

F/T: 0300 244 4000
E: dfmcse@gov.scot

James Dornan MSP
Convener, Education and Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament

By email: es.committee@parliament.scot

08 November 2017

Dear James

Thank you for your letter of 5 October 2017 in which you requested information to support the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny exercise for 2018/19. I have addressed each of your points in turn below:

Prioritisation

My priority for the next financial year will be to continue to pursue relentlessly the delivery of excellence and equity in Scottish education. That is to ensure that every child has an equal chance to fulfil his or her potential and to deliver the best possible outcomes for all of our children. These dual aims will be delivered using a variety of mechanisms but will continue to be built upon the policy foundations of: Getting it Right for Every Child; Curriculum for Excellence; and Developing Scotland's Young Workforce.

A major part of this work for 2018/19 is the expansion of early learning and childcare. As you are aware, we are committed to almost doubling funded early learning and childcare entitlement to 1140 hours per year by 2020 for all three and four year olds and eligible 2 year olds. Additional resource, both revenue and capital, will be required in order to support this expansion and we are committed to meeting these costs. However, this must be delivered efficiently whilst ensuring that a high quality service is provided. We have now set out our assessment of the levels of multi-year funding to deliver the expansion to 1140 hours in order to provide certainty to local authorities and providers to proceed with planning and implementing the expansion.

Furthermore, you are correct to highlight additional support for learning as a specific priority of this government. The Scottish Government wants all children and young people to get the support that they need to reach their full learning potential, and we continue to support education authorities in meeting the duties placed on them by the Additional Support for Learning Act to identify, provide for, and review the additional support needs of their pupils.

For example, we are preparing for the extension of rights under the Additional Support for Learning Act for eligible children, as a result of amendments through the Education (Scotland) Act 2016, which has included consulting on the revised Supporting Children's Learning Code of Practice and associated regulations. Other consultations include: a ten year strategy for the learning provision for children and young people with complex additional support needs; guidance to improve educational outcomes for Traveller children; and guidance on healthcare needs in schools. As this work continues we will also progress our commitment to conduct an experiential review of children's experiences in relation to additional support for learning alongside a consultation on revised guidance on presumption of mainstreaming.

In addition and in line with our specific commitment to additional support for learning, we will be proposing that people supporting teachers who have direct contact with pupils as part of the learning process, including those providing additional support for learning, should be regulated by the new Education Workforce Council (EWCS). It is intended that the EWCS will seek to support their professionalism; suitability and standards of conduct; training; and development. We will be shortly consulting on the establishment of the Education Workforce Council.

Education Scotland are also working to deliver the recommendations of the 'Making Sense Working Group: Dyslexia' including delivering increased access to high quality learning for parents and practitioners, and designing and implementing curricular developmental milestones for learners with complex additional support needs.

It should however be noted that the ultimate responsibility for delivering additional support for learning does sit with local authorities. In meeting this statutory duty local authorities have increased funding on additional support needs by over £80 million (16%) between 2012 and 2016. Furthermore, in 2015-16 education authorities spent £584 million, which is 12% of the total amount that education authorities spend on education, on additional support for learning.

Preventative spending

Our work on the Scottish Attainment Challenge seeks to provide preventative support for children and young people at risk of poor outcomes due to poverty. We are investing £750 million over the course of this Parliament to ensure that we can make demonstrable progress in closing the poverty related attainment gap. The Scottish Attainment Challenge was the first in the world to take an early intervention approach to reducing the gap by focussing on children in primary school. We have subsequently extended the programme to include secondary school, but we remain clear that early intervention and prevention are the cornerstone of our approach to delivering better outcomes for our young people.

We also continue to implement our 'Getting it Right for Looked After Children and Young people' strategy which has early engagement as one of its cornerstones. By this we mean the engagement with families to respond to difficulties before they escalate and potentially cause significant harm. To encourage early engagement, we support a number of community planning partnerships via our Realigning Children's Services programme. This aims to improve collaborative decision making on the use of the total available resource to best meet the needs of - and improve outcomes for – children and families; and to consider ways to invest in earlier intervention and prevention by making better use of evidence and improved partnership working.

Our Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) programme is a further example of how we are utilising preventative spending through an early intervention approach to youth unemployment. By investing in employer engagement in education; an expansion of college based learning for senior phase pupils; and growth in apprenticeships including new foundation and graduate apprenticeships, we have improved the options for young people as they progress through their education. On 9 October we announced the achievement of the headline target for DYW – a 40% reduction in youth unemployment – four years ahead of schedule.

