Curriculum for Excellence Management Board Meeting No. 46

Thursday 29th September 2016 (9:30am – 12.30pm)

St Francis’ RC Primary School, Edinburgh

Minute of Meeting

Attendees

Management Board Members
Janet Brown  Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
Andy Bruce  Scottish Government (SG)
Mike Corbett  National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)
Diane Greenlees  Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
Mhairi Harrington  College Development Network (CDN)
Alison Herbert  Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)
Graeme Logan  Education Scotland (ES)
Bill Maxwell  Education Scotland
Ken Muir  General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS)
Joanna Murphy  National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS)
Jane O’Donnell  Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)
Susan Quinn  The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)
Seamus Searson  Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA)
Andy Smith  School Leaders Scotland (SLS)
Fiona Robertson  Scottish Government
Michael Wood  Association of Directors of Education (ADES)

Additional Attendees
Alan Armstrong  Education Scotland
Chloe Duxbury  Scottish Government
Chris Graham  Scottish Government
Claire Hicks  Scottish Government
Katy Hindmarsh  Scottish Government
Therese Laing  City of Edinburgh Council
Margot MacAlister  St Francis’ RC Primary School
Murray McVicar  Scottish Government
John Swinney  Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Kit Wyeth  Scottish Government

Apologies
John Edward  Scottish Council of Independent Schools
Grant Jarvie  Universities Scotland
Ann MacDonald  Scottish Teacher Education Committee
Ann McIntosh  Association of Headteachers and Deputes in Scotland
Maggie Patterson  Community Learning and Development Manager Group
Damien Yeates  Skills Development Scotland
1. Welcome and Introduction to St Francis’ from Headteacher, Ms Margot McAlister

1.1 Fiona Robertson (FR) welcomed the Management Board and the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (DFM) to St Francis’ RC Primary School.

1.2 FR introduced Margot MacAlister (MM), Headteacher of St Francis’ who gave a short presentation on the school which covered its focus on dance and performance, particularly as a springboard for literacy improvement, as well as some of the broader social and practical barriers which young learners face.

1.3 After questions from the Board, FR thanked MM for her presentation and for hosting the meeting and MM and Therese Laing left the meeting.

2. Vision for Education from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills’

2.1 FR welcomed Joanna Murphy (JM) as the new representative for NPFS and Andy Bruce (AB), who has replaced Alan Johnston as Deputy Director of Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic. The Board noted with thanks the contribution Alan had made to the work of the Board in his time in Learning Directorate.

2.2 DFM set out for the Board his vision for education confirming that both his and the First Minister’s key objective is to close the attainment gap and interrupt the unacceptable cycle which has led to many young people being unable to achieve their full potential.

2.3 DFM stated that closing the attainment gap will be built on the foundations of three essential policies: Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), CfE and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW). DFM spoke about the transformational opportunities these policies are delivering for young people, noting in particular the clear unity of purpose behind DYW which has seen positive adoption by schools, colleges and the private sector.

2.4 DFM emphasised that the most precious resource in education is the relationship between teacher and pupil, noted his concerns that the time available for that interaction has become too cluttered and outlined the steps he has taken to free teachers to teach. These include publication of a concise statement on CfE, requesting that Education Scotland review the work being done by local authorities to tackle CfE-related bureaucracy in schools (Paper 4) and reconvening the Assessment and National Qualifications Working Group (ANQWG) to look into issues of over-assessment in the senior phase.

2.5 In closing, DFM reiterated the necessity for each element of the education system to align in order to raise standards and close the attainment gap. He restated his commitment to CfE and referred to praise for CfE from both the OECD and the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA). DFM stressed the importance of continuing to build on progress to date and thanked the Board for its work over many years.
2.6 The Board made a number of comments and reflections on DFM’s statement. Michael Wood (MW) spoke of his experience as Executive Director of Children and Families in Dundee and the importance of working across organisations to connect services. He noted that a child’s life outwith school has a huge bearing on progress. DFM agreed, noting the importance of the holistic approach of GIRFEC.

2.7 Susan Quinn (SQ) raised some of the challenges for CfE including an ongoing lack of public understanding of its purpose, a media narrative which concentrates on Higher results and a wider perception that National 4 is a less worthwhile qualification. DFM highlighted that his approach on results day had been to emphasise vocational qualification achievements.

2.8 Mike Corbett (MC) welcomed DFM’s message on the importance of ensuring cohesion between services but raised concerns about GIRFEC and levels of local authority funding, especially for non-teaching staff. DFM replied that the Government had sought to protect local services, in the face of spending cuts from Westminster, including protecting the number of teachers.

