

RESPONSE TO FOI 202100236994

In response to bullet number 1 in your request - All communication (internal and external) involving Shirley-Anne Somerville (or her staff) regarding the Scottish National Standardised Assessments. This includes any attachments in the case of emails, as well as non-email communication such as messaging services.

The time frame for this request is 01/06/2021 – 07/09/2021.

DOCUMENT 1, 21/06/21 : (related briefing document in bullet 2 file, document 3)

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] **On Behalf Of** Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Sent: 21 June 2021 14:37

To: Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>

Cc: DG Education & Justice <dgej@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anon@gov.scot>; Drought A (Andrew) <Andrew.Drought@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Griffin J (Joe) <Joe.Griffin@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; McLean L (Liza) <Liza.McLean@gov.scot>

Subject: RE: OECD - Statement and Briefing Pack

Hi Folks,

Aware there are some additional items coming up any moment now, however Cab Sec has asked for a few more additions to her briefing pack;

[redacted – out of scope]

4 – STV asked a question on standardised testing, stating the report suggested getting rid/reforming these. Could this be picked up and addressed.

[redacted – out of scope]

As before grateful for these additions to come up as additional annexes or an individual replacement annex (rather than a replacement briefing pack. Could we get this for 18:00 tonight? Happy to discuss if that deadline makes no sense/is an issue.

Thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

DOCUMENT 2, 27/06/21:

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] **On Behalf Of** Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Sent: 27 June 2021 17:20

To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>

Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications Education & Skills <CommunicationsEducation&Skills@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Taylor A (Alison) <Alison.Taylor@gov.scot>; McLean L (Liza) <Liza.McLean@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Drought A (Andrew) <Andrew.Drought@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted

s38(1)(b)]; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anson@gov.scot>; McCaig C (Callum) <Callum.Mccaig@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Minister for Children & Young People <MinisterCYP@gov.scot>; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: FOR CLEARANCE: Media query - National standardised assessments - The Times, Scotsman

[Redacted s38(1)(b)],

Cab Sec has changed to the following:

‘A Scottish Government spokesperson said:

“In providing nationally consistent, objective and comparable information, Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) can provide a helpful additional source of information for teachers when considering children’s progress and planning next steps in learning.

“We have accepted the OECD’s recommendations in full. Ministers will also carefully consider the report’s other observations. There is no recommendation in the report on standardised assessments.’

Many thanks,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] –Minister for Higher/Further Education, Youth Employment and Training – Jamie Hepburn MSP

St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG - 0131 244 2553, [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Email: MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot

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[Redacted s30(b)(ii)]

DOCUMENT 3, 29/06/21:

Q&A with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills – 29 June 2021 (Summary of Questions with Written Responses)

[redacted – out of scope]

12. Ad Hoc Questions

To what extent does the Cabinet Secretary believe that a consistent national standard in assessment of learning and skills is an important and lasting requirement?

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)];
Subject: National Standardised Assessments for Scotland: Update

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

I attach a submission for Ms Somerville's attention, providing some update briefing on the national standardised assessments for Scotland. [redacted – out of scope]

Many thanks,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

National Improvement Framework Unit: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Learning Directorate| Scottish Government |

Area 2C North| Victoria Quay| Edinburgh| EH6 6QQ

Tel: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

DOCUMENT 5, 7th July:

T : 0300 244 4000

E : scottish.ministers@gov.scot

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Our Reference: 202100219123

Your Reference: Standardised assessment

7 July 2021

Dear [Redacted s38(1)(b)];,

Thank you for your correspondence regarding the use of standardised assessments for P1 learners, and for sharing with me the interesting Upstart Scotland resources which explore child development and early learning.

As you will know, the Scottish Government is committed to supporting the health, wellbeing and development of every child; and to enabling all children to achieve their potential. We recognise, absolutely, the invaluable role of play for our children and young people.

You will be aware too, that we consider the provision of accurate and up to date assessment information as a valuable means of helping teachers to tailor support plans for individual children.

Of course, the national standardised assessments represent just one assessment tool as part of the approach to assessment through the broad general education. I was encouraged to note the OECD's recognition that the SNSAs "are presented as low-stakes to provide teachers with diagnostic information on children's literacy and numeracy to support teachers' assessment and plan for effective teaching. In avoiding the pitfalls of high-stakes testing in the school system, Scotland has positioned teacher's professional assessment work as pivotal for the quality of student learning."

