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Convenor, Education and Skills Committee,
Scottish Parliament

By email to: Stephen.Imrie@parliament.scot

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Thank you for your letter of 15th June inviting me to attend the meeting of the Education and Skills Committee on 29th June to give evidence to the Committee on my portfolio. I look forward to attending the meeting and discussing the Government's mission and ambitions in this crucially important area of public policy.

You asked for a short statement on the Government's plans for Education and Skills to help focus the session. You also asked for a note of what was discussed at the Education Summit on 15th June and what actions are being taken forward as a result of the Summit.

I attach a statement on the Government's plans for Education and Skills. I also attach a short note of the 15th June Summit. In terms of actions being taken forward as a result of the Summit, this will be outlined in the Delivery Plan which will be published before the summer recess.

I trust the Committee finds this helpful.

JOHN SWINNEY

Statement by Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
The Government's Plans for Education and Skills
29th June 2016

The Government's Plans for Education and Skills are to work relentlessly to get it right for all young people in Scotland, regardless of their age, background or circumstances. Our vision for education is essential to deliver more and better paid jobs and create stronger, more sustainable growth in our economy.

The Government's three main priorities for education and skills are:-

- To ensure that our children and young people get the best start in life through a transformed early learning and childcare experience to improve their life chances;
- To focus on what works in schools and be relentless in efforts to deliver excellence and equity, raise standards for all children and close the attainment gap for good.
- To ensure that every child has the same chance to progress by widening out opportunities for all young people to access higher and further education through a range of pathways including high quality vocational options.

This Government's vision is to make sure Scotland is the best place in the world to grow up in and go to school by putting children and their families at the heart of policy making and service delivery.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) is central to delivering a more accessible, streamlined and coordinated service for children and families. Founded in children's rights, these provisions provide valuable additional support for children and their families throughout Scotland. Our aim is to improve how services work together for children and young people and the GIRFEC approach is essential to achieving the ambition of making Scotland the best place to grow up in. Focussing on prevention and early intervention in the early years of life is proven to be the most cost-effective way to reduce inequality in outcomes with savings in the short and longer term. The expansion of childcare will be the most important infrastructure project of this Parliament to support this – it will help parents into work and transform investment in the life chances of our children.

We want all young people to have equal chances and choices to thrive and succeed throughout their education - whether that be pre-school, during school years or beyond in college, university or training.

Scotland has a good education system – with strong schools and talented teachers. We have a new curriculum, record exam passes and a record number of young people leaving school to go onto positive destinations. We aim to improve the system further and ensure educational excellence for all by closing the gap in attainment between young people from our most and least deprived communities. This will be the defining mission of the Government this Parliament.

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To do this we will use information generated through the new National Improvement Framework to set clear, specific and meaningful milestones, with a view to delivering significant progress in closing the attainment gap over this parliament and substantially eliminate it within a decade. To support this, we will develop a fair and transparent funding formula for schools to ensure that resources go where they are needed most. We will expand our Attainment Fund and invest £750 million over this Parliament to close the gap in attainment. We will maintain teacher numbers and continue to invest in teachers and headteachers and ensure all our teachers are confident in teaching literacy and numeracy.

We will review school governance with a view to ensuring that parents, families and communities play a bigger role in their children's education and in the life of their children's school. We will extend to individual schools responsibilities that currently sit solely with local authorities, allocate more resources directly to headteachers and enable them to take decisions based on local circumstances. We will encourage school clusters and create new educational regions to decentralise management and support. We will also develop and implement a Scottish STEM strategy to ensure that from the earliest age, children are alive to the opportunities that science, technology, engineering and maths can offer them.

We will continue to invest in our Youth Employment Strategy, Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), to ensure a greater focus on employability within Scottish education. Through this we will promote more opportunity and choice to improve outcomes for all young people regardless of their background. We will do this by better connecting employers and education and by ensuring all young people have opportunities for high quality work-related learning, including vocational qualifications, embedded in their curriculum.

We will maintain the number of full-time equivalent college places that lead to employment focusing on ensuring that the sector contributes to boosting productivity, encouraging progression and helping tackle in-work poverty.

We will develop and implement a new compact for universities that captures our shared vision for education and the economy, and sets out shared priorities for action. We will appoint a Commissioner for Fair Access to report and advise on access and will provide every care experienced young person with a full bursary.

