scottish Attainment Challenge - have resulted in Scotland investing more in education per person than anywhere else in the UK. Teacher numbers are currently the highest they have been since 2008, with the number of primary teachers the highest since 1980.

Already, all pupils in primaries 1 to 3 benefit from access to free school meals, allowing families to save around £400 per child per year. In addition, the national minimum school clothing grant of £100 is helping more families afford school uniform costs.

Commented [LG(1)]: Add a line about expansion of bo h in first 100 days

In terms of outcomes, 63.9% of young people leaving school in 2019/20 had achieved 1 pass or more at SCQF Level 6 or better. And 93.3% of school leavers from that year were in education, employment or training 3 months after leaving school, up from 87.7% in 2009/10. In the [most recent PISA study in 2018 – which compares education performance from countries across the world](#), [2018 Global Competence assessment](#), only two countries out of all those taking part had a higher average score than Scotland. [The 2018 PISA study focused on young people's global competences – essential skills for learning life and work.](#)

Let me thank the Deputy First Minister for his tireless work in building this platform, and I now look forward to taking forward the next phase of progress.

Response to Covid

We know that, over the last year, Covid-19 has caused greater disruption to all parts of life than at any other period in living memory. Our collective response to that challenge is one that we should all be proud of. Let me be clear, due to the supreme effort of many, the education of our children and young people has been sustained despite these immense difficulties.

I would like to express my appreciation for the extraordinary work of all those in the education workforce, who I know have gone to great lengths to sustain learning and teaching, to support the wellbeing of young people and their families, and to ensure that childcare, nurseries, schools, colleges and universities remained welcoming and safe in the most challenging of circumstances.

Parents and carers have also contributed significantly to the education of children at home; and many of us have been stretched to support families and look after children while continuing to work. Above all else, I want to especially thank the children and young people of Scotland for their resilience and hard work during these difficult days, and to assure them we are listening to their concerns and hopes about the way ahead.

Despite these heroics, however, we still face significant challenges. In the short term, we know that the virus is highly unpredictable, and we must continue to manage the risks of COVID in our childcare settings, schools, colleges and universities as we – hopefully – move towards a greater sense of normality in the coming months. I will continue to take expert advice on these issues, and work with stakeholders to ensure the best possible educational experience for staff, children and young people as we emerge from the pandemic.

We know that the pandemic has had an impact on education globally; the issues being experienced in Scotland are ones that are common to countries across the world.

Research shows us that Covid has had adverse consequences on both the health and wellbeing of some children, as well as their attainment. These experiences have been different for each individual, and our own Equity Audit, published earlier this year, recognises that disadvantaged children may have suffered disproportionately.

Recognising these risks, this Government has already committed £400 million over 2020/21 and 21/22 to support education recovery. The Nuffield Foundation reported earlier this year that the funding committed in Scotland for 'catch up' was the most generous on a per pupil basis across all of the UK nations).

Commented [LG(2)]: Keep it in please

Commented [u3]: If we are looking to cut words, this could go as we reference the basic fact earlier in the speech (although it is a really key point).

Amongst other things, this funding has enabled local authorities to recruit many more teachers and support staff, has led to around 70,000 devices and 14,000 connectivity packages being distributed to learners across Scotland, and has ensured no child has gone hungry thanks to free school meal alternatives during the period of remote learning and school holidays. In addition to that, we have introduced a £20 million Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) Premium for 2021/22 – increasing investment in PEF to £148 million [this year](#).

A focus on mental health and wellbeing

Looking ahead, we know that the health and wellbeing of our children must take primacy, and that this is the first step in supporting effective learning. That is why we are rolling out a £20 million Summer Programme to help children socialise, play and reconnect.

This programme is in addition to the existing £16 million of funding for local authorities to put in place access to a mental health counsellor in every secondary school across Scotland, £11 million to local authorities to support their response to the pandemic's impact on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing, and the £18.75 million available to local authorities for Community Supports and Services.

And we have also invested in resources to directly support young people – for example through funding Young Scot to produce the 'Aye Feel' resource – which provides sources of support and information for children and young people.

