

International Council of Education Advisers

Minute of the seventh meeting: 23-24 September 2019

The following Council Members were present:

First Minister Nicola Sturgeon MSP (attended 24th pm only)
Deputy First Minister John Swinney MSP (Chair)
Dr Carol Campbell
Professor Chris Chapman
Professor Graham Donaldson CB
Dr Avis Glaze
Professor Andy Hargreaves
Professor Alma Harris
Dr Pak Tee Ng
Professor Pasi Sahlberg
Professor Allison Skerrett
Lindsey Watt OBE

Also present:

Paul Johnston, Director General Education, Communities and Justice (23rd am only)
Graeme Logan, Director of Learning, Scottish Government
Gayle Gorman, Chief Inspector of Education and Chief Executive, Education Scotland
Kit Wyeth, Deputy Director, Learning Directorate, Scottish Government (23rd only)
Larry Flanagan, Educational Institute of Scotland (24th am only)
Terry Lanagan, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (24th am only)
Carrie Lindsay, Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, South East Alliance (24th am only)
Mhairi Shaw, Regional Improvement Collaborative Lead, The West Partnership (24th am only)

Secretariat

Judith Tracey, National Improvement Framework Unit, Scottish Government
Elaine Kelley, National Improvement Framework Unit, Scottish Government

Purpose

This note provides an overview of the discussion and key points from the seventh meeting of the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA). The meeting took place in the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh on 23 and 24 September and focused on the following areas:

- Scottish Attainment Challenge - Maximising Progress to 2021 ICEA(19)03
- The Senior Phase Curriculum ICEA(19)04

23 September 2019

Breakfast meeting with senior officials (Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh)

The seventh meeting began with an update from Graeme Logan and Gayle Gorman about developments and activity in Scotland since the last meeting in February 2019. This focused on the empowerment agenda, the refreshed narrative on Scotland's Curriculum and progress with closing the poverty related attainment gap.

Points made during the discussion included:

- There was concern about the variation in progress towards closing the attainment gap in some parts of Scotland. Schools need to be challenged more, particularly now that the data is available to enable such challenge to take place. There needs to be more sharing of good/successful practice at school level via the Regional Improvement Collaboratives (RICs).
- Scotland has a professionally advanced system in terms of the plans, policies and strategies in place but there is a need to think about what is needed in order to deliver a truly self-improving system.
- All the pieces are in place, but they haven't yet "clicked" in a way that brings significant impact. Empowerment is a cultural issue, and cultural change takes time.
- The Council was clear that the small incremental improvements are early indicators of system shift. Larger scale improvements may prove to be unsustainable.
- The Council was clear that the Scottish Government should not let the PISA results in December (no matter what they are) provide a distraction from the long term goals.
- The refreshed narrative on Scotland's curriculum was welcomed.
- The Council welcomed the continued funding for the Scottish Attainment Challenge beyond the end of this Parliamentary term. They also welcomed the additional funding which will be used to secure additional frontline staff in this academic year.

Council session 1

The Deputy First Minister welcomed everyone to the seventh meeting of the ICEA, and said that he wanted the discussion to focus on ways of improving further the pace of progress across Scotland in reducing the poverty related attainment gap.

Points made during the discussion included:

- Scotland is heading in the right direction and taking the right approach to improving education in Scotland, however the challenge now is to deepen the level of progress and impact.
- There was some concern around variation in performance and pace in some parts of Scotland in progress towards reducing the attainment gap. The Council felt that that should be addressed by focussing on leadership, particularly pedagogical leadership, and by matching leadership skills and

competencies to the problems that exist in underperforming schools in a more strategic way.

- Need to think about how to support pedagogical excellence within schools, and develop more specific examples of good practice in pedagogy.
- The Council felt that we need to increase the level of support and challenge for learning and teaching, and intensify our focus on the localities/ regions where the data demonstrates that performance is weaker.
- The evidence so far was demonstrating some progress towards closing the poverty related attainment gap, but that equity and excellence should be seen as a long-term task. Small, steady, incremental gains are evident and need to continue in order to deliver sustainable improvement in any education system, and this what the Council can see happening in Scotland.
- The Council felt it was important to keep up the momentum, and have a period of consolidation and stability to ensure the improvement work that is being undertaken across the Scottish education system has time to become embedded.
- There is a need to think about what more we can do to help people understand what is meant by closing the poverty related attainment gap and be absolutely clear about the complexity of the problem. Equity is not all in the gift of education.
- The Council also raised the issue of inequality of opportunity. Students should have access to structured career guidance at an early stage so that they have the information they need to help them with subject choice in the senior phase. High quality career guidance can also help to expose young people from more socially disadvantaged backgrounds to a wider range of career options.