While the Scottish Government is open to considering all educational research, the 2019 findings from the Independent Review commissioned by the Deputy First Minister

specifically to explore the impact of the SNSAs at P1, are clearly of particular relevance to any consideration of this matter. Mr Reedy concluded there were “strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA.”

While we will of course, consider all elements of the OECD report carefully, I can therefore confirm for you that we have no intentions to discontinue the SNSAs at the current time.

Yours sincerely

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

DOCUMENT 6, 6th September:

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] on behalf of Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Sent: 06 September 2021 17:02

To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Cc: News Desk; Communications Education & Skills; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Anson S (Sam); [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Taylor A (Alison); McLean L (Liza); Pentland MK (Malcolm); [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Drought A (Andrew); [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; McAllister C (Colin); Ingebrigtsen R (Ross); Livey D (David); Nicolson S (Stuart) (Special Adviser); Minister for Children & Young People; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training

Subject: RE: FOR CLEARANCE: Media query - standardised assessments/OECD report - The Times

Many thanks [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Cab Sec has cleared.

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

T: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | M: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E: cabsecES@gov.scot

The Scottish Government | St Andrew's House, Regent Road, EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

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From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)];

Sent: 06 September 2021 16:03

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

Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications Education & Skills <CommunicationsEducation&Skills@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anon@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; A (Alison) <Alison.Taylor@gov.scot>; McLean L (Liza) <Liza.McLean@gov.scot>; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; Drought A (Andrew) <Andrew.Drought@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Ingebrigtsen R (Ross) <Ross.Ingebrigtsen@gov.scot>; Livey D (David) <David.Livey@gov.scot>; Nicolson S (Stuart) (Special Adviser) <Stuart.Nicolson@gov.scot>; Minister for Children & Young People <MinisterCYP@gov.scot>; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>

Subject: FOR CLEARANCE: Media query - standardised assessments/OECD report - The Times

PO/Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

SPICE has published a paper which infers that Scottish Ministers are selectively interpreting the OECD's recommendations by continuing with standardised assessments. The point being made is that there was an SNP manifesto pledge to take forward all of the OECD recommendations – but OECD's comments on standardised national assessments are not being acted on. The Times has asked for comment. Grateful for clearance on the following response. Policy colleagues and SpAds are content.

Many thanks
[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

A Scottish Government spokesperson said:
“We have accepted the OECD's recommendations in full. Ministers will also carefully consider the report's other observations. This work is ongoing.”

QUERY – The Times

SPICE has published a paper which indicates Scottish ministers are selectively interpreting the OECD recommendations by continuing with standardised assessments.

<https://www.parliament.scot/~-/media/committ/525>

SPICE said ministers appear to only accept the "headline recommendations" but ignore the commentary.

Under heading 3.3 "Align qualifications, system evaluation and curriculum to deliver on the commitment of Building the Curriculum 5" the OECD said "census-based" testing like the SNSA produces "questionable" data.

It said "there is now an urgent need for robust, reliable data" on education in Scotland and urged Scottish ministers to consider a sample-based test such as Ireland's NAMER (page 128).

Scottish ministers said they have no plan to scrap the census-based SNSA.

Has the SNP rolled back on its manifesto pledge to accept the recommendations of the OECD report with its narrow interpretation of the recommendations?

SPICE SAID:

Before the publication of the review, the SNP manifesto committed the SNP administration to “take forward the recommendations of the OECD review of the curriculum.” The Scottish Government's response accepted all of the headline recommendations...

As noted, the Government has accepted all of the headline recommendations. This is an important distinction as the Scottish Government has not, it appears, accepted all of the commentary under each headline recommendation.

For example, during the statement to Parliament on the review and the Scottish Government's response, Ross Greer MSP highlighted the criticism of ACEL as a national monitoring tool within BGE. The Cabinet Secretary responded—

“What Ross Greer said in his question about Scottish national standardised assessments was not a specific recommendation in the OECD's report. Assessment was mentioned and I am aware that the issue was mentioned in the webinar yesterday, but national standardised assessments are a key element of our improvement agenda as part of the national improvement framework. They allow us to have consistent, objective and comparable information. Ross Greer will be well aware of the independent review that took place in 2019, which concluded that assessments have a valuable potential and should be continued, albeit with some important changes that we will take forward.”

