

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS AT PRIMARY 1

Introduction

1. The Independent Review of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments at Primary 1 was led by Mr David Reedy.

2. In the spring and summer of 2018, a number of concerns were raised about the SNSA, particularly at Primary 1, for example around the impact of the assessments on children and young people and the value of the information they produce for teachers.

3. The concerns raised about the SNSA led to considerable Parliamentary discussion during autumn 2018. As part of this discussion, a debate took place in September 2018 at the end of which the Parliament voted in favour of a motion calling for an end to P1 SNSA and asking the Scottish Government to reconsider the evidence and the whole approach to evaluating the progress of children in P1. In order to address these concerns, the Scottish Government commissioned an Independent Review to be led by Mr Reedy, formerly Co-Director of the Cambridge Primary Review Trust, Past President of the United Kingdom Literacy Association and Principal Advisor for Primary Schools, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

4. The remit of the Independent Review was to consider and provide recommendations on the following issues:

- the compatibility of the assessments with the play-based approach to early level of CfE;
- the alignment of the assessments to the Benchmarks for early level;
- the effect of taking an on-line assessment on P1 children;
- the usefulness of the diagnostic information provided to teachers and how it supports their professional judgement;
- the implications of the Review for the ongoing development of the national Gaelic Medium Education standardised assessments; and
- the future of the assessments considering in particular whether they continue in line with the current continuous improvement model, whether they be substantially modified, or whether they should be stopped.

5. From January to March 2019, Mr Reedy visited schools to observe the SNSA being undertaken and to interview the staff involved. He interviewed headteachers, deputies and P1 teachers, key stakeholders, local authority staff and HMI, and looked at relevant documentation, for example the conclusions of the P1 Practitioner Forum and the evidence to and report from the Education and Skills Committee SNSA Inquiry. In addition, Mr Reedy sought evidence through anonymous surveys completed by local authorities, headteachers and P1 teachers and a dedicated email address was established for general responses. During the course of the Review, other issues arose which were not specified in the remit of the Review: the purpose of the P1 SNSA; the use of the P1 SNSA data for school improvement purposes, and the challenges associated with implementation of the assessment. These are included in the Review Report. In total, there were around 325 participants in the Review including 142 P1 teachers and 131 headteachers.

6. These sources of evidence, scrutiny of relevant documentation and reviews of recent research into key themes, were used to gather evidence for the Independent Review.

7. Mr Reedy's Report recommends that the P1 SNSA should continue, subject to a number of modifications and enhancements. The Report makes a number of recommendations for action, primarily for the Scottish Government, in order to deliver those modifications and enhancements.

8. This response should be considered alongside the Scottish Government's response to two other significant reports which have been published recently:

- [Scottish National Standardised Assessments: recommendations from P1 Practitioner Forum](#) (18 April 2019); and
- [The Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee Report on Scottish National Standardised Assessments](#) (23 April 2019).

9. The Scottish Government has also published a progress report from the 2018/19 SNSA User Review and a summary document "Standardised assessments in Scotland: draft improvement activity 2019/20" which summarises the action that the Scottish Government (working with key partners as appropriate) plans to take forward during the 2019/20 school session

10. All key documents can be found on the National Improvement Framework page of the Scottish Government website.

Independent Review of P1 assessments – main conclusions and recommendations

Purpose of P1 SNSA and its role within a broader assessment framework

That Scottish Government:

11. Provide a detailed rationale for P1 SNSA setting out the purposes and uses of P1 SNSA at individual, class, school, local authority and national levels. This should include a statement that the intention of P1 SNSA data is solely focused on informing learning and teaching and will not be used for accountability purposes now or in the future.

SG response

Accept. *The Scottish Government will work with Education Scotland to provide schools, local authorities and other stakeholders with a clear and definitive statement on the purpose and use of P1 SNSA for the start of the new school session in August 2019.*

1.1 Work with local authorities, schools and other stakeholders to develop a practical framework/Code of Practice which sets out what SNSA data in P1 should productively be used for and what it should not, including a statement about purpose. This framework should then

be used as the basis for agreement in every school about the purposes and uses of P1 SNSA data. This should be publicised nationally and a copy sent to all schools and P1 teachers.

SG response

Accept. *The Scottish Government will work with key partners to produce a draft practical framework by autumn 2019, which will then be consulted upon widely, including through channels such as the P1 Practitioner Forum and the Scottish Education Council.*

Clearly, in order for us to engage meaningfully with practitioners and wider stakeholders, it will not be possible to finalise this framework in time for the beginning of the 2019/20 school session. We believe, however, it will be possible to produce a final version of the framework by March 2020. Because the framework will focus on the purpose and use of data generated by the SNSA, rather than the assessment content or experience itself, we do not believe its introduction at a mid-point in the delivery of year three of the SNSAs would materially affect or disadvantage those learners who have already undertaken the assessment. Consultation will, however, include the invitation of views on an appropriate timeline for final publication.

