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Interim Advice Note on the National Improvement Framework for EIS Members, School Representatives and Local Association Secretaries

Introduction

The National Improvement Framework (NIF) was published in January 2016, aspects of which are of immediate significance to EIS members this term for two key reasons.

Firstly, data on CfE levels for Literacy and Numeracy based on teacher professional judgement will be collected for P1, P4, P7 and S3 from all schools by local authorities, on behalf of the Scottish Government, by the end of June 2016. Following a period of quality assurance by local authorities (the EIS is clear that this check should relate only to data-gathering processes and completion), this data will be submitted to the Scottish Government by August 31st 2016.

Secondly, the four key priorities that are laid out within the National Improvement Framework and the key drivers of improvement should feature in school improvement planning for Session 2016-17, guidance to this effect having been issued to schools recently by Education Scotland. The four key priorities are:

- Improvement in attainment, particularly in literacy and numeracy;
- Closing the attainment gap between the most and least disadvantaged children;
- Improvement in children and young people's health and wellbeing;
- Improvement in employability skills and sustained school leaver destinations for all young people.

6 areas of Scottish education, identified as key drivers of improvement are: School Leadership, Teacher Professionalism, Parental Engagement, Assessment of Children's Progress, School Improvement and Performance Information.

This, of course, has implications for School Improvement Planning discussions and Working Time Agreement negotiations.

This interim assessment advice is being issued by the Education Committee of the EIS in response to both of those factors exclusively- collection of CfE levels and improvement planning reflecting NIF priorities and drivers. It does not seek to address the wider implications of the NIF, many of which relate to the assessment of children's progress and the use of National Standardised Assessment which is proposed to be fully in use during Session 2017-18. More detailed policy

advice in relation to assessment will follow next session following consideration by the Education Committee and EIS Council.

Background

The National Improvement Framework has been introduced to address the Scottish Government's priority to raise attainment and improve equity of educational outcome between Scotland's most and least deprived children and young people.

There will be an annual report in each of the 6 areas identified as key drivers above, the stated purpose of the report to inform next steps for improvement and to assist with the targeting of support and resources as necessary.

Assessment of children's progress has been at the forefront of discussions on NIF due to the controversial inclusion of plans to deploy national standardised assessments. The EIS challenged early drafts of the NIF which articulated an intention to test cohorts of young people across the country within a given assessment timetable and to have the results of these tests published school by school.

Having made strong representation around the educational arguments against such measures the EIS welcomes that the final version of NIF:

- recognises the importance and primacy of teacher professional judgement in the assessment of pupils;

- confirms CfE levels achieved based on teacher judgement, informed in part by the results of standardised assessment alongside other assessment evidence, as the basis for public information;

- indicates that standardised test scores will not be collected (other than on an anonymised sampling basis) nor published for P1, P4, P7 and S3;

- does not require that pupils be assessed at a specific point in the year;

- does not specify explicitly that all pupils must sit standardised assessments, recognising the primacy of pupil learning needs;

- is underpinned by the assumption that current standardised testing / assessment across the primary sector will be made redundant by the provision of national standardised assessments.

Design of the standardised assessments is still a work in progress and the tendering process has yet to begin. The assessments are due to be piloted post-Christmas 2016 and then to be available for session 2017/18. Given this timetable, details of how they will work in practice clearly are not yet fully known; however, the EIS will oppose any aspects of the final design that is found to be in conflict with EIS policy on assessment, the key elements of which are highlighted later in this document.

Teacher Professional Judgement Collection 2016

The EIS is clear that the collection of data for 2016 must be based on existing practice in schools and not be treated as an additional workload imposition which sits outside existing Working Time Agreements for 2015/16. If this means that there are some gaps, or inconsistencies, in the response to the request from Scottish Government for the data listed below, that simply needs to be the case. In effect, responses should report an honest reflection of where schools are at the moment. Members should not engage in additional assessment practices or reporting simply to appear to respond to the demands of the NIF. There has been an acceptance by Scottish Government, in various fora, that there will be a level of inconsistency across the data garnered from local authorities as this remains an early stage in the implementation of the NIF.

Pupil level data for each individual pupil will be collected from all local authority primary, secondary, special and grant-aided schools on:

- Numeracy
- Literacy- Reading (English)
- Literacy- Writing (English)
- Literacy- Listening and Talking (English)

For pupils based in Gaelic Medium Primary Schools, pupil level data will also be recorded for:

- Literacy - Literacy- Reading (Gaidhlig)
- Literacy- Writing (Gaidhlig)
- Literacy- Listening and Talking (Gaidhlig)

Relevant information will also be collected from standalone special schools/ units where pupils are working to achieve individual milestones even though these may be unrelated to CfE levels.