The Scottish Government's written response also noted that it is undertaking work to consider whether or how the Scottish Government can change the data collected to better reflect the 4 capacities. This work is in response to Audit Scotland's report on Improving outcomes for young people through school education.

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Communications Education & Skills

Desk: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Scottish Government | news.gov.scot

RESPONSE TO FOI 202100236994

In response to bullet number 2 in your request - Any briefings, analysis or other official documents held by the Scottish Government regarding the Scottish National Standardised Assessments.

The time frame for this request is 01/06/2021 – 07/09/2021.

DOCUMENT 1, 8th June: SRO Assessment Activity Summary

SRO for information – June 2021 – Assessment Activity

Current SNSA position

With three weeks remaining, we have passed 450,000 sittings or around 73% of the maximum possible. The likely final figure is in the region of 475-480k (76%). Breakdown by stage as follows

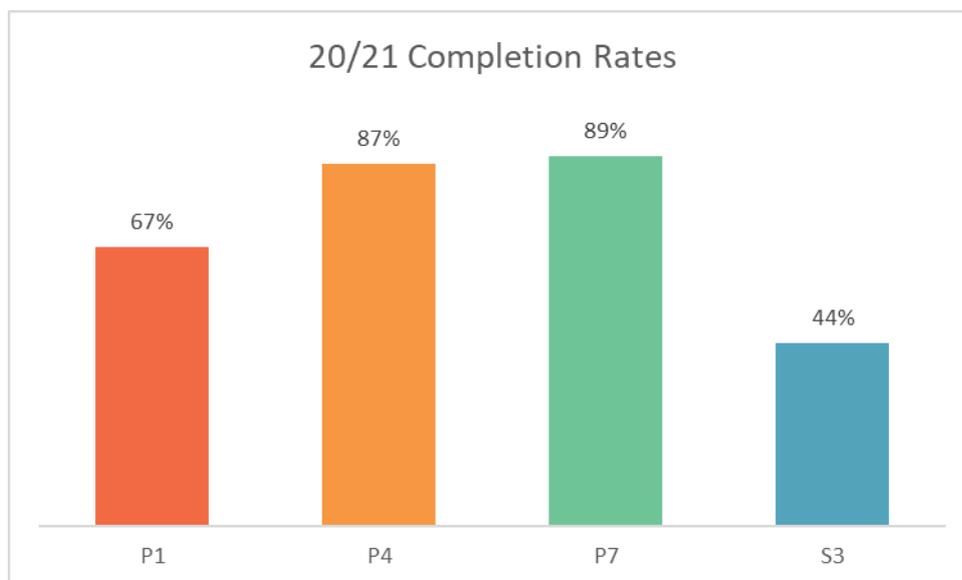


Figure 1

P1 figures are depressed by Fife Council's withdrawal, accounting for approximately 7% of the cohort, and may be further affected by a Glasgow decision that they would be undertaken at their headteachers' discretion.

P4 and P7 will both creep into the low nineties by the end of June which compares reasonably well with expectations of a "normal" year in the region of 95%-97%.

S3 sittings have been low throughout the year, and look to have been further affected latterly by the decision on collection of secondary ACEL data. There is a common pattern however across several local authorities where a decision on undertaking S3 assessments looks to have been devolved to school level. So, where a local authority has an overall completion rate approaching 50%, this can be a consequence of half of their schools opting out entirely and the other half exhibiting near normal activity.

[redacted – out of scope]

DOCUMENT 2, 17th June: Upstart Scotland – Core Brief

Upstart Scotland – Core Brief

BACKGROUND

[redacted – out of scope]

Upstart has also campaigned strongly for the removal of standardised assessments at P1 through its 'Play not Tests' campaign. It believes that standardised assessments run contrary to a play-based approach and that the assessments will have long-term negative effects on the health and wellbeing of learners.

Ministers and officials have engaged extensively with Upstart to explain how learning through play can be delivered within the current policy framework. However, Upstart has continued to vocally oppose the Scottish Government's position – especially in relation to SNSAs.

