EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

AGENDA

41st Meeting, 2000 (Session 1)

Wednesday 6 December 2000

The Committee will meet at 9.00 am in the Hub, Castlehill

1. **Draft Affirmative Instrument:** The Education Minister, Mr Jack McConnell, will move a motion recommending that the following draft affirmative instrument be approved—

   The Education (National Priorities) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/draft)

2. **Celtic's Social Charter:** Members will report back on Celtic's Social Charter.

3. **Update of Committee Business:** The Committee will be updated on business in its current work programme.

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The following papers are attached for this meeting—

The Education (National Priorities) (Scotland) Order 2000 (SSI 2000/draft)

National Priorities Consultation - Responses Summary
NATIONAL PRIORITIES CONSULTATION – RESPONSES SUMMARY

General comments

The vast majority of respondents welcomed the principle of national priorities and the consultation.

• The principal of national priorities as a basis for ensuring a clearly defined and coherent framework for the delivery of education services to the highest standard throughout Scotland is an important one. (Convention of Local Authorities in Scotland/Association of Directors of Education in Scotland)

Many authorities were of the opinion that the focus in the improvement framework should be on the identification of key outcomes of the education system, not on the processes of achieving these.

• For the Executive to define the means as well as the ends would be unnecessarily prescriptive at a time when, nationally, the emphasis should be on encouraging innovation and initiative. (CoSLA/ADES)

• If the priorities which ultimately emerge from the consultation focus on means as well as ends, the possibility of moving towards a service which is genuinely focused upon improvement and which can be properly held accountable will be lost. (Clackmannanshire Council)

Not all respondents concurred:

• Concept of outcomes, inputs and action areas acceptable (South Ayrshire Council)

A number of commentators believed that the national priorities should allow for local interpretation and responsiveness to local circumstances:

• Priorities need to be formulated at a level of generality which avoids them being overly prescriptive, and in a way which allows for local interpretation (COSLA/ADES)

• … schools … should be asked to identify particular priorities from a menu of national and local authority priorities. (Peterhead Academy)
Several authorities believed the number of national priorities was too great:

- Priorities should be limited in number and the number proposed in the consultation document is too large to be kept manageable. (Dumfries and Galloway Council)

Other bodies expressed concern that national priorities would turn into a “wish list”:

- Danger of the priorities developing into a “wish list” than a real attempt at prioritisation (Forum on Scottish Education)

Many respondents raised the issue of funding for national priorities and the education system generally:

- Finance is vital to, not only to ensure that the national priorities initiative is successful, but in order to maintain the standard once it has been achieved. (City of Edinburgh Council)

Some other general comments made on the paper were:

- Pity the paper concentrates solely on school education and does not recognise links with community education. (COSLA/ADES)

- Document is overly prescriptive and centralist. (Renfrewshire Council)

- Not clear who the audience is for the paper or to whom the priorities are addressed. (Clackmannanshire Council)

- Scottish Parent Teacher Council described consultation as “nothing but an empty sham” because they thought that paragraph 10 indicated that the Executive believed that the limit of their role was to identify national priorities “and after that it washes its hands completely of the process for delivery when the outcomes require extra resources... and those extra resources can only be provided by the Executive.”

- Language of the paper is borrowed from business and is inappropriate to schools (Educational Institute of Scotland)
Values and Principles

The document proposes that national priorities should be based on the duty in the Act that:

"It shall be the duty of the authority to secure that the education is directed to the development of the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest potential."

The document also proposes that the priorities should reflect the vision that:

The Scottish Executive will seek every opportunity to celebrate and foster.... excellence so that schools ensure that children and young people:

- Are confident, well-motivated and fully rounded
- Are literate and numerate, to a level at or above that of their peers in the rest of the world
- Fully understand and are able to play their parts as citizens of a modern democratic society
- Seize opportunities open to them regardless of their background
- Have the skills and aptitudes to work flexibly and to embrace change throughout their lives.

