I write in a personal capacity informed by my professional and wider experience (teacher 23 years including head teacher 13 years, social researcher 8 years separately, and additionally within teaching posts). In Part 1 I answer certain specific questions of the Education and Culture Committee regarding the Bill. In Part 2 I present an updated summary of a paper which I wrote and presented at the 28th International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, January 2015. It concerns the principles underlying this Bill set within a wider international policy and practice framework. Scotland is hosting the next ICSEI in Glasgow in January 2016.

PART 1: SPECIFIC QUESTIONS IN THE GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

1) The answer to Question 1 lies in the wider capacities of children’s potential. Essentially our task as educators is to assist pupils to build the awareness and wherewithal to come to know their own capacities, capabilities, dispositions and potentials, so that they may promote them appropriately themselves. The Bill as it stands will take us away from this approach. It is set within the culture of directive managerialism and performative suppositions as have befallen school education throughout the UK over the last fifteen years or so.

2) Certain aspects of disadvantage associate with certain aspects of lesser-developed social and individual capital. Schools thereby seek to provide the nurture, means and wherewithal to foster those deficiencies of developmental capacity. Such a process, working well, does not look anything like attainment-driven performance management. Instead we as educators and those who may support us require to “get knowledge” of our systems to enable us to recognise and assist pupils to fulfil those potentials utilising our deep knowledge of “how the work works”.

3) Re questions 2 and 3 over-attention to outcome takes away focus from the journey that facilitates the outcome. This is well articulated in the CfE ‘Four Capacities’ – see diagram. They are set in the wider framework of the Principles of Curriculum Design and other characteristics of CfE as per the diagram on page 13 of Building the Curriculum.

4) Q4. Schools and teachers could take far more appropriate action to reduce inequalities of outcome if much of the burden of the overly cluttered, prescriptive and duplicative performance-management overlay were lifted. Other approaches than the attainment provisions of this Bill are needed, as I have outlined in Part 2 and references. See the quote by Seth Godin on page 15 of the full paper in Part 2.

5) Q5. The Bill’s provisions on attainment are conceptually and operationally misaligned for the reasons outlined in Part 2 and references (mine and others).

6) Q6. The terms derive from a different conceptual landscape than that of The Four Capacities that constitute the underlying principle of Curriculum for Excellence. To make these provisions the prime focus of education policy will confuse and drive the wrong behaviours, undermining and negating the valid components of those goals. Essentially these provisions reinstate and unknowingly restate Stephen Ball’s “Terrors of
Performativity’⁴, Pasi Sahlberg’s “Global Education Reform Movement”⁵, Andy Hargreaves’ “Fallacies of Education Reform”⁶ and Michael Fullan’s “Wrong Drivers of System Wide Reform”⁷.

7) Q7. Targets do not work; sanctions even less. These provisions will distort purpose and thereby undermine the operation of those working in Scottish school education. They will divert educators from the approaches which effectively ‘close the gap’ as are currently being deployed but which are largely ignored and discounted. These comprise therapeutic, knowledge-building, systems-thinking, enquiry-based, constructivist, arts-integration, and place-based learning approaches, amongst many others. These are much referenced in education change forums. The target-centric, reductionist, instrumentalist, behaviourist, specifications-orientated approaches to audit, management and change in Scottish education thwart the underlying educational principles of Curriculum for Excellence. It is the former education principles which need to be fostered, through finding new means to ‘understand the work’, building bridges and partnerships, framed in theories and models of education and the nature of social, technological and normative change. These require to be centred on knowledge of our actual pupils – their needs, their capabilities, their issues, set in their contexts. It is these approaches which are needed, which stand in stark contrast to the provisions and ethos of the attainment section of this Bill. The last thing we in schools need is any more directive guidance regarding raising attainment deriving from the audit silo and the management factory based on exhortation and specification, especially which is not framed in purpose, principles or genuine understanding of “how the work works” (See Seddon as referenced). The real task is to find out what we have done in schools to enable the principles of Curriculum for Excellence, much of which I have found to have been frustrated by the suppositions and ill-matched procedures of audit-specification and the conceptual mis-suppositions underlying these, which the attainment section of this Bill will reinforce.

8) Q8. We have been performance managed to near functional incoherence in school education. We do not need more of, or worse a wholesale return to that which we are slowly moving away from. We do not need more directive change, especially concerning attainment. Change needs to be “rolled in” – see work of Seddon above.