[redacted – out of scope]

Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSAs)

The P1 assessments are designed around the early level of Curriculum for Excellence and are compatible with play-based learning

- The P1 assessments have been designed by educationalists to align with the early level of CfE – a level that Upstart supports. Every question is quality assured and approved by Education Scotland staff to ensure their curricular and cultural suitability.
- The delivery of the early level experiences and outcomes can still be done using play-based learning where appropriate.
- The independent review undertaken by David Reedy found that the assessments were not incompatible with play-based learning:
 - **QUOTE:** *“A small number of headteachers and teachers have also commented that the P1 SNSA does not fit with a play-based pedagogy but it seems that there are confusions between a ‘moment of assessment’ and a pedagogical approach. There are strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA”.*

The P1 assessments are not high stakes assessments and they should not have an adverse effect on a learner's health and wellbeing when delivered as intended

- Children and young people do not need to be 'ready' to take the assessment and they can be taken at any point in the school year.
- On average, a P1 child spends just 24 minutes completing an assessment.
- The assessments provide important diagnostic information to help teacher judgement on how children are developing.
- They will also help teachers identify any areas where extra help is needed.

- If it is not right for an individual pupil to take part, that is a decision for the teacher to take in discussion with the parent – they know the child best.

The standardised assessments do not dilute teacher professional judgement

- They support the primacy of professional judgement by providing teachers with further information that can guide next steps in learning and teaching.
- Demanding an exclusively play-based approach, as Upstart suggests, would remove professional judgement between 0-7 altogether.

If it is not appropriate for an individual child, then they should NOT take part in the standardised assessment

- The assessments are designed to be diagnostic and inclusive, used as part of normal learning and teaching.
- However if it is not right for an individual pupil to take part, that is a decision for the teacher to take in discussion with their parent – they know the child best.

DOCUMENT 3, 21st June: OECD Publication - Additional Briefing Material For Cabinet Secretary For Education And Skills

SCOTTISH NATIONAL STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS

Lines to take

- We have no plans to stop the national standardised assessments.
- They are a key element of our improvement agenda, as part of the National Improvement Framework.
- In providing nationally consistent, objective and comparable information, the National Standardised Assessments can provide a helpful additional source of information for teachers when considering children’s progress and planning next steps in learning. The assessments support, but do not replace, teachers’ professional judgements.
- The online standardised assessments have been designed to reflect the way we deliver education in Scotland and to align with Curriculum for Excellence. No additional workload, revision or special preparation is required in order to deliver or undertake the assessments. They are intended to be accessible to the vast majority of children and young people, and learners can access the same support when undertaking assessments to which they would be entitled for any other learning activity.
- The Independent Review of the SNSA for P1 in June 2019 concluded that P1 assessments had valuable potential and should be continued, – albeit with the introduction of some important changes and enhanced training and support materials. The Review cited “strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers

operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA.”

Background

Introduced in academic year 2017/18, the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) provide teachers with an additional source of objective, comparable information about learner progress in literacy and numeracy, which can be used to inform next steps in learning and contribute to teachers’ professional judgements of achievement of CfE levels. National Standardised Assessments are a key element of the National Improvement Framework, and our response to OECD 2015 recommendations to improve data across the system.

[redacted – out of scope]

Assessment is a central part of everyday learning and teaching throughout the Broad General Education, and the National Standardised Assessments align with that approach.

The SNSAs came under considerable political and media criticism during 2018 – led by a vocal and persistent stakeholder interest group, which wrongly perceived the assessments to be part of a teacher accountability, rather than improvement agenda; and considered the imposition of what were identified as “high stakes assessments” (akin to the testing regime adopted in England, again, not reflected by the diagnostic, formative focus of our assessment approach) on young learners to be wholly inappropriate, stressful and at odds with the ethos of Curriculum for Excellence, and in particular, the play based learning approaches encouraged in the early years of primary. While unfounded, and based substantially on misinformation and the potential for misuse of the standardised assessments, this criticism culminated in a Parliamentary vote on 19th September 2018 to abolish the SNSAs for P1 learners.

