THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

Scottish Government Consultation on the Development of a Digital Learning and Teaching Strategy for Scotland

EIS Response

Question 1

Is the strategy founded on the right principles?

Yes

Are there other principles that should be considered?

The EIS believes that the five principles are sufficient though there could be explicit reference to equity and/ or equality in the section headed 'Opportunities for all learners'.

Question 2

Are the four key themes identified the right ones to focus on?

Yes, though the EIS would stress that the use of digital technology by pupils should be appropriate to the learning context as judged by teachers. Equally, teacher judgment should determine assessment methodology in accordance with the purpose of the assessment, the needs of the learner and the requirements of teachers as assessors of pupils' progress. At present, in the professional judgment of many teachers, ICT tracking and monitoring systems that are in operation such as SEEMIS are not fit for purpose and are generators of additional workload the products of which teachers find to be of little value.

Are there other themes that should be considered?

The EIS recognises the need for high-quality professional learning opportunities to support teacher confidence and skill in use of digital technology in light of the rapid pace of change in this area. This is particularly pertinent in the context of the demands of digital tracking and monitoring and of growing expectation that teachers engage with ICT platforms such as Insight for the purpose of data analysis to inform practice.

The EIS is of the view that consideration should be given to how ICT systems for the purposes of tracking, monitoring and reporting can be designed in such a way as to be genuinely user-friendly to practitioners and have a positive impact on reducing teacher workload. Direct consultation with teachers in relation to IT system design would be helpful in this regard.

Question 3

Do you agree with the priorities for action outlined in the 'leaders' theme?

Mostly.

Are there other actions that should be considered?

The EIS broadly supports the action points but has concerns over the introduction of another national priority for education at this time: workload burdens for school leaders, the ever increasing demands in relation to school improvement plans and the potential resulting workload increase for the majority of our members are live issues, as acknowledged by the Scottish Government within recent SNCT negotiations.

There is also real concern about how funding will be made available to enable schools to capture the 'vision for digital technology' within improvement plans and to meet any increase in expectations around digital technology with regards to school inspections. Vision alone cannot deliver outcomes.

The EIS welcomes the aim of making digital technology research widely accessible to practitioners.

Question 4

Do you agree with the priorities for action outlined in the 'access' theme? (Page 17)

Yes

Are there other actions that should be considered?

Our members welcome any steps to make school IT infrastructure more 'user-friendly' as currently many experience frustration at time wasted with inadequate IT systems. We have concerns over parity of access to high-speed broadband, particularly in the more rural areas of Scotland as we believe all learners should benefit from the same opportunities. The EIS believes that schools will find it increasingly challenging to fund the purchase of new technologies such as tablet computers in the context of swingeing budget cuts.

Question 5

Do you agree with the priorities for action outlined in the 'curriculum and assessment' theme?

In part. The EIS is of the view that schools and teachers are not in a position currently to engage in curriculum review and development on the scale suggested within the document. Workload demands as they currently sit are unsustainable. Only with the elimination of other priorities could there be further significant development with regards to the place of digital technology within curriculum and assessment.

Regarding the aim of developing and embedding approaches to assessment that make full use of digital technology, the EIS view, as previously stated, is that this should be as appropriate to the context as determined by teacher professional judgement.

Are there other actions that should be considered?

Time for practitioners to engage with curricular change must be embedded in any strategy which is brought forward in this area. The EIS would support the use of IT systems to support assessment, if this was an aid to teacher professional judgement, part of a range of assessment material and effective in reducing workload. Currently, many of our members have concern over use of systems such as SEEMIS and Insight. In addition, any enhancement of learners' entitlement to ICT access and increased use of digital technology by teachers would require significant investment in digital technologies infrastructure in schools.

The EIS recognises the potential for technology to support young people, especially those with additional support needs, to engage with certain assessment activities. However, the EIS is also clear that ICT support is not always the best means by which to support children and young people's engagement. The availability of assistive technology, for example, should not mean that ICT becomes the presumed method of support in every case. The individual needs of each child and young person must be fully considered in the course of such decisions being made.

Consideration must also be given to the fact that children and young people often lack the level of ICT literacy, skill and dexterity to obtain the full advantage from using digital technology for the purposes of assessment. Indeed, for some young people, ICT is a barrier to achievement in this context.

Question 6

Do you agree with the priorities for action outlined in the 'teachers' theme? (Pages 20-21)

Yes

Are there other actions that should be considered?

Currently in schools, especially at key times for reporting and monitoring, access for teachers to computers in schools can be problematic. Essentially there are not enough computers in schools for the numbers of pupils who require to use them, the difficulty compounded when teachers also need to access the same limited number of computers during the school day.

Whilst many teachers may choose to engage with the GTCS Standard for Career Long Professional Learning, they are required only to meet the Standard for Full Registration. The EIS feels language in paragraph 4 of page 20 requires amendment to clear up any ambiguity in the sentence about 'meeting' both Standards.

Question 7

Would you be willing to share your experiences of digital learning and teaching with us?

Yes

If so, please provide the details you would like us to use to contact you (e.g. an email address) in the box below.

abradley@eis.org.uk

Question 8

Is there anything else you wish to add about the strategy?

The EIS believes the cores aims in the strategy are sound but notes that there is no acknowledgement of the financial challenges faced by schools. Without significant additional funding in IT (hardware, software and broadband infrastructure); investment in quality career long professional learning; and alleviation of existing workload, it is likely that implementation of the aims will be patchy and will intensify the issue of inequality of experience and outcome across our schools.

Furthermore, our members will have significant concern over workload implications if this strategy is seen to be an additional burden upon school improvement plans. Additional resourcing, both in time and in budgetary terms will be vital if it is to be successful.