1) 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).

2) I respond to the second letter from the Scottish Government of 18 September 2015 and ‘The Draft National Improvement Framework’ on which the Education and Culture Committee has invited comments.

3) The Draft National Improvement Framework is a top-down imposition framed in suppositions drawn from the most banal clichés of global education corporate reform. I do not consider that Scottish schools were ever freed up to engage with the inner kernel of the ‘four capacities’ at the heart of the 2004 curriculum review. That is because they were diverted by the indicators of ‘How Good Is Our School’ which boxed the curriculum into one ‘indicator’ out of thirty. In so doing the audit control system enshrined the curriculum as a ‘product model’ when other emergent conceptualisations of curriculum were needed. Fixed indicator audit prevents such adaptivity and collegiality.

4) The aim of Scottish education should be to reach out to the diverse capacities of children’s potentials, to equip pupils with the wherewithal to realise them. This requires a process of ‘getting to know’. The processes of personal and social development, and all the attributes which go with those – which are subsumed under the term ‘learning’ – need to be set within real purposes, which children can come to own. Those are not grades, or tests, or attainment, or gaps. The overarching aim should be to foster a love of learning. Certainly we shall record information concerning children’s progression. There are also many drivers, and inhibitors, and complex interactions of many factors which are anything but linear. Those require to be understood, in context, but not through fixed indicator judgmental imposition or in terms of gross simplifications; ‘closing the gap’ stands out.

5) The path forward should be to rekindle the four capacities and engage with schools as to how they are fostering them in their own terms as mediated through their actual pupils. That does not currently occur. Schools are bathed in edicts, directives, specifications and judgements. These are framed in suppositions which do not derive from ‘how the work works’, its variety, nor from the immense cultural, normative and technological changes now occurring, in society and in schools. The National Improvement Framework as proposed will intensify this divergence, and do so to a set of suppositions which will not assist in the essential task to ‘get knowledge’ of how the diverse capacities of children’s potential may be best enabled and integrated, which requires learning from the bottom up, not top down. The letter to the committee states, “We will develop a new National Improvement Hub which will provide teachers with a rich range of tools and resources to help them raise attainment and improve performance”. What if in a school, attainment and performance are optimal. What then? But suppose other characteristics, qualities and concepts emerge as those most requiring attention, or indeed as desired. What then?

6) For these reasons the current proposals should be rejected, and most certainly should not be afforded a statutory basis. We already have an enhancement framework in ‘Building the Curriculum’. It needs to be made to work – to be ‘built’, which is a collaborative endeavour, not impositional. Look at the key characteristics of ‘The Four Capacities’:

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1 A phrase of public services’ analyst John Seddon
A Curriculum for Excellence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Successful learners</th>
<th>Confident individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>with</strong></td>
<td><strong>with</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enthusiasm &amp; motivation for learning</td>
<td>self-respect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>determination to reach high standards of achievement</td>
<td>a sense of physical, mental and emotional wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>openness to new thinking and ideas</td>
<td>secure values and beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>and able to</strong></td>
<td><strong>and able to</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use literacy, communication &amp; numeracy skills</td>
<td>ambition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>use technology for learning</td>
<td>relate to others and manage themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think creatively &amp; independently</td>
<td>pursue a healthy and active lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learn independently and as part of a group</td>
<td>be self aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make reasoned evaluations</td>
<td>develop and communicate their own beliefs and view of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>link &amp; apply different kinds of learning in new situations</td>
<td>live as independently as they can</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assess risk and take informed decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>achieve success in different areas of activity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

To enable all young people to become

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible citizens</th>
<th>Effective contributors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>with</strong></td>
<td><strong>with</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>respect for others</td>
<td>an enterprising attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitment to participate responsibly in political, economic, social and cultural life</td>
<td>resilience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>and able to</strong></td>
<td><strong>and able to</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>develop knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it</td>
<td>self-reliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understand different beliefs and cultures</td>
<td>communicate in different ways and in different settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make informed choices and decisions</td>
<td>work in partnership and in teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluate environmental, scientific and technological issues</td>
<td>take the initiative and lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>develop informed, ethical views of complex issues</td>
<td>apply critical thinking in new contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>create and develop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>solve problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7) If those qualities are reduced to ‘attainment’ and ‘performance’ and determined through standardised testing what is left? Not much.