2.9 MC asked what the proposed next steps were following the findings of Education Scotland’s recent review into local authority actions to reduce teacher workload. DFM explained he will be writing to all local authorities to encourage them to take steps to address teacher workload and would discuss with Education Scotland how best to monitor progress. DFM noted that there is also the opportunity for teachers to feel empowered to reduce their own workload.

2.10 Mhairi Harrington (MH) noted the importance of spreading knowledge about DYW pathways. She suggested that secondary schools are working well with colleges but that primary schools could be more engaged. DFM commented that the DYW programme should enable those connections to be made. DFM also reflected on the importance of encouraging young people to consider alternatives to university and noted the positive impact which the Modern Apprenticeship Scheme has had. JM noted that most parents are welcoming of the DYW agenda and it is important that schools engage with them to facilitate their understanding and involvement. DFM agreed and noted some of the good examples of effective parental engagement which MM spoke of in her presentation.

2.11 Ken Muir (KM) welcomed DFM’s comments on the importance of teacher professionalism. DFM reiterated the importance of high quality teaching and leadership, noting the progress made since the Donaldson review but acknowledging that further work is needed.

3. Discussion on the Proposals of the Assessment and National Qualifications Working Group

3.1 AB presented the update from the ANQWG explaining that the Group met in August to discuss the problem of over-assessment in the Senior Phase and met again in mid-September to discuss draft proposals to alleviate this by removing unit assessments from National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher (as set out in Paper 1). AB clarified that units would still be available for teachers to use to plan learning.
3.2 AB explained that under the proposals, assessment would be based on enhanced coursework and an extended final examination and the range of grades which can be awarded could be extended. AB informed the Board that the changes would be brought in for National 5 for academic year 2017-18, for Higher in 2018-19 and for Advanced Higher in 2019-20.

3.3 AB stated that the ANQWG considered that these proposals would address the workload issues faced by teachers and pupils, while remaining consistent with CfE principles. He commented that the Group did identify a number of issues which have still to be considered: consequences for National 4, presentation policies, parental understanding of the proposed changes and ensuring Broad General Education (BGE) is adequately preparing young people for assessment.

3.4 SQ welcomed the proposals but noted that the phased approach to implementation reinforces the current duplication of work across National 5 and Higher given that it was originally envisaged that learners would be able to bypass National 5 if they would be undertaking Higher (in order to reduce workload). Andy Smith (AS) and MC agreed and AS commented that he had often met with resistance when he had raised the prospect of bypass with parents due to concerns about the risk of children failing to achieve an award.

3.5 SQ and Seamus Searson (SS) also raised concerns about the perception that National 4 was a less valuable qualification. DFM noted that the apparent lack of confidence in the value of the qualification must be dealt with, as it was important that the achievements of all learners were celebrated.

3.6 AS expressed concern that not all stakeholders had been involved in the consultation process. AS offered to meet with the appropriate SG representatives to discuss a number of other issues and concerns arising from the proposals.

3.7 MC welcomed the proposals but sought clarification on what the enhanced coursework and examination would entail and whether units would still attract SCQF credit points. He noted that feedback from pupils is that unit assessments are of little value and suggested that teachers would be generally content with the proposals. JB explained that units would still have SCQF credit value if they were quality assured and noted that SQA has undertaken a review of quality assurance, albeit that this would now have to be revisited in light of the proposals.

3.8 MC and SS asked why the proposed changes for all qualifications could not be implemented in the current academic year and asked when a timeline for implementation would be available.

3.9 JB explained that SQA are considering how best to implement while maintaining credibility, standards and consistency across all qualifications. She noted that this work will require a considerable amount of effort and confirmed that a timeline would be shared with the Board once available. JB noted that the outline of the new assessments will need to be provided to teachers by April whilst work to deliver this year’s diet is still ongoing.
3.10 DFM stated that he considered it would be reckless to seek to bring forward the proposals for this year’s diet as it would risk jeopardising current learners’ qualifications. He commended SQA for its work to date and noted that work is being undertaken as quickly as possible.

3.11 FR noted the comments from the Board and the further work to be done, in particular around National 4 and grading. The Board confirmed that the central proposals on removing mandatory unit assessments from National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher could be taken as agreed.

3.12 DFM drew the discussion to an end with a commitment to continue to work to reform national qualifications and address teacher and pupil workload. He reflected that the changes agreed today were an important first step but that further work to redress the erosion of confidence in National 4 must be undertaken.