And we won't stop there – through our Mental Health in Schools Working Group we will continue to deliver resources and learning for our valued school staff as they work to support the positive mental health and wellbeing of children and young people.

Wider education recovery and 100 day commitments

This support for wellbeing sits as part of a comprehensive programme of education recovery which is already underway, and will support outcomes in the short and long term. This programme continues to be guided by the mantra of excellence and equity – underpinned by a high-quality and empowered profession – and we owe it to this generation to be ruthless in our efforts to deliver that vision.

As in the pre-pandemic period, we are prioritising additional support for those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds – and that is why we have extended our commitment to the Scottish Attainment Challenge by providing over £200 million to the Attainment Scotland Fund in 2021/22, and have committed to investing over £1 billion over the course of this parliament to close the poverty related attainment gap.

I look forward to working with our partners to think about how best to use that investment beyond 2021/22, to have the greatest impact on reducing the attainment gap and improving the life chances of children living in poverty. I strongly believe that schools cannot do this alone, I want to ensure we are taking a joined up approach to tackling child poverty.

Commented [LG(4): Potential to include a line about Cab Sec's previous delivery of the Scottish child payment.

Of course, we know that teachers and support staff are central to the quality of learning in schools. We were elected on a mandate to devolve even greater powers to teachers and schools and to intensify the empowerment agenda. Already, we have supported the appointment of an additional 1,400 teachers and more than 200 support staff in schools across Scotland. And in the first 100 days of this new Government, we will fund councils to increase teacher numbers by a further 1,000 and classroom assistants by 500 – as part of our commitment to 3,500 additional teachers and classroom assistants over the parliamentary term.

These are big ambitions, but we will start delivery of them immediately. In the first hundred days of this Parliament we will publish the OECD report on Scottish education, and begin the work needed to implement its recommendations. Education recovery, renewal and improvement will sit alongside specific, tangible action to intensify support for children and young people's progress and achievement. I also want to be clear with Parliament today that I am open to considering what further reform is necessary to ensure we make maximum progress during this Parliamentary term on improving outcomes achieved by children and young people during their school years. This includes reducing variability in the outcomes children and young people achieve across different local authorities. So reform with a clear purpose in mind – doing all we can to make maximum progress on improving outcomes for children. I can reassure those working on the front line in our education establishments that this will not mean extra pressure or work for them at this critical time as we look to recovery. I want to look at options for reform nationally, regionally and locally, to ensure that schools get the best possible support and challenge to enable them to improve further and to do the very best for the children in their care. To enable them to focus relentlessly on providing the highest quality of learning and teaching for our children. To ensure that those working in education outwith schools are fully focused on doing everything they can to provide the highest quality of support, based on what children, families, teachers and schools need. Today I want to signal my intention to start this process by considering how to reform the role, remit and governance of our two key national education agencies – the SQA and Education Scotland. This will be a key priority for me and will be informed by the findings of the OECD review on 21 June. I will say more to Parliament on this before summer recess.

In this same period, we will also make free breakfasts and lunches available to all primary 4 children in Scotland – as the next step towards extending them to all primary school children, all year round. This will extend to primary 5 children in January 2022 and the provision of free school meals to all eligible children and young people in primary and secondary through all school holidays. We are providing over £49 million in funding to our local authorities to support the implementation of these approaches in 2021-22 – a significant investment in the health and wellbeing of our children and young people.

Commented [LG(5): What period? Can we be more specific please (sorry my addition above may have interrupted the flow)

To help families and give pupils the best start, we will increase the school clothing grant and the Best Start Food grant, which helps families with children under 3 to buy healthy foods, and we will take steps to remove charges for core curriculum activities, and for music and arts education – including instrumental music tuition. We will also agree the first allocation of funding to councils for refurbishment of play parks.

And before we formally expand the Scottish Child Payment next year, and prepare to double its value, we will provide interim support for eligible children – including a £100 payment near the start of the summer holidays.