Forming Teacher Judgement

The EIS is of the firm view that teacher judgments should be based on a variety of assessment evidence gathered from a broad range of learning activities and experiences over the course of the time during which a pupil has been working within a Curriculum for Excellence level. The EIS believes that, in the process of teachers arriving at judgements of pupils' progress through CfE levels, no single piece or type of evidence should be used as the basis of assessment judgements.

EIS assessment policy clearly states the value of formative assessment, and regards it to be intrinsic to effective learning and teaching that is tailored to the needs of individual pupils.

EIS policy also recognises the value of summative assessment that is judiciously and appropriately used and questions the value and validity of externally created summative tests which are not aligned closely to pupil learning in the classroom.

Information gathered from Local Associations by the Education Committee this session has shown that standardised tests/ assessments are being used in many local authorities across Scotland involving the presentation of whole cohorts of pupils, often at set points in the school session.

The EIS believes that the value and validity of standardised assessments is very much dependent on the purpose for which they are being used and on their relevance to pupil learning. Standardised tests which are diagnostic can provide additional information to support the progress of individual pupils and therefore can be helpful. EIS policy is opposed to the use of standardised tests/

assessments for the purposes of data-gathering to enable the setting or streaming of pupils by ability; school by school comparison; or the creation of accountability measures. The EIS believes that all assessment must genuinely support learning.

In summary the EIS view is that:

- no single piece or type of evidence should be used as the basis of overall assessment of pupil progress;
- assessment evidence should be derived from a wide range of learning experiences and activities;

- the body of assessment evidence leading to professional judgement of pupil progress should be gathered over the period of time at which a pupil is working at a CfE level;

- all assessment, both formative and summative, should be planned and conducted at a time and in a way that serves the best interests of pupils' individual learning.

Moderation

Existing EIS policy endorses the role of professional dialogue in the development of teacher judgement of pupils' progress, in line with the statement within Building the Curriculum 5 that:

> *'Professional dialogue is central to the creation of this shared understanding. Schools need to create space for sharing ideas among staff internally and for teachers to engage in various external discussions.'*

As part of the package of support materials to be provided to schools ahead of the data-gathering exercise and in response to NIF, Education Scotland recently issued advice to schools on arriving at professional judgement of pupils' progress through CfE levels, entitled 'Achievement of a Level'.

While it is a useful document for schools in that it reiterates aspects of the original CfE assessment approach, it does not reflect fully the varying degrees to which schools and local authorities are engaged in, and have negotiated time committed to, the scale of moderation that is advised in the document.

It is the view of the EIS Education Committee that the approach to moderation outlined in the advice is aspirational, and that, in most cases, because of the significant investment of time demanded, it is highly unlikely that the range and depth of moderation activities described will have been overtaken by teachers.

It must be accepted in that case that the data which will be supplied on CfE levels this term is on the basis of the much more modest moderation activities for which time will have been made available within Working Time Agreements for Session 2015-16. It may indeed be the case that time for moderation will not have been assigned within some WTAs for Session 2015-16.

Implications for Workload

Given the mid-session publication date of the NIF and the subsequent advice from Education Scotland, Working Time Agreements for session 2015-16 do not take account of the full implications of either.

Regarding the collection of teacher judgement of CfE levels, the EIS is clear that the provision of such information by teachers to local authorities in the first instance, should not result in any increased workload. Appropriate data of this nature is likely already to have been recorded as part of an establishment's usual assessment and reporting procedures and so providing teacher professional judgement data should, in most cases, simply involve the appropriate transfer of data to local authorities. **It is for local authorities to cull the data from their existing arrangements and EIS members should resist additional duties in this regard.**

In the event of a dispute arising with regard to this area the school representative should raise the matter with the Local Association Secretary who should in turn raise it with the local authority.

Working Time Agreements for session 2015-16 are likely to have included time for moderation. In instances of any time allocated for moderation still being available, it could be used in some of the ways outlined in the Education Scotland advice. Where there is no remaining available time for moderation within the Working Time Agreement, members should bring to the attention of the school representative any attempts to introduce additional moderation activities by the management of the school with a view to a suitable resolution being negotiated. Again, in the event of this being unsuccessful, the matter should be raised with the Local Association Secretary.

Working Time Agreements for Session 2016-17 should reflect the priorities in the School Improvement Plan as they relate to NIF.

NIF and School Improvement Planning

The EIS is clear that school improvement plans (SIPs) must be realistic and deliverable within the parameters of Working Time Agreements. Taking account of the 4 key priorities highlighted in NIF, and the 6 drivers of improvement, in addition to local authority priorities and school priorities as identified through self-evaluation, is a significant challenge, but planning must be proportionate in relation to resources, most particularly the time available.