3.13 Members took a short break and DFM left the meeting.

4. **Note and Actions from June Meeting/Matters Arising**

4.1 FR invited comments on the June minute. None being received, the minute was taken as agreed.

4.2 AB took the Board through the actions from the last meeting, all of which had been completed. AB confirmed the next meeting of the ANQWG would likely be held on 2 November.

5. **CfE Implementation Update**

5.1 **CfE Implementation Group Update (Papers 2 – 6)**

5.1.1 BM introduced Papers 2 – 6 as one item. He summarised the report of the CfE Implementation Group (Paper 2) commentimg that at its last meeting, the Group had focussed on programme delivery, immediate deliverables and priorities emerging from the Delivery Plan and had received a presentation on discussions with college and local authority staff on DYW. BM noted the pace of recent work over the past couple of months including publication of the CfE Statement and Benchmarks (Paper 5) and the CfE Implementation Plan (Paper 3). He noted that the latter was slightly later than planned in order to take account of work streams emerging from the Delivery Plan. Alan Armstrong (AA) commented that the CfE Implementation Group had also discussed the importance of collectively engaging primary schools with long term pathways.

5.1.2 Jane O'Donnell (JO) noted that Paper 2 indicated that the Implementation Group had discussed risks relating local government budgets and agreed mitigating actions. BM agreed that it would be helpful to have a broader meeting involving COSLA officers on this issue.

5.1.3 MC noted in relation to Paper 4, that some NASUWT local representatives had not been invited to the meetings held with local authorities. BM clarified that
invitations to the review meetings had been made by the local authorities themselves rather than Education Scotland.

5.1.4 MC raised a concern about the guidance issued by ES in May on progression from BGE to the Senior Phase noting that it had been interpreted by some teachers as allowing some of the 160 hours of directed study for National Qualifications to occur in S3 i.e. during BGE. SQ commented that the difficulty in covering the required number of hours for a National Qualification in one academic year was another reason why the Board should look again at the issue of bypassing qualifications. SQ noted that learners are sometimes presented for qualifications based on parental pressure rather than solely on teacher professional judgement. SQ suggested this is an issue which needs to be addressed by the CfE Implementation Group.

5.1.5 KM suggested that it may be helpful to prepare case studies of young people and the pathways they have taken to illustrate to teachers and parents some of the alternative options and learner journeys available. AA explained that the guidance in May had sought to clarify for teachers that learners can be performing above the third level before S4. AA noted that Education Scotland were creating illustrative pathways to demonstrate different learner journeys between BGE and Senior Phase and confirmed that the intention was to publish these along with the Benchmarks for the remaining curriculum areas.

5.1.6 FR noted the range of issues which had been raised by the Board. In closing she commented that the policy approach to date - and agreed by the Board - has sought to encourage flexibility, rather than, for example, mandating presentation for Highers over two years at the expense of other options. FR noted that, while there were issues to be addressed, it was important to retain that flexibility.

5.2 SQA Update (Verbal)

5.2.1 JB provided a verbal update on the recent examination diet informing the Board that it had been generally successful with results broadly similar to those achieved in previous years. JB noted that whilst there was a steady increase in the number of certified Qualifications other than National Qualifications, there was a drop in entries for National 4 with a clear focus on more presentations for National 5.

5.2.2 JB commented that SQA had seen levels of inappropriate presentation for National 5 Mathematics with an A-C attainment rate of 63% (below the national average) and a rate of 36% for Lifeskills Mathematics.

5.2.3 JB explained that SQA will be revisiting the commitments made in both the Delivery Plan and CfE Implementation Plan in light of the work which will now be required to deliver changes to unit assessments.

5.2.4 MC noted concerns raised by teachers on marking and grade boundaries for National 5 Graphic Communications and Advanced Higher English. JB noted that SQA had not received substantive feedback on problems with those subjects and agreed to pick this up separately with MC.
5.2.5 SQ noted the recent letter from SQA to teachers which suggested some had not consistently applied assessment conditions for coursework and had given more than reasonable assistance to learners. SQ expressed concern about the letter and suggested any cases of such behaviour should be dealt with on an individual basis and in a constructive manner. JB noted that it was essential for equity that every teacher understood the appropriate level of support which should be provided and that SQA would continue to investigate instances where evidence suggested teachers had provided a more than appropriate level of assistance.

5.2.6 KM noted the importance of the success of this diet and asked the Board to acknowledge the commendable work of SQA in its delivery. FR agreed and commented that while it was natural for the Board to focus on problems and potential solutions it was just as important to recognise achievements and successes as the 3 year programme of significant reforms was completed. The Board agreed.