The Deputy First Minister responded to this criticism by commissioning an independent review of the approach to P1 assessments in 2018. David Reedy was appointed as the Independent Reviewer and conducted his review in the early part of 2019.

The Independent Review of the SNSA for P1 published its full report review in June 2019. Mr Reedy concluded that P1 assessments had valuable potential and should be continued, – albeit with the introduction of some important changes and enhanced training and support materials. The Review reported “scant evidence of children becoming upset when taking the P1 SNSA.” (p9) and cited “strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA.”

We continue to take work forward to improve the assessments, and our communications and training provision surrounding them, in response to Mr Reedy’s recommendations and wider and ongoing user feedback. While this work has been delayed to some extent through the impact of the pandemic, school closures, and the resulting challenges in working closely with practitioners to gather, act on, and assure continuous improvement proposals, the recent procurement exercise for a phase two provider for national

standardised assessments contained a number of requirements to ensure ongoing enhancements of the assessments in response to developing policy and user needs.

A key element of our improvement activity has been the publication, in August 2019, of a Purpose and Use of National Standardised Assessment document, which provided clarifying guidance on how national standardised assessments in Scotland are intended to be used by practitioners, headteachers and local authorities

[redacted – out of scope]

DOCUMENT 4, 23rd June: OECD Review FMQ 23 June 2021

- [redacted – out of scope]

21 June: OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation) published their report on Review of Curriculum for Excellence, and GIQ set out SG’s acceptance of their 12 recommendations as well as details on planned reform of SQA and Education Scotland and a commitment to update Parliament fully the next day (**22 June**). Questions from opposition centred on:

- [redacted – out of scope]
- **Ross Greer:** Hopes that the new body to replace SQA isn’t just a rebranding exercise and calls for SNSA to be scrapped.
- [redacted – out of scope]

[redacted – out of scope]

SCOTTISH NATIONAL STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS (SNSAs) **The OECD found teachers felt increasingly confident in assessing progress.**

- The national standardised assessments are a key element of our improvement agenda, as part of the National Improvement Framework.
- The OECD found that **[quote]** “... (SNSA) are presented as low-stakes to provide teachers with diagnostic information on children’s literacy and numeracy to support teachers’ assessment and plan for effective teaching. In avoiding the pitfalls of high-stakes testing in the school system, Scotland has positioned teacher’s professional assessment work as pivotal for the quality of student learning.”
- As the OECD highlight **[quote]**: “In 2019, local authorities reported that teachers feel increasingly confident when assessing progress. From

2018, Scottish National Standardised Assessments provide an additional source of objective, nationally consistent evidence.”

The OECD reported that, as standardised assessments have been rolled out, Scotland now has a [quote] “well-developed and widely shared view of the centrality of teachers in the assessment process.”

- The OECD report added [quote]: *“The agency of teachers in assessment and the focus on providing teachers with tools (including census-based assessments) to support their judgement is a particular strength of the system, and one that is internationally regarded.”*

The OECD cited David Reedy’s independent review which concluded, in 2019, that assessments had valuable potential and should be continued.

- The Reedy Review found [quote] *“strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA.”*

Assessment is a central part of everyday learning and teaching throughout the Broad General Education, and the National Standardised Assessments align with that approach.

- 2018/19 Learner feedback showed 91% of Primary 1 children who had undertaken the assessments indicated they were happy doing them.

It should be noted that we are accepting all 12 recommendations from the OECD in full – and there is no recommendation about standardised assessments.

- In our more detailed response to the OECD report we will consider its comments about the re-introduction of a survey-based approach to gathering data.

[redacted – out of scope]

DOCUMENT 5, 23rd June: NSA Cabinet Secretary Update Briefing

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]
Learning; Improvement, Attainment &
Wellbeing
23 June 2021

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

NATIONAL STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS FOR SCOTLAND

Purpose

1. To provide an update on the status of phase one of the national standardised assessments (Scottish National Standardised Assessments – SNSA – [redacted – out of scope] and progress in relation to the transition to phase two of project through a combined assessment platform.