9) Q9. For practice to embrace “all examples of inequality of outcome” in the terminology of this Bill, is akin to the precept to “absorb variety” in systems thinking approaches to change management. But in school education it is already an intrinsic professional expectation and is considered as part of the essence of the job. There is no requirement for new legislation regarding these aspects. They need to be fostered, not mandated, and require a very different ethos of system change, framed in very different conceptual suppositions to that of this Bill. The attainment section of the Bill constitutes a major new outbreak of Pasi Sahlberg’s GERM⁸. (I discuss this in the paper of Part 2). The real gap which needs to be closed is that of management thinking. Command-and-control and specifications-judgementalism have had their day.

10) Question 19 constitutes directive micro-management of an unhelpful nature. There will in any case be an official who essentially discharges this function given its importance. The provision is unnecessary.

11) Q25. There is much more thought, consideration and consultation needed to be given to the issue of complaints, and more particularly complaint resolution, dissatisfaction management and processing of issues raised (not necessarily complaints as such) by many persons and bodies in education, of different types and functional roles, including
internal bodies and employees and between them. Some of these stray into the normal tensions of operational management, and even which, when appropriately contained, are necessary or unavoidable. Such complaints and issues may straddle functional roles and authority between bodies. The resolution to many will be to bridge perception and expectation through dialogue. There is also far more attention needed to be given to the roles and powers of Education Scotland and where such functions sit with other bodies. There has been a concentration of power without due attention to checks and balances, and rights of complaint and appeal, including of Education Scotland itself. The regulator and arbiter of professionalism is, or rather should be, The General Teaching Council for Scotland, not Education Scotland. There has been a tendency to merge functions which in other judicial or quasi-judicial contexts are kept separate, for very sound reasons. Rapid change in this area has occurred without oversight of administrative justice responsibility and functional aspects. I consider that this provision needs a far more open, broader and more penetrative consultation than presently occurring. I do not consider that this additional power and responsibility should merely be transferred to Education Scotland without consideration of the ethical, probity and functional responsibility issues which lie therein. There has come to be an assumption and acceptance in school education that assertion may constitute determination in such fashion as is not found in any other sectors.

PART 2:

SCHOOLS AS AGENTS OF SYSTEM CHANGE – A PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

ICSEI 2015 Cincinnati details: http://www.icsei.net/conference2015/
ICSEI 2016 Glasgow details: http://www.icsei.net/2016/
Plockton Primary School 2002-2012 (‘closing the gap’) http://www.plockton.com/primary/

12)In 2004 a national curriculum review framed a new approach for Scottish schools. It focused on ‘Four Capacities’ of children’s development: confidence, contribution, responsibility and learning. The normally expressed central goal of school education – learning – was just one of these capacities. This was a bold redirection of goals for a national school education system. They were set within the broader framework of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) providing principles of curriculum design and other features of a much altered and integrative implementation pathway of ‘Building the Curriculum’, which incorporated a specifically collegiate approach.

13)Yet a problem arose early on. The incoming changes were wedded to the pre-existing inspection audit schedules. These mandated practice and development through voluminous prescriptive specifications. In Scotland they are one-size-fits-all in character for all schools in all contexts. The first indicator is “Improvements in Performance”. This enshrines an explicit ideology. But it is not what the incoming reform was about. Schools had been asked to promote the ‘Four Capacities’ of children’s capability and potential. They were asked to innovate to an explicit new rationale. It was integrative, not performative. There would be progression but differently formed and recognised.

14)The rationale underlying “The Four Capacities” of CfE was a groundbreaking development from the former curriculum, which was laid out as a complex matrix of attainment targets. This was as per Sahlberg’s “curriculum as product”. The incoming Scottish approach placed “Successful Learners” equal to the other capacities of “Effective Contributors, Responsible Citizens and Confident Individuals”. To achieve these requires an understanding of Sahlberg’s “curriculum as process”. The very
The notion of a Scottish Attainment Challenge is far removed from the holistic vision of “The Four Capacities”. Children’s potential is most effectively enhanced through the integration of their capabilities, building their perspectives from their rationales and purposes. These cannot be targeted in isolated and disconnected fashion. That is not how children learn and develop. It is not how we may assist them to enhance the capacities in their potential, including attainment.