6. Strategic Issues

6.1 Governance Review

6.1.1 Clare Hicks (CH) introduced Paper 7, “Empowering teachers, parents and communities to achieve Excellence and Equity - A Governance Review” and provided an overview of the key themes within it. She noted that the review seeks to promote discussion about the running and organisation of the education system, starting from a fundamental presumption that decisions about a child’s education should be made at school level where possible. CH informed the Board that Ministers would be hosting a number of regional engagement events over the next few months and that there would be targeted engagement with key stakeholders. She confirmed the review will run until 6 January 2017.

6.1.2 SS acknowledged the importance of the review and welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the discussion, but expressed concern that the openness of the consultation paper may inhibit wider engagement. MC also welcomed the opportunity to input to the review and noted that he had been reassured by DFM’s commitment, in a recent meeting, to the comprehensive model of education in Scotland.

6.1.3 MH queried how the review would coordinate with the Enterprise and Skills Review. CH clarified that officials are working closely with colleagues responsible for the Enterprise and Skills Review and noted that while bodies such as SDS were outwith the scope of the Governance Review, they would still have a valuable contribution to make to the discussion. Diane Greenlees (DG) emphasised the importance of engaging industry and business voices with the review.

6.1.4 FR noted the wide range of comments from the Board and explained that the review had been left deliberately open to encourage creative discussion. FR clarified that all internal governance of programmes and policies within SG would also be within scope of the review. The ongoing role of the Management Board had been discussed in previous meetings given the maturity of CfE delivery and FR confirmed that the ongoing role of the Management Board, Implementation Group and ANQWG would be considered as part of the review.
6.2 National Improvement Framework

6.2.1 Kit Wyeth (KW) introduced Papers 8 and 9, updating the Board on progress with the National Improvement Framework (NIF). He informed the board that work was underway on the publication of the NIF Report in December and that this would include teacher professional judgement data, which was currently being quality assured by analysts. KW explained that proposals for publication of the data would be discussed with Directors of Education at the end of October. He noted that the NIF Report would provide national level data, that experimental statistics would be published providing local authority level data, and that school level data would be available.

6.2.2 In relation to standardised assessments, KW informed the board that the tender process was near completion and the Government intended to appoint a contractor shortly. He noted that pre-implementation testing of the system, materials and assessments would run until May with many local authorities interested in taking part in the pilot. KW stated that the final product would be available for all schools from August 2017.

6.2.3 SQ welcomed confirmation that it would be for teachers to decide when assessments were taken during the school year and that the assessments were intended to be a valuable real-time diagnostic tool for teachers. In response to a question from SQ about replacing current whole-cohort assessments, KW explained that SG had advised local authorities that the new assessments should replace existing local arrangements and local authorities were working towards implementation on that basis. He noted, however, that there may be timing issues in some local authorities because of the duration of existing contracts with assessment providers.

6.2.4 Graeme Logan (GL) explained that Education Scotland would be working with the chosen contractor to ensure the assessments were best suited for CfE content and, therefore, the most useful product for teachers compared with existing products. GL also explained that Education Scotland were recruiting a small team of four NIF advisors to work with local authorities and provide a programme of moderation support to improve validity of teacher judgement data and to strengthen the existing support for moderation.

6.2.5 MC suggested that any concerns about the quality of teacher judgement data should be addressed before data is published. FR undertook to keep the Board informed on developments with the procurement process for standardised assessments.

6.3 International Council of Education Advisers

6.3.1 FR asked the Board to take Paper 10 as read and thanked those members who had attended the lunch for the ICEA on 1 September.

6.3.2 SS expressed his disappointment that representatives from the teacher unions had not been approached when the ICEA was being established given their
expertise, and asked when the Board would have an opportunity for further engagement with the ICEA. SS expressed similar reservations about the creation of the Teacher Panel.

6.3.3 FR explained that both the ICEA and Teacher Panel had been recent additions to the structures which heavily involved the professional associations.

6.4 Review of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006

6.4.1 JM introduced Paper 11 on the NPFS Review of the Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006. JM encouraged Board members to complete the questionnaire and to encourage parents to do so. She noted that 151 organisations have been sent copies and that four times as many responses than were originally expected had already been received. JM commented that it would be helpful to engage with the Board further on the issues raised in the review it was agreed that further specific engagement with the Board would be arranged.

6.4.2 FR noted the importance of the review and asked the Board to engage with it and to note the closing date at the end of October.

7. Close

7.1 FR thanked the Board for their contributions. She noted that the Secretariat would be in touch to identify suitable dates during 2017.