Priority

2. Routine

Background: phase one services

3. The SNSAs form a key element of the National Improvement Framework and the Scottish Government's commitment to reduce the poverty related attainment gap and raise attainment for all. Announced in the 2015 Programme for Government, and referenced in the 2016, 2017 [redacted – out of scope] PfGs, the SNSAs were rolled out to all publically funded Scottish schools in August 2016, [redacted – out of scope]

[redacted – out of scope]

4. With a few days remaining of term, SNSA sittings in the 2020/21 school year exceed 490,000 or 79% of the possible maximum (cf. 94% in 2017/18; 93% in 2018/19 and 41% in 2019/20 - unexpectedly foreshortened by school closures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic). This is slightly higher than anticipated given the move to remote learning in January to March: the assessments can only be taken in school. P4 and P7 rates are now within a few percentage points of what would have been expected in an uninterrupted year, while P1 rates are slightly depressed by local decisions in Fife (not to use SNSA for P1) and Glasgow (to devolve decision making on P1 presentations to headteachers) so are otherwise not much below "normal" expectation.

5. S3 rates have been particularly low throughout the year. This is possibly due to the challenges faced by secondary schools in delivering the alternative certification model, and latterly, the Deputy First Minister's related decision that S3 ACEL data would not be collected for this year only, which may have impacted some practitioners' views on the utility of the diagnostic information generated, albeit recognising that the assessments are intended to inform next steps in learning, as well as contribute to teachers' professional judgements of learners' progress. S3 completions have held up comparatively well throughout June, however, taking the completion rate over 50%.



6. [redacted – out of scope]

Sensitivities

7. Considerable controversy has surrounded the national standardised assessments, largely based on a misunderstanding about their purpose. They are diagnostic assessments designed to support learning and teaching, not, as many have inferred, high-stakes tests for measuring system performance or accountability. Stakeholder, media and political criticism of the assessments, particularly for P1s, culminated in a parliamentary vote to abolish P1 assessments in September 2018 which in turn led to the Deputy First Minister commissioning the Independent Reedy Review into P1 assessments. The review concluded that P1 assessments had valuable potential and should be continued, albeit with the introduction of some important changes and enhanced training and support materials.

8. Despite the Independent Review findings, high completion rates over the last four years (as above), and increasing evidence from stakeholder discussions and the SNSA staff survey of how useful practitioners find the assessments, national standardised assessments remain a sensitive issue, as demonstrated by the questions received on this in response to the OECD report.

[redacted – out of scope]

9. The key principles/success criteria for the transition to phase two are as follows:

- National standardised assessments for Scotland remain a key element of our improvement agenda, as part of the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education.
- In response to clear demands from end users and stakeholders, our requirement for phase two focuses on securing continuity of core service provision; and enabling teachers to analyse learner progress against phase one SNSA outcomes.
- [redacted – out of scope]
- During phase two delivery we want to see greater efficiencies and consistency of provision across the two existing assessment sets (SNSA and MCNG).
- The establishment of a combined platform through which each assessment set will be accessed will bring the following benefits:
 - One interface for practitioners to navigate/familiarise themselves with
 - One set of training materials
 - Consistent reporting formats and information
 - A consistent approach to standardisation

[redacted – out of scope]

10. One of the key success criteria for phase two – identified by service users and local authorities during our consultation discussions ahead of publishing the Invitation to tender – is the continuity of user experience and ability to secure longitudinal value from phase one outcomes (i.e. for practitioners to be able to make valid comparisons between phase one and phase two outcomes, in terms of learner progress) – through a reasonable equivalence of approach to standardised outcomes.

[redacted – out of scope]

Conclusion

11. The Cabinet Secretary is asked to note the update on national standardised assessments, and in particular:

- The encouraging completion rates for standardised assessments this year, despite the challenges of school closures and resulting educational recovery issues – suggesting practitioners see the value of the diagnostic information they generate.

[redacted – out of scope]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Learning: Improvement, Attainment and Wellbeing

Mobile: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

June 2021

1. Copy List:	2. or Action	3. or Comments	4. For Information		
			5. Portfolio Interest	6. Constit Interest	7. General Awareness
8. First Minister 9. Minister for Children and Young People 10.	11.	12.	13. 14.	15.	16. X 17.