The 15-24 Learner Journey Review is another area in which preventative spending may be utilised. The review is examining the efficiency and effectiveness of progressions for 15-24 year olds through the education system, a period where there are many options and choices to be made from the learner's perspective. It is also assessing our tertiary education system from the perspective of what our society and our economy require in terms of the balance of skills and qualifications. The aim is to support young people to make and sustain positive choices and to ensure that our investment matches these ambitions as efficiently as possible. The Stage 1 report, to be published by the end of the year, will set out proposed improvements to the learner journey with specific reference to: careers advice and guidance; college application processes; senior phase provision; transition and progression including college to university articulation; winter leavers; and graduate apprenticeships and funding.

This year we have also embarked on an improvement project involving five colleges across the country to better understand and find ways of improving student retention and attainment rates. By applying tried and tested improvement science methods the participating colleges, with SG professional support, will be developing preventative approaches to ensure that more students stay the course and achieve the level of qualifications and skills training they are capable of with the aim of sharing and applying improved practice across the sector as a whole.

Value for money, evaluation and outcomes

As you will know, all of the work taken forward by the Scottish Government aims to contribute to the delivery of the National Performance Framework outcomes and indicators.

Evaluations such as the 2015 OECD review into Scottish education and on-going inspections conducted by Education Scotland provide a useful overview of the impact of the policies and programmes the education portfolio is taking forward. Reviews of specific programmes and policies also take place. For example, the work around Pupil Equity Funding illustrates how evaluation is carried out in a way that allows the Scottish Government to ensure that desired outcomes have been met. In supporting the delivery of equity and excellence in education, Pupil Equity Funding also contributes to a number of National Performance Framework outcomes as well as the indicator specific to attainment.

While it is presently too early to determine the impact of Pupil Equity Funding - it has only been in place since 1 April 2017 - mechanisms have been put in place to allow the impact to be measured at a school, local authority and national level.

School Level

Headteachers have been encouraged to make the best use of the data they have access to locally, to understand which children and young people would benefit from this targeted support. Headteachers will monitor and track learners' progress over time. A range of support has been put in place for headteachers to assist them with this task.

Headteachers are accountable to their local authority for the use of Pupil Equity Funding within their school. To ensure transparency, schools are expected to incorporate details of their Pupil Equity Funding plans into existing planning and reporting processes including in their annual School Improvement Plans and Standards and Quality Reports. These reports should be publicly available so that parents can understand what is happening in their school.

Local Authority Level

Local authorities are required to report on progress towards National Improvement Framework priorities including how well they are closing the gap. The statutory guidance which supports this reporting activity can be found here - <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/03/4559>

In addition, local authorities are expected to look across SIMD 1-10 to establish where progress is being made towards narrowing the attainment gap and identify which schools require further targeted support.

The operation, use and effectiveness of the Pupil Equity Funding to close the poverty related attainment gap at a local authority level will also feed into other existing quality assurance processes, such as Audit Scotland's Shared Risk Assessment.

National Level

We are currently consulting on proposals for measuring the poverty related attainment gap and milestones towards closing it. We aim to publish our planned measures as part of the 2018 National Improvement Framework & Improvement Plan for Scottish Education in December of this year.

In the meantime, progress towards closing the attainment gap will continue to be reported in the annual National Improvement Framework evidence report. We will use the range of measures we already have in place to monitor our objective of making demonstrable progress during the lifetime of this Parliament, and in substantially eliminating the poverty related attainment gap by 2025.

As part of the formal Scottish Government evaluation of the Attainment Scotland Fund, proposals are being developed to extend the existing evaluation to include Pupil Equity Funding. A process review of Pupil Equity Funding is also underway to consider operational matters and whether any amendments are required to the guidance or grant conditions for future years.

School inspection and other review processes will be used, where necessary, to ensure schools use their funding appropriately. Three of the four core quality indicators used in inspection activity will consider how the school is using their Pupil Equity Funding. They are:

- leadership of change;
- learning, teaching and assessment; and
- raising attainment and achievement.

