

EIS Advice on Education Scotland Statement on CfE and Benchmarks

Introduction

In August 2016, in recognition of the excessive workload and bureaucracy associated with the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence, the burdensome amount of support material and guidance, and the reported need for greater clarity around achievement of CfE levels, the Chief Inspector of Education published a statement on CfE (Curriculum for Excellence: A Statement for Practitioners from HM Chief Inspector of Education) accompanied by Benchmarks for Literacy and English, and Numeracy.

This correspondence was coupled with a letter to all teachers from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills who expressed determination to tackle 'workload, confusion and duplication'.

The EIS welcomes the key messages within the statement which strongly echo the recommendations of the Tackling Bureaucracy reports, and which give clear direction to teachers that excessive paperwork and electronic form-filling that lead to unproductive workload are not acceptable and, indeed, should be challenged.

This advice note is intended to support EIS members to act collectively in applying the key messages from the most recent Education Scotland statement within their establishments, in order that what has previously been little more than rhetoric becomes a reality, and excessive workload associated with planning, teaching and assessment is genuinely reduced.

Planning Learning, Teaching and Assessment Using the Experiences and Outcomes: Key messages

The EIS welcomes the emphasis on curriculum de-cluttering within this section of the statement. While many of the initiatives that have found their way into the curriculum in recent years are well-intentioned, for example 1+2 Modern Languages and STEM, they have generated additional work for teachers and placed additional strain on an already overcrowded curriculum.

With regards to planning processes, it is the view of the EIS that those which are multi-levelled-strategic, monthly and daily- are hugely demanding of time, do not support the delivery of high quality learning and teaching, and are not based on professional trust. Neither are they required by Education Scotland for inspection purposes.

Education Scotland advice is that teachers **should not and should not be asked to:**

- Write rigid, overly lengthy and detailed forward plans
- Plan coverage of every Experience and Outcome
- Spend large amounts of time completing daily/ weekly plans and evaluations
- Deliver too many learning activities within a given time period
- Deliver Interdisciplinary Learning activities which do not allow for genuine depth and application of learning

The statement goes so far as to say:

‘All planning must focus directly on enhancing the learner journey. When asked to complete paperwork which does not directly relate to improving the learner journey, challenge this with your colleagues.’

The Cabinet Secretary’s letter echoes this.

‘I hope it (the statement) will help you to make judgments about what needs to be done and what does not. It is perhaps best summed up by the comments of one teacher to me: “Don’t do anything unless it is relevant to the learner’s journey”.’

Advice for EIS School Reps and Members

The EIS agrees that overly-bureaucratic practice should be challenged and encourages EIS members to do this collectively.

With this in mind, it is advisable for EIS members to consider and discuss at Branch meetings, the extent to which planning processes in their establishments are in line with Education Scotland direction, taking account of the good practice in relation to planning outlined in the statement and echoing the Tackling Bureaucracy Reports. Planning should be proportionate, include the level of detail that will best support pupil learning and professional dialogue, and should be realistic in terms of the number of learning activities. Daily plans should be viewed as working notes, mainly for the use of class teachers.

Where members in a school are being asked to do any of things listed as unacceptable by Education Scotland with regards to planning, the matter should be raised by the EIS School Representative on behalf of members with the Headteacher with the aim of reaching satisfactory agreement.

Members are reminded that all aspects of planning should:

- be accounted for within the school’s Working Time Agreement
- be designed and agreed on a collegiate basis (as indicated in the statement)
- be consistent with any LNCT agreements/ policies on planning (copies of these can be obtained from Local Association Secretaries)
- strongly incorporate professional dialogue (with time made available for this)
- directly relate to enhancing the learning experience (as indicated in the statement).

In the event of there being no satisfactory agreement, the School Representative should contact the Local Association Secretary for advice.

Where an individual is asked to carry out a task in a way which is contrary to the Education Scotland advice, she or he should engage in relevant professional discussion with the line manager and seek advice as necessary from the School Representative in the first instance, or the Local Association Secretary.

Planning Learning, Teaching and Assessment Using the Benchmarks

The purpose of the Benchmarks in Literacy and English, and Numeracy, according to Education Scotland, is to set out clear statements of what children and young people need to learn to achieve the next level of the curriculum. The benchmarks streamline and embed a wide range of existing guidance- significant aspects of learning, progression frameworks and annotated exemplification- to support teachers’ professional judgment for each curriculum level.

The Benchmarks describe the standards that children and young people need to meet to achieve a level and are grouped together to support holistic assessment rather than assessment of individual Experiences and Outcomes.

The Benchmarks should be used to help monitor progress towards achievement of a level and to support overall professional judgement of when a learner has achieved a curriculum level. They support professional dialogue, moderation and monitoring of progress in learning.

Education Scotland states that evidence of progress and achievement will come from:

- observing day-to-day learning within, and outwith, the classroom
- coursework, including tests.
- learning conversations.
- planned periodic holistic assessments.
- information from standardised assessments.

Achievement of a level is based on evidence and on overall professional judgement of the extent to which the learner has:

- achieved a breadth of learning across the knowledge, understanding and skills as set out in the Experiences and Outcomes for the level;
- responded consistently well to the level of challenge set out in the experiences and outcomes for the level and has moved forward to learning at the next level in some aspects;
- demonstrated application of what they have learned in new and unfamiliar situations.

It is not necessary for learners to demonstrate evidence of every aspect of learning within the Benchmarks before moving on to the next level. However, it is important that to ensure that there are no major gaps in children's and young people's learning, for example with respect to the relevant organisers in each curriculum area.

The EIS concurs with the view that the primary purpose of assessment is to support learning and that teacher judgment must be at the heart of what should be an holistic process. Formative assessment based on teacher professional judgement should be the central approach until pupils reach the senior phase and are at the stage of sitting qualifications as set by external bodies. Teacher professionalism and autonomy in determining how and when to assess learners in the best interests of future progress are of key importance.

Education Scotland advice is that teachers **should not and should not be asked to:**

- Spend time on assessment activities which do not help identify next steps in learning
- Over-assess learners or duplicate assessment
- Gather evidence of every aspect of learning within the Benchmarks before moving on to the next level
- Track progress using the terms 'developing, consolidating, secure'
- Gather large portfolios of assessment evidence
- Track and record progress against individual Experiences and Outcomes
- Spend too much time collecting a wide range of evidence for moderation purposes
- Write lengthy reports for parents containing extraneous detail.

Advice for EIS School Reps and Members

Again, in light of these directions, EIS members should discuss current approaches to assessment and reporting within their establishment, taking account of the good practice described in the statement.

In the event of current practice within the school breaching the advice of Education Scotland, the matter should be raised by the School Representative on behalf of members with the Headteacher, with the aim of agreeing satisfactory policies on assessment, moderation and reporting.

All aspects of assessment, moderation, tracking, monitoring and reporting should:

- be accounted for within the school's Working Time Agreement
- be designed and agreed on a collegiate basis (as indicated in the statement)
- be consistent with the relevant LNCT agreements/ agreed policy (copies can be obtained from Local Association Secretaries).

In the event of there being no satisfactory agreement, the School Representative should contact the Local Association Secretary.

Where an individual is asked to carry out an assessment-related task or approach in a way which is contrary to the Education Scotland advice, she or he should engage in relevant professional discussion with the line manager and seek advice as necessary from the School Representative in the first instance, or the Local Association Secretary.