Presiding officer, I am proud to say that during these first 100 days – and in *addition* to the above - we will also complete one of the major legacies of the last Parliament. From August, all three and four year olds, and two-year-olds who need it most, will be eligible for more than 1,100 hours of free early learning and childcare each year.

We know that high quality early learning and childcare can make a huge difference to children's lives, particularly when they are growing up in more disadvantaged circumstances. Universally accessible and high quality early learning and childcare helps to provide children with skills and confidence to carry into school education, and is a cornerstone for closing the poverty-related attainment gap between children from the most and least deprived communities.

The expansion will provide more flexibility for families with parents having greater choice of providers and a child's hours being more aligned to working patterns, whilst being delivered in a manner that provides a high quality experience for the child.

Collectively we can now focus on realising the transformational benefits the expansion will bring, including improved educational and development outcomes for children, enhanced family wellbeing and greater employment and training opportunities for parents and carers.

And we do not intend to stop there. In this Parliament, we will expand childcare further - for example, by developing the provision of wraparound care and after-school clubs. In the first 100 days we will begin work to develop this wraparound child care offer, building on our engagement to date with children, parents and carers as we better understand their needs. We are committed to working collaboratively with children and young people, and parents and carers to co design our future policy. This year, we will establish a diverse and inclusive public panel of parents, carers, children and young people from a wide range of communities across Scotland.

We will also ask children and young people to develop their own charter for school age childcare in Scotland, which will reflect the views of children and young people and provide recommendations outlining how they could better access childcare, activities and wider support round around the school day and during the holidays.

And of course, in Scotland we prioritise fundamental children's rights. We will press on with the implementation of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to the maximum extent possible and fight any legal challenge to children's rights

FE / HE

Presiding officer, so far I have focussed mainly on our work to improve outcomes for children and young people within early learning and childcare settings and within schools.

However, our determination to deliver extends beyond that. For example, since 2012 we have invested over £1 billion per year in Scotland's universities, meaning that a record 260,490 students enrolled at Scottish universities in 2019/20.

I know the Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training will say more about such issues in his closing remarks, but let me cover in brief some key points.

As with elsewhere in the education sector – and society more generally - I am acutely aware of the challenges our universities have faced throughout the pandemic.

I am appreciative of the proactive, collaborative and innovative ways in which they have responded, and remain grateful to staff and students for their continued patience, understanding and support as we progress towards greater normality.

Looking ahead, we will continue to work collaboratively with the sector as it intensifies planning for 2021/22, including through the recently established Advanced Learning Covid Recovery Group and on the basis of expert advice provided through the new COVID-19 Advisory Sub-Group on Universities and Colleges.

Our further and higher education institutions are key strategic assets, not only in the fight against COVID-19, but in our economic and social recovery. We will continue to work closely with the sector and the Scottish Funding Council to understand the impact of the pandemic, to ensure our institutions remain sustainable in the long-term and at the forefront of global education and research.

Closing

Presiding officer, in closing, let me make two final observations.

First, I am conscious of Audit Scotland's recent observations that – and I quote – *“Those involved in planning, delivering and supporting school education were working well together prior to the pandemic. This strong foundation helped them to collaborate to deliver a rapid response to Covid-19 in exceptionally challenging circumstances.”*

As we move further into the recovery phase of the pandemic - and beyond - my firm intention is that this strong collaborative approach will continue. Working together, we will ensure that all pupils are given the support they need to recover their learning and health and wellbeing. This includes maximising how we support and challenge improvement, and reduce variability in what children achieve in different parts of the country.

Second, it is right that the voice of children and young people themselves must be at the heart of our approach. I expect them to be engaged in every aspect of our policy considerations, and know they will bring the energy and insight borne of lived experience to those discussions.

I am deeply conscious of the privilege of holding this office, and I look forward to working with colleagues from across Parliament and beyond as we continue to deliver a high quality education system that ~~is based on excellence and equity for all.~~ ensures that all children and young people can achieve their potential.

Thank you.

