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Dear Convener

OECD INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CURRICULUM FOR EXCELLENCE: UPDATE

I am writing to update the Committee on progress with OECD engagement on the Independent Review of Curriculum for Excellence and on plans for additional work on qualifications and assessment.

CfE Review Engagement

As you are aware, the first round of national stakeholder interviews took place from 28th September - 2nd October. During this visit the OECD met virtually with: myself; the Scottish Parliament's Education & Skills Committee; Scottish Government officials; the Scottish Practitioner Forum; national agencies; local government representatives; college bodies; DYW regional employer groups; university bodies; academics/ researchers; organisations responsible for teacher professional learning & leadership; teacher and headteacher professional associations; parent organisations; young people organisations; Gaelic education groups; subject specific interest groups; members of the Curriculum & Assessment Board; and members of the Scottish Education Council.

The schedule for this first round of national stakeholder interviews was agreed in discussion with the Scottish Practitioner Forum and with the OECD, based on guidelines from the OECD.

The second week of engagement with schools, learners and parents ran from 2nd - 5th November. As part of this engagement, the OECD held in-depth virtual visits with 4 schools (Forehill Primary School, Tiree & Oban High School Partnership, Castlemilk High School and Aberdeen Grammar School), as well as a number of focus group sessions with headteachers, teachers, partners, learners and parents.

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The approach to this week was also agreed with the Scottish Practitioner Forum and officials worked closely with ADES and individual schools to make the necessary arrangements.

Between virtual school visits and focus group sessions, the OECD engaged with (approximately):

9 Headteachers
36 teachers
21 parents
60 learners (primary, secondary and post-school)
2 College Principals
2 employer reps
A CLD provider

The feedback from those who participated in the OECD engagement activities has been very positive, with schools welcoming the opportunity to be involved and to contribute despite the wider challenges they are facing. This shows once again the commitment and professionalism of our education practitioners in Scotland.

Whilst my preference would have been for the OECD Team to have been able to visit Scotland in person, undertaking the engagement virtually has allowed them to meet with a wide range of education bodies and cover a wide geographical spread of schools in a short period of time.

Next steps

The OECD will now focus on the drafting process and officials will work with them to organise a further engagement event in February 2021, so that draft recommendations can be shared and discussed with stakeholders, providing a further opportunity for key partners and practitioners in Scotland to inform the final report.

Additional Work on Assessment & Qualifications

As part of the suite of work I commissioned in response to the 2020 SQA exam results, I asked the OECD to expand the work on the CfE Review to also include a deeper focus on the future of assessment and qualifications approaches in the Senior Phase curriculum in Scotland. The aim of this work is to analyse Scotland's approach to assessment and qualifications and produce options for how we could enhance our approach, informed by international good practice.

Officials have been working with the OECD to scope the additional work on assessment and qualifications, and we have agreed with the OECD that this will involve:

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- Employing an additional international expert to undertake a desk-based analysis of Scotland's approaches to student assessment in relation to National Qualifications in the Senior Phase in comparison with approaches in other education systems. The comparative analysis will consider education systems that are relevant to Scotland's experience and objectives in education.
- A second seminar with stakeholders (in addition to that planned for the wider Review) to present and discuss the preliminary findings from the desk-based analysis and to gather stakeholders' feedback and suggestions on how to move forward.
- The production of a comparative paper building on the desk-based analysis and stakeholder engagement seminar and provides a set of options for Scotland to consider.

This work will be aligned with the current OECD Review of the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence and the final comparative paper will be published later in the summer 2021, following the publication of the CfE Review Report in June 2021.

I hope this update is helpful to the Committee.

Yours Sincerely

JOHN SWINNEY

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