15) The implementation pathway of Scotland’s new curriculum approach has been stymied by mandating it through imposed audit categories not found in the original framework. Such output data drives, and no longer derives. What is left is compliance. Effective and functional change cannot emerge from constructs codified by rationales disconnected to the local service operational perspective – Williamson’s (et. al.) ‘code acts’. Data then becomes monstrous. Scotland’s CfE school reform, if restored to its original vision, would find a major role on a much bigger stage. This is because it would then have something to say about a journey of transformation. This requires that we redefine schools as agents of system change.

16) In so doing we may enable schools to reach out to the wider potential of children’s capacities – all of them. An effect of that will be to close the gap – the attainment gap, but also lots of other gaps – the sensibility gap, the knowledge gap, the skills gap, the application gap, the responsibility gap, the confidence gap, the achievement gap, the contribution gap, the awareness gap, and many other gaps – in fact the whole wider gamut of what Curriculum for Excellence was/is all about, or rather should be all about. Those pertain to all children. Where certain potentials are constrained by circumstance, some deriving from socio-economic characteristics, schools can operate to mitigate those. But to do that they need to “get knowledge” in systems-thinking terms and come to understand the work from the customer point of view – which here means pupils and the potentials within their capacities. That requires that we “absorb variety” – theirs. To do that requires getting to know them as individuals through the wider compass of the Four Capacities and the component characteristics, which are themselves but a summary of the potential dispositions we may set out to fulfil. Those will not come about from target-driven specification, from more reams of imposed guidance dreamed up in the audit silo and management factory, disconnected from the work; worse still if they are imposed via command-and-control managerialism to a product model of curriculum a factory model of learning and hemmed in by a narrow attainment agenda. While a goal of closing the gap is sound – many gaps, not just one – the attainment section of this Bill in terms of prescriptive measures and sanctions and narrow conceptualisation of pedagogy stands against the central direction of Scottish school education of the last fifteen years. So do other processes such as the existing performance management system, which is where truly transformational innovation and reform are necessary to enable the incoming principles of a rapidly altering operational and normative context.

17) The knowledge that should enable service improvement, the insights of those at the point of enactment, are blocked by adherence to specifications. The alternative is integral understanding operating equitably and supportively, in fair weather and stormy, halcyon calm and normal bluster. Knowledge may utilise data, but does not comprise it. Performance measures are nothing if not formed through interpretation rather than read off as readings on a dial as per Corbett’s “edumometer”, formed through Reeves’ “assessowork” and framed in Biesta’s “learnification”.

18) Quality is subtle, its achievement found in a moment of satisfaction, an essence achieved, a bridge crossed, a moment of insight realised, or a new opportunity opened up. The process is not linear, and certainly not when embarked on as a transformational
education change programme. It is most definitely not “A clear plan...for getting from A to B”, as Education Scotland has imposed on schools. Rather there is an endless interplay of swirls, loops, zigzags, and even setbacks followed by forward leaps, as hurdles are identified and then overcome.

19) The role of management of schools is to garner organisational perspective to best support locally determined function and purpose. In Finnish Lessons 2.0 Pasi Sahlberg gives attention to this distinction, and referred to my analysis in a Scottish context: “Niall MacKinnon (2011), who teaches at Plockton Primary School, makes a compelling appeal for “locally owned questions and purposes in realising practice within the broader national policy and practice frameworks”.

20) Thereby data should serve purpose, not purpose serve data, as now occurring. Public services’ analyst John Seddon identifies a need to “absorb variety” in the management of public services. Functions of assurance and effective improvement come from openness and regular contact at the front-line service interface, using situationally appropriate measures and interpretation, not specification and exhortation, or worse, sanction. The former build insight, morale and organisational knowledge. Problems are understood for what they are, and before they escalate. Organisational energy then focuses on “value work”, not “waste work”, another distinction of Seddon's. Prescription, inspection and data-driven overload cause the evasive climates of threat, hectoring and fear that dispose towards underperformance, and onwards towards failure. For Mike Farrar, “Staff give really, really great care when they feel really, really valued – not really, really inspected”. This observation was prompted by a major health service failure in England. Specifications and targets were found to be the main problem. This is a problem across public services.

21) Through audit mismatch staff may be castigated on indicator scorings to criteria not set up to deal with emergent functions and local variety. The problem is not then policy change, but the mismatch with audit assumptions. Audit and evaluation need to be reconstructed as evidential understanding, linking enhanced perspective to the means to effect change. Measures may be used to inform, but not constrain.

