

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
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Sgilean

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Education, Children and Young People
Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Dear Convener,

I am responding to the Committee's request on the 6th October 2023 to receive an update on the implementation of the recommendations from the OECD report *Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: Into the Future* (published June 2021).

As you indeed acknowledge in your letter, the implementation of the OECD recommendations will necessarily have to be considered in light of the subsequent reports commissioned to look at key OECD recommendations in more depth, and the wider education and skills reform landscape. Decisions on reform including the future of qualifications and assessment, which is of course inextricably linked to curriculum and pedagogy, will not be taken lightly. It is right that we are taking the time necessary to properly consider it and understand the potential impact on schools, teachers and pupils.

I intend to update Parliament, providing more detail on next steps in education and skills reform. Those next steps will be set in the context of Programme for Government commitments to tackle poverty and improve educational equity, and ensure sustainable public services.

Turning to progress we are making on taking forward the OECD recommendations while acknowledging the above context, the following provides an update against the four key areas identified in the OECD report.

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Balance Curriculum for Excellence so students can fully benefit from a coherent learning experience from 3 to 18 years:

Education Scotland are leading a partnership approach to taking forward work on related recommendations focussing on better alignment between the broad general education and senior phase in particular, through piloting curriculum review approaches. Work is being taken forward alongside teachers, practitioners and key stakeholders such as the Association of Directors of Education (ADES), in particular the ADES Curriculum, Assessment and Qualifications Network¹. Other examples of work include the establishment of a National Timetable Group focused on sharing innovative approaches; development of a professional learning offer on curriculum design; a thought paper *Exploring the Four Capacities* and exploratory work on a Scottish Learner Profile.

Co-design and pilot curriculum review groups involving a total of more than 500 teachers and educators, local authority representatives and senior leaders are involved in the work. Initial pilot curriculum reviews were held in three curriculum areas (Maths, Health and Wellbeing and Social Subjects) in session 22/23 with follow up sessions planned in these areas for 23/24. An additional three curriculum area reviews in Modern Languages, Expressive Arts and English are planned for session 23/24. Members of the groups come from across all local authorities and national partner groups with representation from early years through to post school.

This approach reflects wider OECD advice and research on successful implementation of education reform and the significance of developing capacity, focusing on implementation processes and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Responses from the sessions has highlighted the enthusiasm from teachers to be involved in education reform work which supports professional development, improved classroom practice and ultimately better outcomes for pupils. Education Scotland provides regular updates to the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) on progress towards the implementation of these recommendations.

Combining effective collaboration with clear roles and responsibilities:

In June, I updated Parliament on how I planned to take forward Education and Skills Reform. This included the Scottish's Government's commitment to the reform of our national education bodies.

Work continues to develop plans for a new public body responsible for qualifications, a national education agency and an independent inspectorate, ensuring that we establish clearer accountability and well understood roles and responsibilities. This will help strengthen the support, experience, and outcomes for all those who use and rely on our education and skills infrastructure.

¹ The Curriculum and Qualifications Network is a network of curriculum leads within each local education authority, which meets approximately every quarter.

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As part of this, work is now at an advanced stage in the recruitment for a new Chair of SQA and for an interim HM Inspector of Education. These roles will provide enhanced leadership to support the development of the new bodies. The new Chair of SQA will, subject to Parliament, transfer to the new qualifications body.

Delivering new bodies will not in itself deliver all the change we require. I have therefore announced plans for a new national Centre of Teaching Excellence, recognising that excellent learning and teaching must be the foundation of all that we do in Scottish education. The Centre will be set up as part of the education reform programme, co-designed with teachers and professional associations and will put Scotland at the forefront of innovative research in teaching practice.

As I outlined in my June update to Parliament and as confirmed in the Programme for Government, legislation in respect of new national education bodies will be introduced in this parliamentary year allowing the government to draw on the independent reviews and reports that have been published. As part of my update on education and skills reform later this year, I will outline next steps with regards the national bodies.

Consolidating institutional policy processes for effective change:

Initial work on this recommendation, in particular the call to develop a systematic approach to curriculum review in Scotland, has been undertaken by Scottish Government supported by Education Scotland. Officials have engaged with stakeholders and drawn on a rapid evidence review supported by the OECD, which looks at international best practice. I am currently considering proposals for a potential systematic review process aiming to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant, forward looking, reflects the contemporary needs of our children and young people and ultimately supports high quality teaching and learning.

Leading the next steps for Curriculum for Excellence with a long-term view:

The government's implementation of this recommendation acknowledges that we are building on our education system's existing strengths. Fully implementing the recommendations of the OECD report will take time and while I remain committed to delivering these, things have moved on since the report's publication. The OECD stated that the recommendations should be delivered as a coherent package, not as individual policy actions, and in the context now of a number of reports which could lead to significant change, it is important that there is a holistic and co-ordinated response to all potential Education and Skills reform. I see the implementation of the OECD recommendations as part of this wider education reform landscape and as such the Action Plan will be updated following the Government response to the recent Reviews.

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I look forward to engaging and working with the committee to ensure education and skills reform delivers tangible benefits for those teaching, learning, and working throughout Scottish education and the skills sector.

Yours sincerely



JENNY GILRUTH

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