8) The suppositions which frame the Draft National Improvement Framework are widespread and dominant on the global education stage. Indeed they are becoming more prominent. But there are powerful alternatives, and those too have been powerfully and successfully articulated in national education systems, and indeed at local levels. Ways of seeing, ways of thinking and ways of doing articulate around these models. When power becomes involved, as it does, then conflicts arise. This needs to become far more explicit. These need to resolve through decisions framed through choices based on knowledge – operational and organisational knowledge which may arise through ‘studying the work’. This is a very different process to school inspection.

9) I present three articles and a report to the Committee for their consideration as directly relevant to the theme of The Draft National Improvement Framework. Although already published they relate directly to this central conflict of school enhancement through a performative or a constructivist pathway and were written to highlight the central distinctions. In now making a decision which will have an enormous and directive effect on school education in Scotland for many years to come it is necessary that all those involved be aware of these central distinctions and how they articulate into different operational visions. Then, when a choice is made, some consideration will have been given to the existence of alternatives, and the developmental implications of going down one route or another. This will be a very big decision, with far-reaching consequences. Different learning will occur, literally.

10) The three articles are:


11) The report is:

Submission on Public Sector Reform and Local Government (February 2012), Local Government and Regeneration Committee, Scottish Parliament [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_LocalGovernmentandRegenerationCommittee/Inquiries/MacKinnon_Niall.pdf]

12) Some recent commentary is particularly relevant to this consultation, especially that deriving from practitioners. I draw particular attention to these:

Telling Time with a Broken Clock - The trouble with standardized testing’ by Joe Bower [http://www.cea-ace.ca/education-canada/article/telling-time-broken-clock-joe-bower]


Altman, Ian (14 August 2014) ‘Seven things teachers are sick of hearing from school reformers’ [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2014/08/14/seven-
things-teachers-are-sick-of-hearing-from-school-reformers/
The Secret Teacher (16 May 2015) ‘Sats stress is crushing children’s love of learning’
http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2015/may/16/secret-teacher-sats-stress-
childrens-love-of-learning
If this is your daily reality what then? (it has been mine in dealing with profound needs of
pupils in my class): http://www.joebower.org/2012/05/mental-health-day-is-
inconvenient.html
The polar opposite of the Framework proposals form the thesis of Sir Ken Robinson’s new
book ‘Creative Schools: Revolutionizing Education from the ground up’:
http://sirkenrobinson.com/creative-schools-the-grassroots-revolution-thats-
transforming-education/
Knowledge building: http://www.ikit.org/ transcending ‘best practice’ and:
Scardamalia, Marlene, (2013), ‘21st Century Competencies environments and
Assessments’, keynote speech, 26th International Congress of School Effectiveness,
Santiago, Chile
http://ww2.educarchile.cl/UserFiles/P0001/File/entrevista_educativa/scardamalia_ppt.p
df and:
MacKinnon, Niall (2006), ‘AifL - Assessment is for Learning: Questioning strategies in
Plockton Primary School’, Highland. Learning and teaching Scotland (website)
ghqualityinteractions/plocktonps.asp and:
Express and Digest 6.2, September 2015
http://www.icsei.net/fileadmin/ICSEI/icsei_expresse/ICSEI_expresse_6_2.pdf (page 6)
13) We need to look at what has emerged in our school systems during the heavy initiative
and change agenda of recent years. Much has worked, but is new. There are whole new
frameworks, but because they did not fit with audit preconceptions they were ignored.
They need now to be considered. Some of what worked was discarded and perhaps
should be restored. The A to F level assessments were not tests to be graded and
administered on specific dates – but confirmations of judgement of reaching certain levels
to be administered when appropriate. There is much to be commended in that, when
considered with what is now on offer. What is now needed is consolidation. Within the
loose framework of Curriculum for Excellence, and its very different purposes, we now
need to ‘get knowledge’ of what is working, or what is not, absorb the immense variety of
context and potential, and provide a framework of constancy and support. We need to
build a learning system. Former Scottish Government minister Jim Mather provides a
model of how that could work, based on the systems thinking methods developed by John
Seddon in conjunction with various public services. They provide a framework where local
adaptivity within overarching themes acquires functional coherence without undue
constraint, thus releasing the potential of innovation. That is a framework to commend.
http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/docs/080119_Seddon_Systems_Thinking_in_the_P
ublic_Sector.ppt I do not commend the framework as now proposed in this consultation.
14) “A system can only see what it can see. It cannot see what it can’t see. Nor can it see that
it cannot see what it can’t see.” Niklas Luhmann, quoted by ICSEI president Michael
Schraz http://www.icsei.net/fileadmin/ICSEI/icsei_expresse/ICSEI_expresse_6_2.pdf (page
1)

NIALL MACKINNON
3 NOVEMBER 2015