1.2 In consultation with schools and local authorities, provide clear guidance, along the lines of the guidance offered about administering the P1 SNSA with ASN and EAL children, on the level of support which can be given to P1 children as they undertake the assessments.

SG response

Accept. *Work on this recommendation will be taken forward with partners and practitioners and the guidance will be published in October 2019.*

1.3 Continue with the flexible arrangements about the timing of the P1 SNSA.

SG response

Accept.

1.4 Refrain from drawing any general conclusions from aggregated P1 SNSA data until there is evidence of consistent administration. P1 SNSA data should not be used to make comparisons between schools or local authorities.

SG response

Accept. *The Scottish Government will not use P1 SNSA data (or data from the assessments at P4, P7 and S3) to make comparisons between schools or local authorities. That has never been the policy intention of introducing national standardised assessments.*

The SNSAs are standardised in a number of important ways, to provide reliable, consistent and useful information. For example the SNSA uses a standard assessment platform so that

children all undertake the assessments in the same format. Moreover we believe that the two extensive national norming exercises conducted in November 2017 and March 2018, provide statistically robust national frames of reference.

1.5 In consultation with local authorities, teachers and headteachers, agree how P1 SNSA data will inform Quality Assurance conversations within the context of all the other data pertaining to the performance of schools. This should be based on the practical framework/Code of Practice recommended in 1.2.

SG response

Accept. *The SNSA, when used as part of a range of evidence, can support discussions around quality improvement within schools. This recommendation will be actioned as part of the development of the practical framework/code of practice highlighted at recommendation 1.2.*

That local authorities:

1.6 In consultation with headteachers and teachers, agree how P1 SNSA data will inform Quality Assurance conversations within the context of all the other data pertaining to the performance of schools. This should be based on the practical framework/Code of Practice as recommended above to Scottish Government. P1 SNSA data should not be used to make comparisons between schools or local authorities.

1.7 Refrain from drawing any general conclusions from aggregated P1 SNSA data until there is evidence of consistent administration.

SG response

Accept. *The Scottish Government strongly supports the suggestion that quality assurance/school improvement discussions should take into account all performance data and assessment evidence available to schools, rather than focusing exclusively on the SNSA. That holistic approach lies at the heart of our assessment model for the broad general education.*

Local authority representatives will be involved in the consultation and wider development of the practical framework recommended at paragraph 1.2 of the Review. This involvement should assist local authorities in taking forward this recommendation. The Scottish Government and Education Scotland will also seek to work with the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES) to support local authorities in progressing this activity.

The compatibility of the assessments with the play-based approach to early level of CfE

That Scottish Government:

2.1 In partnership with stakeholders, including teachers and headteachers, continue to develop guidance and examples of the ways in which a play-based approach to learning and teaching can accommodate administration of the P1 SNSA.

SG response

Accept. *This work is already underway in response to the recommendations of the P1 Practitioner Forum. This guidance will be published on the National Improvement Hub and the SNSA website by March 2020.*

2.2 In partnership with stakeholders, including schools, develop specific guidelines about how to use data from P1 SNSA alongside observational and other evidence from play-based activities to support judgements of progress and planning of next steps for learning within a play-based approach.

SG response

Accept. *Scottish Government and Education Scotland will work with stakeholders to develop guidance and support materials on using SNSA within a play based learning environment for improvement purposes. This support material will be published on the National Improvement Hub and the SNSA website by March 2020.*

2.3 Ensure that training in administering the SNSA and relevant documentation re-emphasises the option of stopping the assessment if a child becomes tired, bored or upset.

SG response

Accept. *Training materials and support documents will re-emphasise the ability to stop or break the assessments where it is in the interest of the child. This will also be illustrated in case studies, which will be published on the National Improvement Hub and SNSA website by March 2020.*

The usefulness of the diagnostic information provided to teachers to support professional judgements

That Scottish Government:

3.1 Request that, as part of its development process, ACER review the P1 literacy SNSA to ensure that the items align with the relevant parts of the early level CfE. Attention should be given to the language used in the item descriptors and in the data generated from the assessments so that they are comparable with the language used in the expectations and outcomes and associated Benchmarks for the early level of Curriculum for Excellence. In addition, ACER should involve experienced P1 practitioners in the question development process in order to give feedback on the appropriate level of difficulty, particularly in the P1 Literacy SNSA.