18. DG Education and Justice	31.
19. Graeme Logan, Director of Learning	32.
20. Gayle Gorman, CEO, Education Scotland	
21. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
22. Alison Taylor, DD Improvement, Attainment and Wellbeing	
23. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
24. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
25. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
26. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
27. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
28. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
29. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]	
30.	

National Standardised Assessment (NSA) Overview

NSAs are a key element of our improvement agenda, as part of the National Improvement Framework

- The assessments were developed as part of our response to OECD 2015 recommendations to improve data across the system.
- The Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) were introduced in academic year 2017/18

[redacted – out of scope]

Assessment is a central part of everyday learning and teaching throughout the Broad General Education.

- In providing nationally consistent, objective and comparable information, the NSAs can provide a helpful additional source of information for teachers when considering children's progress and planning next steps in learning in both literacy and numeracy.
- NSAs are intended to support, but not replace, teachers' professional judgements.

The national indicator of pupil performance is the Achievement of CfE Levels (ACEL) data, based on teachers' professional judgement.

- The SG does not collect NSA data and it is not used for performance reporting purposes.
- The ACEL data collection, not the SNSA, has replaced the SSLN.

NSAs are intended to be accessible to the vast majority of children and young people.

- Learners can access the same support when undertaking assessments to which they would be entitled for any other learning activity.
- The assessments are aligned with Curriculum for Excellence so do not distract from learning.
- No additional workload, revision or special preparation is required in order to deliver or undertake the assessments.

The Deputy First Minister appointed David Reedy to conduct an Independent Review of the SNSAs for P1.

- The review concluded in June 2019 that P1 assessments "had valuable potential and should be continued, – albeit with the introduction of some important changes and enhanced training and support materials."
- Mr Reedy cited "strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA."

We continue to develop and enhance the assessments and our user communications in response to Mr Reedy's recommendations and ongoing user feedback.

- Published in August 2019, Purpose and Use of National Standardised Assessment document, provided clarifying guidance on how national standardised assessments in Scotland are intended to be used by practitioners, headteachers and local authorities.
- The recent procurement exercise for a phase two provider for national standardised assessments established a continuous improvement process to ensure the delivery

of ongoing enhancements of the assessments in response to developing policy and user needs.

DOCUMENT 7, 12th July: Briefing - Meeting With FDA And PCS Unions To Discuss Reform To Education Scotland

[redacted – out of scope]

SCOTTISH NATIONAL STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS (SNSAs)

The OECD found teachers felt increasingly confident in assessing progress.

- The national standardised assessments are a key element of our improvement agenda, as part of the National Improvement Framework.
- The OECD found that **[quote]** “... (SNSA) are presented as low-stakes to provide teachers with diagnostic information on children’s literacy and numeracy to support teachers’ assessment and plan for effective teaching. In avoiding the pitfalls of high-stakes testing in the school system, Scotland has positioned teacher’s professional assessment work as pivotal for the quality of student learning.”
- As the OECD highlight **[quote]**: “In 2019, local authorities reported that teachers feel increasingly confident when assessing progress. From 2018, Scottish National Standardised Assessments provide an additional source of objective, nationally consistent evidence.”

The OECD reported that, as standardised assessments have been rolled out, Scotland now has a [quote] “well-developed and widely shared view of the centrality of teachers in the assessment process.”

- The OECD report added **[quote]**: “The agency of teachers in assessment and the focus on providing teachers with tools (including census-based assessments) to support their judgement is a particular strength of the system, and one that is internationally regarded.”

The OECD cited David Reedy’s independent review which concluded, in 2019, that assessments had valuable potential and should be continued.

- The Reedy Review found **[quote]** “strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA.”

Assessment is a central part of everyday learning and teaching throughout the Broad General Education, and the National Standardised Assessments align with that approach.

- 2018/19 Learner feedback showed 91% of Primary 1 children who had undertaken the assessments indicated they were happy doing them.

It should be noted that we are accepting all 12 recommendations from the OECD in full – and there is no recommendation about standardised assessments.

- In our more detailed response to the OECD report we will consider its comments about the re-introduction of a survey-based approach to gathering data.

