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James Dornan
Convener, Education & Skills Committee
Scottish Parliament

By email to Roz.Thomson@parliament.scot

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Dear James,

Thank you for your letters of 19 September and 7 October. It was helpful to receive a summary of the Committee's intended working practices and its upcoming work programme and I am grateful for the early notice you have given me regarding expectations to attend Committee. I appreciate that I may be expected to attend at relatively short notice and I will ensure my Private Office is mindful of this when planning my diary for Wednesday mornings.

Following my update on the Named Person, I would be glad to keep members informed about planned engagement and my intended approach with stakeholders and the public on this issue.

Regarding the Committee's question about the publication of criteria for measuring the attainment gap, I committed in the Delivery Plan to using new data that will become available to identify the attainment gap in P1, P4, P7 and S3 at school, local authority and national level. The criteria that we will use to measure the gap will be set out in the National Improvement Plan which will be published in December along with the National Improvement Framework annual report and revised Framework. I then intend to engage with key stakeholders to discuss plans to reduce the gap, together with any possible milestones towards delivery, and I will inform the Committee of these by the middle of next year.

You also asked for clarification on the relationships between the Experiences and Outcomes (Es and Os), Significant Aspects of Learning and the new Benchmarks. The Es and Os and Benchmarks are the two key resources which teachers should use to plan learning, teaching and assessment. The Es and Os sit alongside the Benchmarks as central materials for teachers to draw on. Es and Os for each curriculum area illustrate the learning within each level. The recent Statement on Curriculum for Excellence outlined how teachers should use Es and Os to plan learning, teaching and assessment in the medium-term and suggested teachers should group these together when planning learning activities, in the ways which best suit learners.



The Benchmarks are designed to support teacher professional judgement of both progress towards, and achievement of, a level. The purpose of the Benchmarks is to set out clear statements about what learners need to know and be able to do to achieve a level. They streamline and embed a wide range of existing assessment guidance, including the Significant Aspects of Learning and progression frameworks, providing a single key resource to support teachers' professional judgement. The Benchmarks should be used to help monitor progress towards achievement of a level and to support professional dialogue and judgement of when a learner has achieved a level.

The Benchmarks for both literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics were published in draft form in August 2016. This will enable Education Scotland to engage with teachers and practitioners, as they begin to use the Benchmarks to support professional judgement of both progress towards and achievement of a level. Feedback on specific Benchmarks is being welcomed. All feedback will be considered when finalising the Benchmarks for publication in summer 2016. While the Benchmarks are still in draft form, Education Scotland has committed to keeping the Significant Aspects of Learning and progression frameworks online. When the Benchmarks are finalised, the Significant Aspects of Learning and progression frameworks will be removed to keep to our commitment to simplify, de-clutter and move to the two key resources, Es and Os and Benchmarks.

I understand my Private Office has contacted you to confirm that the 2nd of November is being held in my diary for my attendance at Committee. I would be grateful if you could liaise with my diary secretary, Connie Whiting, to confirm arrangements for this.

JOHN SWINNEY