We are also monitoring and evaluating the expansion of early learning and childcare. We undertook an evaluability assessment in 2016 to obtain independent advice on the most appropriate way to monitor and evaluate the expansion at national and local level. The resultant evaluation programme is providing annual updates on progress and will provide

evidence on the long term impact of the expansion on both children's outcomes and parental outcomes. Data is informing policy development at national level, while the data collection processes implemented at local level are enabling local authorities to plan for the expansion and monitor impact. We will publish annual updates on progress, with the first update report due in December 2017.

We are also awaiting the recommendations of the independent review of student support. The Review was commissioned to ensure that the student support system is equitable, fair and supports all students throughout their learner journey. It is expected to report this autumn. Once we have the report, we will carefully consider each of the proposals.

In addition to ensuring that Scottish Government policies deliver intended outcomes, I also ask that public bodies in the education and skills portfolio have cognisance of their duty to take forward work that contributes towards National Performance Framework outcomes and indicators. For example, the strategic letter of guidance issued to the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) for the current financial year now includes Scottish Government requirements grouped by relevant SFC strategic outcome and SG strategic priority. This will allow for a much more systematic approach to be taken to SFC performance reporting and our subsequent scrutiny of that.

We are also asking the SFC to intensify the outcomes agreement process which underpins their investment in colleges and universities. As part of this, the SFC will consider setting more ambitious targets and encourage engagement with external stakeholders, thus achieving desired behaviours through a more dynamic allocation of places and funding. In addition, they are asked to improve transparency; improve accountability; and drive improvement through the publication of institutional level performance information. These changes will apply from academic year 18-19 with the aim of providing a clearer line of sight between SG investment and the delivery of desired outcomes.

Similarly, the work of Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is aligned to the National Performance Framework, with their Corporate Planning and Performance Management Framework evidencing their contribution and progress. The Framework aims to ensure SDS are delivering the right services to their customers with the means to manage performance and drive continuous improvement.

Finally, in line with the Scottish Government's Digital First initiative the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is focused on how it can take advantage of technological solutions to drive improvements in its service delivery, provide better services and create efficiencies in its processes to make them more effective. One example of this approach is their Change Programme which is in the process of being implemented. The Programme aims to improve the way SQA delivers its business by adopting and seeking the benefits of technology to improve customer experiences; provide greater flexibility; and reduce costs.

Climate Change

The education and skills portfolio is in the privileged position of being able to tackle climate change through our organisational practices while also being able to directly influence our next generation in learning about the importance of sustainability.

Changes in organisational practices have seen the SQA arranging for 4000 trees to be planted through their carbon management plan, SDS reduced its carbon footprint by 43% since 2011 (surpassing their target of a 42% reduction by 2020) and the Scottish

Government continue to reduce its carbon footprint through its own carbon management plan.

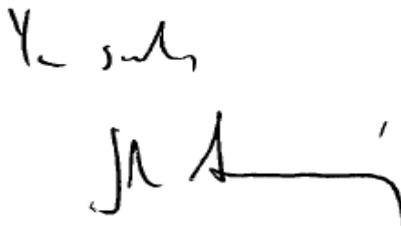
The SFC has also taken forward work to help tackle climate change. They are running a £20 million interest free loan scheme for universities to take carbon reduction measures; they have funded work under the 'Universities and Colleges Climate Commitment' which saw universities and colleges make commitments to contribute towards the SG's targets for carbon emission reductions; and they support universities and colleges in complying with their annual statutory duty to provide accurate, consistent and complete information on how they are helping to tackle climate change.

Furthermore, Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is embedded within Curriculum for Excellence. LfS is a set of values and approaches to teaching, learning and leadership in schools that enables young people to build the values, attitudes, knowledge and skills to engage in the key issues of social justice and sustainability. All teachers and school leaders are required to demonstrate LfS in their practice as an integral part of the new General Teaching Council of Scotland Professional Standards.

As Scotland's national awarding body, the SQA is also in the unique position to be able to support a deeper understanding of the issues around climate change and sustainability through its qualifications and awards in schools, colleges and training providers - from Environmental Science to Geography; Horticulture; the Sciences; and Health & Safety.

The SQA's other qualifications also meet the needs of the industries that are key to addressing climate change and sustainability including: power and renewables; environment - natural and built; engineering; land based utilities; waste; and construction sectors.

I hope you find this information useful and I will be happy to discuss any of it further when I attend a future Committee session as part of the pre-budget scrutiny process.



JOHN SWINNEY