There was wide support for the suggested values and principles to guide the setting of national priorities:

- We very much welcome the inclusion of Values and Principles in the new national priorities as these provide some indications of the kind of society we aspire to and the contributions to that society which we expect our young people to make.
  (Catholic Education Commission – Scotland)

COSLA and ADES have proposed changes to the second and third bullet points and an additional sixth one, as follows:

- Possess a comprehensive range of fundamental transferable skills, and in particular are literate and numerate to a level at or above their peers in the rest of the world;
- Fully understand and are able and equipped to play their parts as citizens of a modern democratic society;
- Are enterprising and creative, with a clear regard for the principles of sustainability.

Several organisations believed that principles of sustainable development should also inform the setting of national priorities.

- .. any statement on the nature and purpose of education, in line with much stated government commitment, should have the goal of sustainable development at its very heart as a focus and context for all learning.
  (IDEAS: International Development Education Association of Scotland)
A number of organisations thought that specific mention should be given to equality issues:

- The principle of equal opportunities should be explicitly referred to within the national priorities (some made particular reference to the MacPherson report, and the sub-group on it chaired by Jackie Baillie which is looking specifically at education);

- One of the basic tenets of the Scottish Executive is equality and the mainstreaming of equality issues, yet there is no evidence of this happening in the Improving Our Schools document and no recognition that it should be occurring. (Edinburgh & Lothians Racial Equality Council)

Several authorities asked that a greater emphasis should be placed on partnership arrangements:

- The reference to partnership with parents is welcome but it would be useful here to incorporate some broader components of the new community school concept such as partnership with community organisations, social work, health and the business sector. (CoSLA/ADES)

Several churches and religious organisations wanted reference to be made to the moral and spiritual development of children, as well as the intellectual development.

Other points made under this section include:

- There is a need to recognise and address the needs of rural and remote areas;
- There is a need to link to other Scottish Executive work and reports (specific mention was made of Special Educational Needs reports e.g. Riddell, Beattie).

What are the key outcomes that the Scottish Executive, local authorities and schools should be working together to achieve to develop the potential of each and every child?

Most consultees agreed with the list of key skills in the document – ie in:

- Literacy and numeracy;
- Information and Communications technology;
- Communication and interpersonal skills;
- Problem solving and critical thinking;
- Working with others.

- The education authority welcomes the focus on the wide range of skills which young people need to take their place in an increasingly complex society and the widening out of the focus from a narrow concept of attainment to a wider concept of achievement. (East Dunbartonshire Council)

High on the list of other skills suggested were:

- Enterprise skills
- Active citizenship skills
- Learning skills
• Personal and social development and values
• Emotional intelligence
• Self-confidence
• Development of physical skills
• Foreign language skills (also relevant in action areas)

Several organisations (e.g. Children in Scotland, those representing sports organisations) said that they did not feel that the consultation paper reflected priorities based on the new duty in the act that authorities should ensure that the education they provide is directed to the personality, talents and mental and physical abilities of the child or young person to their fullest ability. Their view was that a focus on more than the key skills listed was required to ensure this duty was fulfilled, and there was a particular view that the development of “physical abilities” had been missed.

Most church respondents said they felt that the spiritual development of children had been missed.

There were mixed views about whether attainment in national examinations should be a key outcome, but overall most were in agreement on this. Some respondents said they felt there was too much of an emphasis in the paper on academic skills and qualifications and more attention should be given to personal skills.

Several authorities questioned whether performance in national examinations provided sufficient evidence that the kinds of key skills mentioned had actually been acquired:

• Achievement in national examinations does not necessarily provide evidence that the skills and knowledge has been developed, so it would be helpful if the skills and knowledge could be used as a basis for the review of current curriculum guidelines.
  (Dumfries & Galloway Council)

*An inclusive system- Scottish Ministers believe that the promotion of social justice should be central to national priorities and that these targets should be included as measures of performance in respect of skills and knowledge*

There was little dissent that the national priorities should reflect the promotion of social justice, or social inclusion. Many however expressed reservations about the targets – there was some confusion about them being included as measures of performance – a significant minority of those responding saw them as a list of priorities in their own right. More information on these responses is given later under “measures of performance.”

Several school boards and authorities expressed a concern that the inclusion of more disruptive pupils in mainstream schools could adversely effect the majority of children.