Word count: approx. 2400

From: McLean L (Liza) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Sent: 27 May 2021 16:34

To: Pentland MK (Malcolm) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Subject: CONFIDENTIAL AND RESTRICTED - POSSIBLE REFORM AGENDA

Importance: High

Malcolm and [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)], with apologies as I know how busy you are, but Graeme wanted me to share this with you on a highly confidential basis, in particular for:

- 1) Anything further that needs to be said on SQA – [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; and
- 2) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)].

Graeme is hoping to share this with Joe early next week so grateful if you might get a chance for a quick look on Tuesday if possible.

Happy to discuss and make the changes – whatever is most helpful and time-efficient for you.

Kind regards

Liza

38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)];
[REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s.
38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)];
[REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s.
38(1)(b)];

Cc: Anson S (Sam) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; ; Drought A (Andrew) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)];

Subject: Education Debate 030621 Opening speaking notes

Dear colleagues,

Thank you to all who sent contributions for the speaking note for Ms Somerville to open the Education Debate on Thursday (3 June)

I would be grateful if you would check, edit and update the attached draft of the speaking note for your policy area by **3pm on Tuesday**. I appreciate this deadline in tight, we've done what we can within the constraints of the holiday weekend.

Best wishes,
[REDACT s. 38(1)(b)];

[REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [Learning Directorate](#) | [Scottish Government](#) | [07719344759](#)

From: Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>

Sent: 01 June 2021 13:04

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>; Griffin J (Joe) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; DG Education & Justice <dgej@gov.scot>; McLean L (Liza) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Anson S (Sam) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Drought A (Andrew) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Subject: Meeting on reform options

Afternoon [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

When I spoke with Ms Somerville this morning, she asked for a meeting to be arranged with a select group of officials (those in this email chain) to discuss reform options following her statement on Thursday 3 June. Could this be arranged within the next few days following the statement please?

The submission I sent this morning (thanks Liza) will guide the discussion. In addition, Sam will provide a one pager with bullet points providing an outline high level rationale for any potential reform of SQA and ES.

Happy to discuss. Thanks, Graeme.

From: McLean L (Liza) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Sent: 02 June 2021 14:52

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; DG Education & Justice <dgej@gov.scot>; Griffin J (Joe) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Anson S (Sam) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Director of Advanced Learning and Science <DirectorofAdvancedLearningandScience@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>; Macdonald R (Roddy) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Cc: Drought A (Andrew) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Subject: RE: Mtg with Joe Griffin, DG Education and Justice and Graeme Logan, Director of Learning

Apologies, please use this version.

Kind regards

Liza

Liza McLean

Interim Deputy Director, Learning Workforce, Infrastructure and Reform

Learning Directorate

Working from home – [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

From: McLean L (Liza)

Sent: 02 June 2021 14:42

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; DG Education & Justice <dgej@gov.scot>; Griffin J (Joe) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Anson S (Sam) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Director of Advanced Learning and Science <DirectorofAdvancedLearningandScience@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>; Macdonald R (Roddy) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Cc: Drought A (Andrew) [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

Subject: RE: Mtg with Joe Griffin, DG Education and Justice and Graeme Logan, Director of Learning

Stuart, please see attached a supplementary paper on reform for the meeting this afternoon that covers:

- Rationale for reform;
- Likely stakeholder views; and
- Potential next steps.

Liza McLean

Interim Deputy Director, Learning Workforce, Infrastructure and Reform

Learning Directorate

Working from home – [REDACT s. 38(1)(b)]

-----Original Appointment-----

From: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>

Sent: 02 June 2021 10:33

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills; McLean L (Liza); Director of Learning; DG Education & Justice; Griffin J (Joe); Anson S (Sam); Director of Advanced Learning and Science; McAllister C

(Colin); Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training; Macdonald R (Roddy)

Cc: Drought A (Andrew)

Subject: Mtg with Joe Griffin, DG Education and Justice and Graeme Logan, Director of Learning

When: 02 June 2021 16:00-16:45 (UTC+00:00) Dublin, Edinburgh, Lisbon, London.

Where: Microsoft Teams

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