Council session 2

Graeme Logan chaired the afternoon session where Murray McVicar, Head of the Senior Phase Policy team at the Scottish Government, gave a presentation about the senior phase curriculum.

The main points highlighted from the presentation are detailed below –

- The Education and Skills Committee published its report on the Senior Phase Subject Choice Inquiry on Monday 16 September. The report broadly focused on the following themes –
 - The Senior Phase curriculum offer in S4 and equality of the offer across the country, given that a growing numbers of schools are offering more bespoke options choices to match learner needs across S4-S6
 - Impact of different Senior Phase approaches on attainment/ outcomes e.g. more young people taking a wide range of qualifications may mean fewer national qualifications passes in total each year
 - Impact of approaches to learning and teaching
 - Coherence between the Broad General Education and Senior Phase.
 - Impact on specific subjects e.g. from learners studying for fewer qualifications in S4 (norm was 8 subjects for most learners in S4 before CfE)
 - Understanding of the purpose of the Senior Phase
 - Pace of change

- As part of the Research Strategy for Scottish Education, a survey of headteachers in all Scottish secondary schools was undertaken to gather their views and experiences of implementing the Senior Phase curriculum. The report from this research was published on 25 September and is the first phase in a wider research project on the Senior Phase.
- The Deputy First Minister has said he will commission an independent review of how Curriculum for Excellence is being implemented for young people in S4-S6 to identify any improvements that might be made.
- The Scottish Government is in the very early stages of scoping the review..

On the evening of 23 September, the Council members attended a formal dinner at the Edinburgh Larder hosted by the Deputy First Minister.

24 September 2019

Council session 3 (Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh)

On the morning of 24 September, Council members met Larry Flanagan, Terry Lanagan, Carrie Lindsay and Mhairi Shaw to discuss key themes of interest identified by the Council, on the Scottish Education System. This was a closed session chaired by Professor Chris Chapman and no officials from the Learning Directorate were present. Gayle Gorman was in attendance.

The ICEA then had an opportunity to work together on their second report and conclusions from the two days, with a view to presenting those conclusions to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Final session

The Deputy First Minister reconvened the meeting, with the First Minister in attendance. Council members provided feedback and recommendations based on the information they had gathered, and the discussions they had held, over the two day meeting. The headline recommendations included:

- The Scottish Government should stay the course with the current improvement programme, go deeper, and consolidate the work that is currently being undertaken.
- Do not introduce new initiatives at this stage, unless there is very clear evidence that something needs to be revised. Collaboration & empowerment is the right agenda, but there is a tension between the Regional Improvement Collaboratives and local authorities in terms of their respective roles and responsibilities which needs to be resolved. More needs to be done to support the development of pedagogical excellence in classrooms. In particular, the Council felt it was important to consider how to grow effective pedagogical leadership in schools.
- There needs to be a more consistent and coherent approach to dealing with underperforming schools and local authorities. Where there is persistently

poor performance, the Scottish Government should consider using its existing legislative powers to intervene in an underperforming local authority. To avoid reaching that stage, it is important to be more directive, and match leadership skills and competencies to problems in a more strategic way.

- Scrutiny in inspection should drive improvement in schools, rather than being solely about accountability. Education Scotland should be promoting a culture where collaboration is underpinned by ongoing professional challenge.
- Parents need to know how much they matter. It is important to ensure that parental engagement is embedded in high school as well as primary school, particularly in the senior phase. International evidence has shown that parental engagement is powerful and liberating, and is crucial to releasing achievement potential, and closing the poverty related attainment gap.

The First Minister and Deputy First Minister concluded the meeting by thanking the Council for their valuable time and insight once again on how Scotland can improve further the progress towards reducing the poverty related attainment gap.

Any other business

It was agreed that the Council would meet again in February 2020 and that the Council's second formal report would be published in Summer 2020.