While there was clear support for the idea of raising the performance of children and young persons with the lowest attainment relative to the performance of high achievers, several commentators noted that this should not be at the expense of a continuing rise in the level of performance across the board. A potential difficulty in reconciling the drive for inclusion with the simultaneous drive to raise attainment/achievement was also articulated.
How should the needs of children with special educational needs be best reflected in national priorities and measures of performance?

There was wide agreement that improvement planning and target setting should take account of the needs of pupils with special educational needs.

- In relation to children with SEN .. we feel strongly that targets set should, as at present, be decided by a process of negotiation between school and other professional staff, parents and (whenever possible) children themselves.
  (University of Edinburgh: Faculty of Education)

- Council (SCCC) believes that pupils with identified SENs are entitled to a curriculum that recognises their individual circumstances and offers appropriate learning experiences.
  (Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum)

Many commentators also believed that using the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools as a measure of performance on its own would be inadequate.

- Mainstream placement alone is an insufficient target. Mainstream placement supported in such a way that the child concerned and his/her class peers progress educationally at individually appropriate rates .. should be the aim.
  (University of Edinburgh: Faculty of Education)

- Given the many, varied and often extremely specific needs of (children with SEN) .. it would be completely inappropriate to attempt to use integration of such children as a measure of performance.
  (Bankhead Primary School Board)

Children in Scotland’s response covered the views of many SEN organisations. Their response said that special educational needs had to be addressed within the general framework of key outcomes and inputs - “children with special educational needs must be included within the general framework in order to pursue the vision of an inclusive system but their particular needs must also be highlighted for fear that these issues may be sidelined.”

They suggested changes to some of the language used to ensure that the language does not exclude certain children. They felt that the development of a child to their fullest potential would not always be measurable in terms of attainment of qualifications or assessment of particular skills and so targets should be inclusive and make greater reference to achievements appropriate to the individual child (though did not specify how that might be done).

ENABLE suggested specific targets for SEN children, including that they should all have an Individualised Educational Programme (IEP), that parents should be involved with IEPs, that class sizes should be reduced and relating to teacher and auxiliary training.
What inputs are most significant in delivering the key outcomes for education?

Those proposed in the consultation document were:

- A professional, well-motivated teaching force
- Making use of resources at every level in the system
- Modern buildings with the facilities to promote effective learning
- Engagement of parents in their children's learning and development
- A positive ethos
- Schools to be a safe and pleasant environment

There was little disagreement that these were important. Several respondents also felt that the involvement of pupils in their own education should also be listed here. Mention was also made of the importance of the input of other agencies and the impact of social factors such as housing and health.

Some respondents (almost all of them Councils) felt that the outcome/input model was not helpful and that this list should not be part of the national priorities themselves but seen instead as conditions conducive to effective learning. Some felt these were too vague. A significant minority mentioned that additional resources from the Executive were essential.

Are there particular areas of concern where action is necessary to ensure improvement?

This section received mixed reviews – some were confused by the concept of action areas, and what status they would have relative to the outcome/input priorities. Several authorities and education bodies believed that the concept of action areas worked against the principles of planning and taking a strategic view.

Some felt that the detail at this level should be left to local authorities to specify. Of those who agreed with the concept of action areas, most agreed with the list of:

- Transition from primary to secondary (though some thought this should be widened to cover transitions in the system more generally)
- Attainment of boys and girls
- National priorities in the curriculum – eg science and modern languages

In addition – other areas proposed included health education, outdoor education and technological education.

Gaelic

There were split views on this – some respondents thought this should be a low priority (and therefore not feature in national priorities). Most Councils supported the approach outlined in paragraph 26 (which is what is now in the Act – the consultation paper was written before that section of the Act appeared).
The Gaelic organisations who responded reiterated their view that there should be a duty to provide Gaelic education, and wished to see it as a specific priority (some were happy that it should be an action area, some were not and wanted it as a separate priority, because of the shorter timescale implied for action areas).

Several respondents thought that equal emphasis should be put on provision of education which reflected Scotland's multi-cultural society – so eg Urdu and Punjabi were also relevant.