SG response

Accept. Education Scotland has already begun discussions with ACER around the language used in item descriptors, with a view to aligning the language of the descriptors more closely with the language of Curriculum for Excellence. Education Scotland will continue the approach to reviewing the content of the P1 literacy assessments adopted to this point, whereby Education Scotland staff with relevant classroom experience are involved in signing off each individual question for all assessment stages and curricular areas. In the future we will involve practicing P1 classroom teachers in the sign off process. Particular focus will be directed towards language, alignment with the early level benchmarks and levels of difficulty.

3.2 Recommend that one of the two additional in-service days agreed for 2019-2020 should be used so that all schools, including P1 teachers, can engage in professional learning related to how P1 SNSA information can be used effectively to inform professional judgements and/or moderation activities.

SG response

Partially accept. Whilst the content of in-service days should be determined between the professional associations and employers, the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers has agreed these two additional in-service days should support professional learning focusing on key issues such as workload, additional support for learning and empowering schools. There is an expectation that decisions on the content of these in-service days should involve the relevant Regional Improvement Collaborative and other stakeholders to provide opportunities for collaborative practice across local authorities. The Scottish Government can emphasise to local authorities, however, the importance of professional learning in maximizing the value of the SNSA.

3.3 In consultation with local authorities and schools, review the current materials available to ensure that there is easily accessible professional learning support available for schools to use on the dedicated in-service day and publicise these materials to schools.

SG response

Accept. Improved signposting to the relevant sections of the training and support materials has already been undertaken in response to the P1 Practitioner Forum recommendation, and training materials have been made available on GLOW.

3.4 Expand the QAMSO programme to support local authorities and school clusters in developing cross school moderation events.

SG response

Accept. Education Scotland is in the process of developing a revised QAMSO programme which takes account of the change in the system. This will support moderation at different levels of the system and will expand what is available to include support at a regional level, and reflect joint working with regional improvement collaboratives, local authorities and schools. The moderation hub will be updated providing continued support to schools and

clusters. We will continue to support teachers with assessment in partnership with all stakeholders, providing advice and guidance on quality assurance and moderation.

The use of the P1 SNSA data for school improvement purposes

That Scottish Government:

4.1 Work in partnership with local authorities and schools to produce guidance outlining how P1 SNSA can positively contribute to school improvement including further detailed case studies showing how a range of both urban and rural schools have used P1 SNSA for improvement purposes. This guidance should be accessible online.

SG response

Accept. *Scottish Government and Education Scotland will continue to work with local authorities and schools to develop case studies and practical guidance on using the SNSA for improvement purposes. These will be made available on the National Improvement Hub and the SNSA website by March 2020.*

4.2 Expand the frequency of professional learning opportunities/training in all local authorities, including face-to-face discussions, which focuses on both the positive use, as well as the limitations, of using P1 SNSA information. This should particularly target senior leaders in schools.

SG response

Accept. *Scottish Government and ACER will work with local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives to develop the range and frequency of professional learning programmes. While it is a matter for local authorities to indicate to ACER their needs and preferences as regards the delivery of SNSA training, the Scottish Government and ACER will continue to encourage wide uptake, highlighting to practitioners the Review findings regarding the benefits of professional learning in terms of a heightened understanding of the value of the diagnostic information generated by the system.*

That local authorities:

4.3 Expand the frequency of professional learning opportunities already planned, including cluster meetings. Develop bespoke training for P1 teachers and monitor attendance.

SG response

Accept. *As indicated in response to recommendation 4.2, the Scottish Government and ACER will work with local authorities and regional improvement collaboratives to develop the range and frequency of training programmes.*

The challenges of using the P1 SNSA

That Scottish Government:

5.1 Continue and extend support to schools for administering the P1 SNSA in terms of resource; this might include recommending that priority time should be given within the Collegiate Hours Agreement in schools so that there is planned time to administer P1 SNSA.

SG response

Partially accept. *Working Time Agreements are developed and agreed at a school level, in advance of each academic session and are a matter for the Local Negotiating Committees for Teachers (LNCT). The Scottish Government can re-emphasize the importance of allowing time for the effective delivery of P1 SNSAs as long as it's undertaken during the collegiate activities within the 35 hour working week.*

5.2 In consultation with local authorities and schools, develop more guidance for primary schools, particularly larger schools, in managing the technological demands of the P1 SNSA.

