



The Educational
Institute of Scotland

Mr John Swinney MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
EDINBURGH
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Dear John

Thank you for your invitation to set out the view of the EIS in relation to reducing excessive workload for teachers. The Institute welcomes the fact that you have stated quite publically your intention to address this issue in order to allow a clear focus on the issue of raising attainment and ensuring equity in our system.

Whilst not wishing to demur from the timetable you have set out, as we agree that urgent action is required, may I just underline the EIS view that it is more important to get these matters correct than to make quick decisions. Many of the pressures within the system, particularly around the issue of National Qualifications, are there as a result of previous decisions being made to meet timeline imperatives.

That said, I enclose for your consideration a range of options which, if taken, would alleviate significantly teacher concerns around excessive workload. Some of these are big ticket items which may well require further discussion/negotiation and some are relatively straightforward. May I also make the point at the outset that teachers have always been prepared to go that extra mile for pupils in their care – the key issue for most teachers around excessive workload is that they feel that many of the demands being made of them add little to, indeed often detract from, the core purpose of teaching and learning.

We have set out issues in what, hopefully, is a fairly straight-forward manner. Clearly we could develop lengthier arguments around our proposals, including citing appropriate evidence, but as this would have led to a something of a weightier tome, we merely summarise the key issues whilst being willing to provide further thinking where requested.

Before dealing with specific areas, it is perhaps worth rehearsing some of our discussions around how schools are supported. Austerity driven cuts have seen many local authorities strip out previous support layers such as QIOs; even at Directorate level there has been a move towards corporate structures involving the merging of

departments and the diminution of pedagogical leadership at Council level, recognised in part by Scottish Government's introduction of a statutory requirement to have a Chief Education Officer. In some local authority areas this lack of support has reached critical stage.

Combined with this at a national level Education Scotland, an organisation we work with successfully on a number of fronts, is not, in the view of the EIS, providing sufficient support to schools to compensate for losses elsewhere.

We are attracted to a model where a realignment of school support sees much of the direct support function of Education Scotland move to a more local basis (regional), potentially working across local authority boundaries and providing an additional resource for schools, and indeed Local Authorities, which might enable the "leading from the middle" agenda around classroom practice and professional dialogue, without requiring significant structural changes to how Scottish Education is governed. We would be pleased to discuss this area further.

We have tabulated our suggestions for action to reduce workload in the attached paper but I include below summary paragraphs in relation to the keys areas your set out in your letter.

Not directly related to workload, but a key element in the drive to raise attainment, is the position of Nursery education. No one with a genuine commitment to deliver high quality early years education and childcare would design our current range of pre-5 provision as it lacks coherence and aim. Given the recognised importance of pre-5 services generally and nursery education in particular in terms of creating a level base of opportunity, Scottish Government might wish to consider being absolutely bold and determined in the pre-5 sector by looking at a statutory framework of entitlement to state funded and provided nursery education to ensure that the 3-6 entitlement of the CfE Framework becomes a reality, rather than the current inequality of access which is the experience of so many families.

In relation to primary schools, the excellent Tackling Bureaucracy report sets out the key drivers of excess bureaucracy and recommends a series of actions. Given that every organisation in Scottish education signed up to this report, the question might be asked as to why it still is not fully implemented nearly 4 years after its publication. Put simply, there needs to be much stronger messaging from all agencies involved that certain practices are not acceptable e.g. school reports which focus discretely on every E and O stream. HMIE and ADES have clear roles here.

Actions such as the above would be key drivers in "decluttering" the Primary curriculum, an ambition you have cited as a key objective.

This does raise the question you asked of the EIS when we met, about the appropriate balance between direction and autonomy; at the moment matters are out of kilter and some directional input might serve to helpfully realign the system.

One footnote to that would be that communications from Scottish Government, or from Education Scotland or the SQA, need to be much more focussed. Scottish

Education has suffered over the past few years from an almost manic desire to overwrite the simplest of messages, for reasons it might not be helpful to rehearse at this stage.

Moving on to Secondary school the single biggest area requiring action is the Senior Phase, where frankly, the three stated CfE objectives of maintaining breadth of study (including vocational options), of creating space for deeper learning, and of reducing the assessment burden have simply not been achieved, primarily because of a lack of system level leadership. The EIS remains committed to these principles but the current situation, which has led to national industrial action on our part, needs immediate action. We set out some proposals in the attached document. I also attach, for ease of reference, the summary paper we provided to the Review Group on National Qualifications in terms of the stripping out of duplication between unit assessment and external exam (we have provided also the full return from members which amounted to over 350 replies).

Our view is sought in relation to S1-S3 BGE, also. It is difficult to disentangle the connections between BGE and Senior Phase, especially around the interface years of S3, but many of the issues raised in relation to the Primary BGE experience would apply to secondary, also: the Tackling Bureaucracy report, reporting, assessment etc.

Finally, we include in our proposed actions a number of areas which have purchase across all phases of the 3-18 Curriculum: class-sizes; presumption of mainstreaming and resources around ASN; collegiate leadership and professional voice; professional learning entitlements; and the issue of teacher numbers, supply teachers and the need for a national minimum staffing standard.

The Institute is open to further discussion and requests for elaboration on all of these matters.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Flanagan', written over a faint, light-colored signature line.

Larry Flanagan
General Secretary
Educational Institute of Scotland