**How can national priorities be assessed and measured so that improvement can be demonstrated?**

While there was broad support for the principle of measuring and assessing performance, there was a concern among many authorities and education bodies that the document appeared to place too great an emphasis on quantitative measures of performance. More specifically, concern was expressed that not all national priorities would lend themselves easily to qualitative measurement and the potential for such measures to distort the picture was also outlined.

- Council (SCCC) is conscious of the fact that not all national priorities may be amenable to simple and readily understandable forms of measurement. For the areas on which views are invited, it would be more appropriate to develop a set of success criteria (along the lines of Performance Indicators used by HM Inspectorate of Schools) by which success can be recognised, rather than measured in a quantitative sense. (Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum)

The table (at para 31) in the document produced a mixed response. Many found it confusing and thought that it was a list of priorities rather than measures (and so concluded that there were far too many priorities). The ADES/COSLA response said that the approach in the table was broadly acceptable, but made some detailed comments on the proposals. A table is attached summarising comments on the different proposals. In addition, the following suggestions for measurement were made:

- Surveys of pupils' views
- Feedback from HMI inspections

**How often should national priorities be reviewed and consulted on?**

The majority of respondents agreed with the suggestion of 3-5 years.

**What benchmarking information should the Scottish Executive offer?**

There was not much comment on this question. COSLA/ADES simply said that benchmarks were important, and that their development would be a gradual process which should be informed by research and involve all Councils and the Scottish Executive.
Other comments made include:

- It is .. our view that the document places too great an emphasis on measurement at the level of the individual school. Increasingly schools work in partnership with each other or work in association with other agencies in society. .. Groups of schools can achieve improvements which individual schools and teachers can not.
  (University of Strathclyde)

- On the question of similarities between schools and authorities, it is our view that national priorities and benchmarks should not be so restrictive as to prevent local experimentation and diversity.
  (University of Strathclyde)

**What characteristics or factors are most relevant in deciding that schools or authorities are similar?**

There was not much comment on this question, however several respondents highlighted both socio-economic make-up of catchment areas and free-school entitlement as means to comparing similarity.

Other characteristics/factors suggested included:

size, geographical location, population served including stability of the local and school population, parent and community expectations and priorities, local economic infrastructure, level of funding available, number & origin of Placing Requests, school occupancy levels, overall standard of accommodation, parental educational achievement and family stress indicators.

Other comments made included:

- Benchmarking could offer opportunities to share ideas and progress, but meaningful comparison of performance is difficult. Issues such as teacher numbers, pupil numbers and performance, staff absence and the availability of cover are all very localised and act against direct comparisons with other schools.
  (Falkirk Council)