While the expectation is that SIPs should reflect the NIF, it is worth noting that Education Scotland has recognised that the extent to which individual schools take forward the individual NIF priorities, and work around the drivers of improvement, will be dependent on local circumstances. Education Scotland also recognises that SIPs must be balanced in light of the findings of the Tackling Bureaucracy Working Group and should be delivered within the collegiate hours available within Working Time Agreements.

Local Assessment Policy

In particular, EIS members and representatives should seek to be involved in and to influence discussions around the development of local authority and establishment-based assessment policy in light of publication of the NIF.

Although the details of how standardised assessments will operate are yet to be finalised, it is possible that some local authorities will make pre-emptive adaptations to existing policy on assessment. It is important that the EIS is involved in any such policy review at LNCT and

establishment level. In so doing, they should endeavour to ensure that EIS priorities in this area are taken account of and reflected within assessment policy at both levels.

Key principles of EIS policy on assessment

- 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.

- Confidence in and the reliability of teacher professional judgement should be developed through professional dialogue at all stages in the learning and teaching process.

- This must be supported by the provision of allocated time for meaningful moderation activities, including the planning of assessment and understanding of standards.

- Teacher professionalism and autonomy in determining how and when to assess learners are of key importance.

- Assessment methodology and the timing of assessment should be tailored to the particular learning needs of individual pupils.

- It is therefore unlikely to be appropriate for whole cohorts or classes of pupils to be assessed at the same time using the same assessment tool.

- Standardised tests/ assessments can be useful diagnostic tools but are of limited value to learning, teaching and assessment as a whole.

- The use of any kind of standardised tests/assessments in schools should therefore be limited.

- The use of standardised testing/ assessment for the purposes of data-gathering to enable the setting and streaming of pupils by ability, school to school comparison or the creation of accountability measures is not in the interests of learning and teaching.

- Where standardised tests/ assessments are in use, their results should not be treated as an exclusive measure of learners' progress and achievement.

- Assessment judgments should be based on a range of assessment conducted over the period of time at which a pupil has been working within a particular CfE level.
- This broad approach to assessment should be reflected in reporting to parents and carers, with information being fully contextualised- no single item of assessment data should be reported in isolation.

- At points of transition, time should be made available to teachers to share this assessment information to support future learning.

Taking account of the recent 'Achieving a Level' advice from Education Scotland, assessment policy should reflect a commitment to the provision of time for teachers to collaborate in the planning of learning and assessment; to observe learning and assessment in process; and to evaluate outcomes collaboratively to ensure a shared understanding of, and reliable information gathered from, assessment to support further progress by learners. Such commitment should be reflected also in Working Time Agreements.

The policy should also reflect a commitment by the local authority to offer opportunities for professional learning for teachers in a range of assessment approaches and practices and to support moderation and understanding of standards through moderation within primary schools; among primary schools in a cluster; within and across departments in secondary schools; across secondary departments within a learning community; and across sectors.

Action

National

Nationally the EIS will continue to monitor the implementation of NIF and awaits with particular interest, the details of standardised assessment design and implementation. In the event of there being duplication of assessment across local and national approaches the EIS will expect new national standardised assessments to replace those in use currently within local authorities.

Local Associations

Local Association Secretaries/ LNCT Joint Secretaries should seek to review local policy on assessment within the broad general education (Early Years to S3) with the aim of ensuring that it accurately reflects the principles of CfE and EIS policy on assessment as outlined within this advice note.

In addition to those raised by NIF, issues around the Tackling Bureaucracy Report and the subsequent Follow-up Report should be considered. Of particular importance are the statements that assessment judgements should be based on evidence drawn mainly from day-to-day teaching and learning, and that schools should focus on assessing progress in Significant Aspects of Learning (SALs), rather than at the level of individual Experiences and Outcomes.

Revisiting original CfE documentation on assessment may also be helpful. For example, BtC5 states that 'Assessment activity should not dominate the learning process. Assessment must be proportionate and sustainable, and the demands it places on teachers' time should be carefully monitored.'

School Branches

EIS members in schools should ensure that the assessment policy of the school is consistent with that agreed at LNCT level and should endeavour to influence practice in line with EIS policy on assessment as outlined within this advice note.

Conclusion

In summary, the key points of advice in relation to Professional Judgment Collection and School Improvement Planning as part of the NIF are:

- The data being gathered should come from existing assessment practice and members are advised that there is no need to engage in additional assessment or reporting to meet the NIF requests.

- Existing WTAs for 2015/16 pertain and members should resist any additional workload impositions.

- In terms of School Improvement Planning and WTAs for 2016 / 17 realistic time allocations for activity related to the NIF require to be made.

- Where specific concerns arise at a school level, the school representative should raise these with the Local Association Secretary for advice and/or further action.

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