By email
7 October 2016

Dear John

The Committee has now concluded its overview sessions on the six main elements of its remit. In advance of your session with the Committee on 2nd November to discuss issues arising from these sessions, I wanted to seek clarification from you in relation to key documents for the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence. During the session on C for E on 28th September, members and witnesses discussed the moves towards decluttering the amount of guidance and other information that teachers are required to be aware of and adhere to. I know this is something that you emphasised the need for in your evidence session with the Committee in June.

During the discussion the witnesses talked about the Experiences and Outcomes document, Significant Aspects of Learning and the new benchmarks document, including in relation to numeracy and literacy. As you will see from the extracts of the Official Report attached in the Annexe below, there was some uncertainty as to whether the new benchmarks document will supersede the other two documents. I should be grateful for clarification on this within your response to my earlier letter dated 19 September 2016. In order for your response to be taken into account in committee papers I would be grateful for a response by Friday 21st October.

Yours sincerely

JAMES DORNAN MSP
CONVENER
Annexe

Keir Bloomer: The experiences and outcomes have been around for something like eight years, and we should have been going through a process of iterative change whereby we refine our approach to the experiences and outcomes and they become steadily more useful. However, we have not done that; we have duplicated them, first in the significant aspects of learning, which were really a recognition that the experiences and outcomes were too many and too complex, and which provided a simpler system. Susan Quinn referred to those. However, my impression is that even they are no longer current but have been replaced by the newly issued benchmarks. If that is not the case, we now have three systems of the same thing, which is a strange approach to simplification. There is a need to look seriously at how change can be brought about and to dramatically simplify what is on offer.

Ann Grant: My understanding is that the recently published benchmarks—which are for certain aspects of the curriculum; benchmarks for the rest of the curriculum will be published by the end of the calendar year—have subsumed the Es and Os and the significant aspects of learning. In other words, the benchmarks document is now the working document that I expect to look at with my staff. I do not expect to look at Es and Os and the significant aspects of learning in the same detail.

The benchmarks for literacy and numeracy have an interesting feature, which is that there are bits that are in bold or italics that are for all teachers, and there are other bits in plain font, which are specifically for English teachers, in the case of literacy, and maths teachers, in the case of numeracy. That has all been conflated in one document. I may be wrong, but that is the way that I approach it.