**Is the timetable for implementation the right one?**

The suggested timetable was broadly considered to be reasonable. Many Councils thought that the references to July for many of the reports were inappropriate since that was during the school holidays. They also believed that the local authority statement of improvement objectives should be published in April each year and the school development plans by the end of June. To allow the reports on school performance to be informed by the most recently available exam statistics, they suggested a date of September for school reports. Many authorities wish to see report on school development plans included in present Standard and Quality report published in September – not at end of July from 2002 as suggested.
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<tr>
<th>National priority</th>
<th>Basis for measures of performance</th>
<th>Comments received</th>
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<tr>
<td>Core skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Literacy and numeracy</td>
<td>5-14 levels</td>
<td>These should not be adopted formally until the current national testing system can be refined to make it more accurate and reliable.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Standard grade performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Number of young people in local authority care who achieve a pass at English and maths standard grade*</td>
<td>Word “pass” anachronistic and will need to be replaced by a more appropriate measure. Many respondents who commented on it did not like this target – saying that it was patronising since many children in care would achieve more than this. “This target may give an important indication, but should not make young people (or their teachers) who achieve in other ways feel devalued.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skills in using ICT</td>
<td>Views invited</td>
<td>It would be appropriate to make some reference to 5-14 levels of attainment.</td>
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<td>Problem solving, critical thinking, working with others</td>
<td>Views invited</td>
<td>Assessment instruments on problem-solving and thinking skills are available through NFER and CASE – these should be actively considered. “Problem solving etc: should shy away from discrete Measures of Performance for these, as should be embedded in mainstream curricular areas at Standard Grade and Higher Still.” (Glasgow City Council)</td>
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<td>Personal, interpersonal and learning skills</td>
<td>Views invited</td>
<td>Would be useful to exemplify a broad entitlement of experiences for young people in schools without specifying how or where in the curriculum they should be provided.</td>
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<td>National qualifications</td>
<td>Percentage of pupils attaining particular qualifications</td>
<td>SQA believe at the latter stages of secondary school, recognition of a broader range of qualifications is needed</td>
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<td><strong>Inclusion</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Access to pre-school education</strong></td>
<td>All children to have access to publicly funded pre-school education. Measured as percentage of those whose parents request access.</td>
<td>Need to take account of partnership working. Should be “quality pre-school place.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Halving the proportion of 16-19 year olds who are not in education, training or employment</strong></td>
<td>Leaver destinations, number of pupils who stay on to take Highers</td>
<td>This devalues other types of provision/qualifications other than Highers which are equally valid. Some respondents pointed out that it was not just the education system which could influence whether or not this target was achieved.</td>
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<td><strong>To raise the performance of the 20% of children and young persons with the lowest attainment relative to performance of higher achievers</strong></td>
<td>Standard grade, grade point performance</td>
<td>Need to also keep a focus on the need to sustain the rise in standards across the attainment spectrum.</td>
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<td><strong>Reducing exclusion and truancy by one third</strong></td>
<td>Attendance and exclusion levels</td>
<td>Councils in particular asked that the distinction between “authorised” and “unauthorised” absences be dropped. Many respondents who commented on this did not feel the target to reduce exclusions was appropriate – they felt it lead to disruptive pupils being kept in the classroom to the detriment of others.</td>
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<td><strong>Raising the level of performance at P2 and P7 in literacy and numeracy</strong></td>
<td>5-14 levels</td>
<td>Many of those who commented on this felt that measurement should be at stages which correlated to the present target-setting initiative, which would mean P3 and P7. Many also suggested measurement at S2, given concerns at that stage. Some also suggested P5.</td>
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<th><strong>A professional teaching staff</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation for leadership</strong></td>
<td>Levels of success/participation in SQH</td>
<td>Some authorities pointed out that there were limited places on SQH. It was suggested this was broadened to include a range of other relevant management training opportunities.</td>
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<td><strong>A learning profession levels of participation in CPD</strong></td>
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<td>McCrone committee considerations will be relevant (as might Charter status). View that CPD should be attractive,</td>
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progressive and rewarding. “Participation in CPD is not an indicator of success in itself. It must be measured in terms of the quality of delivery and the availability of places.” (Falkirk Council)
Would be useful to consider the proportion of budgets spent on CPD.

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<tr>
<th>Promoting a safe and pleasant environment for learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concern expressed over possible misinterpretation of any figures produced.</td>
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<td>Violent/racist incidents</td>
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<td>Important to take public perception of statistics into account. Need to take account of guidance recently issued on school drug safety regarding the handling of drug related incidents in schools.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improving school buildings</td>
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<td>Authorities wanted it to be pointed out that they had a limited influence on this compared to central government. May be distorted by spread of Public Private Partnership budgets and any moves to pool budgets across service or organisational boundaries.</td>
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<td>Providing the technology to support teaching and learning</td>
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<td>Pointed out that levels of hardware don’t indicate level or quality of use and that many classrooms have no room for 4 computers. “A more meaningful indicator would be the National Grid for Learning ratio of pupils to computers.” (Falkirk Council)</td>
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<th>A positive ethos</th>
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<tr>
<td>Promoting an ethos of achievement and fairness</td>
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<td>Worth considering award of Investors in People. Charter Mark might be relevant. The ethos indicators in the HMI publication <em>How Good Is Our School?</em> were perceived to be a very effective way to measure qualitative performance. Councils’ belief that measures of performance should take local circumstances into account.</td>
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<th>Resources</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring that resources and used flexibly and effectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measures to be identified</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mention was made of a perceived need for more resources, beyond using existing funds efficiently.</td>
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