SG response

Accept. *As indicated in the response to 2.2 and 4.1, Scottish Government and Education Scotland will continue to work with local authorities and schools to develop case studies and practical guidance on using the SNSA. This will include how to manage the technological demands of P1 SNSA. These will be made available on the National Improvement Hub and the SNSA website by March 2020.*

5.3 Recommend that, as part of its ongoing review process, ACER reduce the number of items in the P1 literacy SNSA.

SG response

Partially accept. *As outlined in response to recommendation 3.1, Education Scotland will continue to review all content for the P1 literacy assessments with ACER. They will consider the implications of reducing the number of items and the impact this may have on assessment duration and coverage, giving particular consideration to the extent to which coverage can be reduced, while still enabling the generation of meaningful diagnostic information.*

The Scottish Government would note that any changes to the number of items included within an assessment will need to be made at the beginning of a school session, to ensure a consistent assessment experience for all children and young people, no matter when within the school year they undertake the assessment. Consideration of the potential for reducing the number of questions within the P1 literacy assessment is a complex matter, which, if it is to be undertaken meaningfully, may extend beyond August 2019. If that is the case, we would seek to implement any reduction in items for the 2020/21 school session.

5.4 Extend the work of QAMSOs and moderation processes specifically to include special schools and those teachers with responsibility for children with additional support needs *and English as an additional language.*

SG response

Accept. Local authorities nominate the staff to take part in the QAMSO programme. The QAMSO programme has always been open to staff in special schools. Education Scotland will continue to work with local authority assessment coordinators and others to ensure an appropriate range of staff have access to this support.

5.5 Continue to develop the productive partnership between home and school, including parents/carers in professional conversations about children's progress.

SG response

Accept. The Scottish Government welcomes this recommendation which is pertinent to our [“Learning Together” National Action Plan](#) on parental involvement and engagement, our [National Improvement Framework Parent Communication Plan](#) (which emphasises good quality dialogue between parents, teachers and headteachers) and the National Improvement Framework for education.

Our Learning Together plan recommends that schools and authorities take steps to i) support parents to be active participants in the assessment and reporting process, ii) provide advice to parents to help talk to their child about their learning and next steps and iii) ensure that communication and reporting to parents is simple, quick and responsive to parents' needs. At national level, Education Scotland through its regional working will continue to promote and share its guidance on reporting to parents, which is provided as part of the [Parental Engagement Toolkit](#) for schools. We will continue to emphasise certain key principles including the importance of dialogue and face-to-face discussions and the development of reports which are meaningful to parents and designed around parents' needs and the needs of the individual child.

That local authorities:

5.6 Extend support and consultation with schools experiencing difficulties in managing the technology and timing of administering the P1 SNSA.

SG response

Partially accept. The flexibility which SNSA offers in terms of timing of assessment goes some way towards relieving pressure on the availability of equipment. We will provide local authorities with detailed learner feedback data in July. Any data suggesting the quality of technology may have impacted upon learners' experiences can be used by local authorities to inform targeted interventions. We have agreed with COSLA and ADES that we will factor questions relating to ICT into a forthcoming survey of local authorities. The survey is specifically about use of technology to support education and will be structured around the four objectives in our Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy. We expect to have the findings from that survey in late 2019.

The national Gaelic Medium Education Standardised Assessment (MCNG)

That Scottish Government:

6.1 Working with local authorities and schools, proceed with the implementation of the national Gaelic Medium Education Standardised Assessment.

SG response

Accept. *The Gaelic medium standardised assessments were made available in December 2018 and many schools have now carried out assessments. The Scottish Government will continue to work with partners to enhance these assessments in time for the 2019/2020 school session and beyond.*

The future of the P1 SNSA

That Scottish Government:

7.1 Retain the P1 SNSA to inform professional judgements about learning and teaching but address the recommendations identified in this Review, particularly in respect of the P1 literacy SNSA.

SG response

Accept. *The Scottish Government welcomes the Review's conclusion that P1 SNSA should be continued and is committed to ensuring that, when used as part of the full range of assessment evidence available to teachers, the assessments play a valuable part in informing professional judgements about learning and teaching. The rest of this response sets out how the Scottish Government will take forward, with partners, the recommendations in the Review.*

7.2 Ensure that the purpose for collecting P1 SNSA data at national and local authority level is made clear in Government documentation and clarify how the P1 SNSA will contribute to narrowing the poverty related attainment gap. (See also Recommendation 1.1)

SG response

Accept. *As set out in the response to recommendation 1.1, the Scottish Government will develop and publish guidance on the purpose and use of P1 SNSA. We will ensure that such guidance makes explicit the link to narrowing the poverty related attainment gap and the improvement agenda more widely. It should be noted that there is no national collection of SNSA data.*

7.3 Retain the P1 Practitioner Forum to offer advice and support to teachers, schools, local authorities, Scottish Government and Education Scotland.

SG response

Accept. *The Scottish Government welcomes the work and recommendations of the Forum and plans to retain it for the 2019/2020 school session. The remit and membership of the Forum will be extended to include practitioners working with the Gaelic medium assessments.*