22) Keir Bloomer noted that Scotland’s 'Curriculum for Excellence' is not a curriculum: “The dangerous word is 'curriculum'”. I noted that it is not about excellence, warning of “The Perils of Permanent Perfection”. The name of Scotland's school reform programme has undefined it, or has come to redefine it.

23) The Scottish school inspectorate defines “excellence” as “the very best there is”. I disagree, defining it as “bringing out the very best in us”. To excel is not an endpoint to be reached as the conclusion of a journey, but a state of being to be grasped along the way. Indeed it becomes the way. Such a journey may then transform. Trans-forming is then the journey, one of in-formation. Utilising information inputs and rendering them meaningful to assist purpose – the journey – is to conceive of knowledge in a different way to data. A school or a class acts and feels as a community of individuals who cohere and create and care and conjoin and enter a state of flow.

24) Ball and Olmedo write of “regimes of truth” in school education, “One produces measurable teaching subjects, whose qualities are represented in categories of judgment. The other is vested in a pedagogy of context and experience, intelligible within a set of collegial relations”. The latter reads as a vision of Scotland’s “Four Capacities”. But the inspection schedule grade descriptors read as the former.
25) As a teacher quoted by Ball and Olmedo notes: “The work overload of drowning in specificatory garbage to irrelevant notions, which ever-change and for which you are damned for the impossibility of keeping up, dealing with damage and somehow trying to find the space for real work which ‘they’ are not in the slightest bit interested in, is exhausting. How to break out?”.

26) Participative understanding discerns meaning relating to function and purpose. Therein lies organisational knowledge. We then become in-formed.

27) System goals vary in implementation, mediated by local purpose and function. The detail at the highest level must be vague, “creating a Teacher's Intent” as noted by Canadian teacher Joe Bower. Yet throughout the UK the opposite pertains.

28) Ball and Olmedo note that, “Teachers are no longer encouraged to have a rationale for practice, account of themselves in terms of a relationship to the meaningfulness of what they do, but are required to produce measurable and ‘improving’ outputs and performances… We are in danger of becoming transparent but empty, unrecognisable to ourselves.”

29) Such performance management imposes false and pseudo-quantification and destroys the sense of what is happening in schools, what we are seeking to achieve, and what we are dealing with. In reducing complex interpretation to ersatz-quantification then meaning and worth are destroyed. Arbitrary indicator scorings substitute for purpose, the very goals and objectives whose achieved operation the service is there to enable. The complexity becomes self-serving, driving out meaning, then responsibility, then fulfillment, then trust. An ideology of “Improvements in Performance” causes service function to decline because it distorts principle, purpose and means.

30) A new public services' management paradigm is needed. We need to “think purpose” not “think performance”. Joe Bower asked on his internationally renowned blog, “You say you want this, so then why are you doing that?” John MacBeath made a case for “leadership as a subversive activity” and school improvement as an “essential conversation”. This is akin to Jenny Reeves' analysis in the context of CfE that, “The conditions for learning require an organisational culture that, in Deming’s (1982) terms ‘drives out fear,’ and encourages people to be open to, and about, change and prepared to take the risks of both justifying and enacting new behaviours”.

31) For John Seddon, managing director of Vanguard Consulting, speaking to Jim Mather, former SNP Minister for Enterprise “…the most important outcome can only be to agree to go collectively to study a service somewhere. Of course the leaders of that service have to be part of the study team, otherwise a train crash will ensue.”

NIALL MACKINNON
avernish, Kyle, Ross-shire
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2 Diagram at: http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningandteaching/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/thepurposeofthecurriculum/
3 Diagram on page 13 (PDF page 16) of: http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2008/06/06104407/14
11 Ibid.
18 HMIE (2011). HMIE Inspection Advice Note – Progress with Curriculum for Excellence for inspections which are announced from January 2011, HM Inspectorate for Education, p6


31 Bower, Joe (2011). You say you want this, so then why are you doing that? *for the love of learning*, Alberta, Canada, 23 June [http://www.joebower.org/2011/06/you-say-you-want-this-so-then-why-are.html](http://www.joebower.org/2011/06/you-say-you-want-this-so-then-why-are.html).


35 Jim Mather reviews *The Whitehall Effect* by John Seddon, an uncompromising account of Whitehall’s effect on our public services. [http://whatworksscotland.blogspot.co.uk/2015/02/jim-mather-reviews-whitehall-effect-by.html](http://whatworksscotland.blogspot.co.uk/2015/02/jim-mather-reviews-whitehall-effect-by.html).