We will review the Enterprise and Skills Agencies and contribute to innovation reform by aligning Higher Education support and simplifying the innovation landscape. We will also maximise the Government's use of science advice, knowledge and techniques when developing and implementing policies to further enhance Scotland's status as a science and innovation nation.

More detail on the Government's plans for getting it right for all young people in Scotland and ensuring excellence and equity will be provided in a Delivery Plan for Scottish Education, due to be published before the summer recess.

John Swinney MSP

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Scottish Government
June 2016

Summary note of Education Summit – Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education

15th June 2016, Craigroyston Community High School, Edinburgh

The summit was hosted by Craigroyston Community High School on behalf of the Scottish Government. It was attended by 51 delegates across the breadth of Scottish Education and included party leaders and education spokespeople.

The summit was addressed by teachers and pupils from Craigroyston who had taken part in either the highly able widening access group or the developing the young workforce pre-apprenticeship programme. An employer also gave their perspective of the pre-apprenticeship programme.

The First Minister addressed the summit outlining the importance of education both for the individual but also for the country as a whole and noting the importance of the summit to build consensus and the importance of a shared national endeavour to agree on practical steps to meet the twin aspirations of excellence and equity in Scottish education.

David Istance and Andy Hargreaves from the OECD provided an international perspective of the work underway in Scotland reflecting on the recent Scotland review which had taken place. In summary, Scotland faces a watershed moment in which to be specific about the bold curricular changes under Curriculum for Excellence and to ensure progress is monitored in a clear and transparent way. Scotland should take the opportunity to transform a culture of judgement into a system of judgement, where robust collaboration and shared responsibility between teachers, headteachers, schools, local authorities and national bodies will lead to Scotland not only remaining ahead of the curve globally but actually become the curve that others refer to around the world.

Councillor Stephanie Primrose, COSLA spokesperson on Education and Young people, provided a local government perspective. She highlighted the importance of services working together across health, social care, early years and education for the benefit of our young people. COSLA has supported greater collaboration between councils as demonstrated in the Northern Alliance in order to drive improvement. COSLA wish to continue to work within a strengthened middle to improve the outcomes for the most vulnerable.

The first discussion session focussed on empowering classrooms and putting teachers at the heart of improvement.

Points raised in discussion included:

- the importance of teacher leadership and enthusiasm for professional learning;
- the role for professional associations to also lead from the middle; clear agreed moral purpose in the twin ambitions of excellence and equity;
- the impact of high quality teaching on getting it right for every child; the use of diagnostic assessment to support teachers' professional judgement;

- workload challenges including the need to reduce bureaucracy for school leaders;
- the need to support the cluster model of collaboration in order to share best practice;
- the importance of using evidence to focus on what works;
- the impact of reductions in the wider education support team for individual children;
- a desire to declutter the primary school curriculum;
- issues with the supply of teachers impacting on the time teachers have to collaborate;
- the need to empower young people to influence their classrooms; and
- the importance of teachers working in wider partnerships which involve youth work and local partnerships.

The second discussion session considered empowering parents and communities in order to get the support for education right.

Points raised in discussion included:

- the need to draw communities in, with the belief that creating partnerships is a key part of teacher professionalism although with the proviso that sometimes schools needed to challenge the prevailing community ethos;
- schools are a key social anchor;
- the need to involve the Scottish research community more in the design and evaluation of education policies;
- teachers need to value parents - parental engagement is mixed and we need to have a more systematic approach to learning from best practice;
- research has shown that the level of participation of young people within schools can have a significant impact on attainment;
- the quality of relationships within and across a school community is important;
- while a focus on raising attainment is important, we must be clear on what we mean by attainment and this must reflect the Developing the Young Workforce agenda;
- the importance of a non-tokenistic pupil council;
- we must offer pathways for all young people;
- the importance of opening schools up to employers in order to secure positive destinations for young people;
- the importance of health and wellbeing and ensuring that we focus on adolescence; and
- the importance of joining up policy on achievement and attainment that supports lifelong learning.

In conclusion the Deputy First Minister thanked all delegates for their contributions. These would be used to inform his thinking in order to formulate a unified agenda for the delivery plan which he will publish before the summer recess. This delivery plan will concentrate on concrete actions which will be taken in order to make a practical difference in Scottish Education.