[redacted – out of scope]

DOCUMENT 8, 22nd July: Briefing contribution – Royal Scottish Geographical Society Meeting

OECD CFE REVIEW AND EDUCATION REFORM

[redacted – out of scope]

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[redacted – out of scope]

DOCUMENT 9, 5th August: Briefing For The Minister For Higher Education And Further Education, Youth Employment And Training for Introductory meeting with, Cllr Stephen McCabe, COSLA spokesperson for Children and Young People

[redacted – out of scope]

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[redacted – out of scope]

DOCUMENT 10, 25th August: NSA brief for Ms. Somerville

[redacted – out of scope]

ISSUE: 23 June: OECD report, STV and others reported that the OECD suggested getting rid of/reforming standardised assessments

We remain fully committed to national standardised assessments.

- Rightfully, while our focus remains on the health, wellbeing and the welfare of learners, we have a responsibility to ensure inequality does not widen.
- Teachers having a wide range of assessment information to inform next steps in learning is a fundamental part of our commitment to support teachers, including the provision of nationally consistent, diagnostic assessments.
- National standardised assessments are a key part of our improvement agenda, providing additional, complementary assessment information to inform next steps in learning, and are available for teachers to deliver as part of daily learning.
- Decisions on national assessment presentation are devolved to teachers, who choose when learners access the assessments, based on the best interests of learners in their care.

The assessments' value in supporting teaching and learning continues to increase.

- Despite the challenging circumstances faced by all schools over the past academic year, assessment uptake has remained high, with a total of 496,112 assessments being undertaken - a completion rate of just under 80%.
- Data from our staff feedback survey in each of the last 3 years suggest that reports are providing practitioners with valuable insights into the learning needs of individual learners.
- In 2018/19, just over 80% of teachers said SNSA individual reports were helpful or very helpful to them – that rose to over 90% last year.

- In 2018/19, nearly 80% of teachers said the SNSA group diagnostic report was helpful or very helpful – that rose to nearly 85% last year.

Standardised assessments play a valuable role within the wider assessment approach for the broad general education.

- The Independent Reedy review (2019) concluded that the standardised assessments had valuable potential and should be continued, albeit with the introduction of some important changes and enhanced training and support materials.
- The review cited *“strong examples of schools where headteachers and teachers operate a play-based approach and find no incompatibility between that and the P1 SNSA.”*
- The importance of the standardised assessments as a tool for teaching and learning was also identified by the OECD report in 2021, which stated *“As the SNSA continues to be rolled out, Scotland now has a well-developed and widely shared view of the centrality of teachers in the assessment process. The agency of teachers in assessment and the focus on providing teachers with tools (including census-based assessments) to support their judgement is a particular strength of the system, and one that is internationally regarded.”*
- It should be noted that we are accepting all 12 recommendations from the OECD in full – there is no recommendation about standardised assessments.

[redacted – out of scope]

- The phase two contract will bring together SNSAs and their Gaelic equivalent, MCNGs, into one assessment platform. Assessment content will remain distinct.

[redacted – out of scope]

- In response to clear demands from end users and stakeholders, our requirements for phase 2 focused on securing continuity of core service provision; and the facilitation of teachers’ longitudinal analysis of learner progress from phase one SNSA outcomes.

[redacted – out of scope]



Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA)



Measaidhean Coitcheann Naisanta Gàidhlig (MCNG)

National Standardised Assessments: Phase 2

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]



Briefing

Purposes of today

- Phase 1 of national standardised assessments: SNSA and MCNG
- Transition to Phase 2: timeline
- Phase 2 of national standardised assessments
 - continuity
 - improvement
 - future development



[redacted – out of scope]

[redacted bullet in slide below – out of scope]

Phase 2 of national standardised assessments

Continuity

- Building on design of Phase 1 to ensure familiarity of operation
- Retention of main reports available within Phase 1
- New features/reports will be subject to consultation with stakeholders e.g. learning progress over time
- National policy positions remain unchanged:
 - diagnostic assessment to inform next steps in learning, alongside wider evidence
 - information which is consistent and comparable, nationally
 - presentation once per year for each curricular area
 - available at stages P1, P4, P7 and S3

Improvement

- Working to improve the operational ability and flexibility of familiar features
- [Redacted]
- Consistency of operations and reports across MCNG and SNSA

Future development

- New reports and additional features will be subject to consultation with stakeholders e.g. learning progress over time



Questions?

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

