

STANDARDISED ASSESSMENTS IN SCOTLAND: DRAFT IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY 2019/20

1. The draft improvement activity identified in the table below sets out the key standardised assessment actions that the Scottish Government and Education Scotland (working with key partners as appropriate) plan to take forward during the 2019/20 school session. The action proposed in this draft plan responds to the recommendations from the various reports on P1 SNSAs noted below. Publishing the plan as a draft enables us to build on initial discussions with key partners such as COSLA and ADES, ensuring that our approaches to improvement are co-constructed and reflect an empowered system. Education Scotland regional teams will be involved in working with partners to shape the implementation of many of the areas for improvement at local level to take account of local needs and priorities. The approach to implementation will be discussed and agreed with the Scottish Education Council, with an initial discussion planned for the Council meeting on 26 June 2019. We will then look to publish a detailed finalised action plan in August 2019.

2. These priority actions have been identified in response to three significant reports which have been published recently, as well as direct feedback from those undertaking the Scottish National Standardised Assessments (SNSA) in the 2018/19 school year. The three reports are:

- [Scottish National Standardised Assessments: recommendations from P1 Practitioner Forum \(18 April 2019\)](#);
- [The Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee Report on Scottish National Standardised Assessments \(23 April 2019\)](#); and
- The Independent Review of the Scottish National Standardised Assessments at Primary 1 led by Mr David Reedy (11 June 2019).

3. The background to each of these reports and how they were prepared is set out below. They make a number of recommendations for action that are similar to one another. In addition to the individual responses, the Scottish Government has therefore sought to bring together the action it proposes to take in response to the three reports in this document for ease of reference and accessibility.

4. Direct user feedback was gathered through the Scottish Government's 2018/19 SNSA User Review. This review will not be completed until the end of the current school session but a progress report and recommendations have been published now to allow all relevant activity to be brought together.

5. All key documents can be found on the [National Improvement Framework](#) page of the Scottish Government website.

6. All of the activity included in the finalised plan in August will be fed into preparation of the 2020 National Improvement Framework and Improvement Plan due for publication in December 2019.

Background

7. In January 2016, the Scottish Government published its National Improvement Framework for Scottish education (the NIF). The NIF set out an holistic view of the education system; bringing together evidence and information from all levels of the system and across all aspects that impact on performance: the six drivers of improvement. The idea is that no one aspect takes precedence – the focus is on the way in which different parts of the system interact and connect with one another, to drive improvement.

8. Within the Assessment of Children's Progress driver itself, children's progress is considered in its widest sense – from development in the early years, right through to their destination on leaving school, and recognising the primacy of health and wellbeing throughout.

9. As part of the NIF, the Scottish Government introduced a new, national data collection, to provide additional information at school, local and national level about children's progress in literacy and numeracy. The national statistical publication of Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels has been produced annually since December 2016. It provides the key measure of children's progress in literacy and numeracy and is based entirely on teacher professional judgement.

10. The Scottish Government and Education Scotland have taken a number of steps to support teachers in making these judgements:

- the publication of literacy and numeracy benchmarks to provide clarity on what the achievement of a level looks like;
- Education Scotland's Quality Assurance and Moderation Support Officer (QAMSO) programme which is helping to ensure the consistency and robustness of teacher judgements across schools and local authorities; and
- the introduction of national standardised assessments in English (SNSA) and Gaelic Measaidhean Coitcheann Nàiseanta airson Foghlam tron Ghàidhlig (MCNG) to provide an additional source of objective, nationally consistent evidence for teachers to use when assessing children's progress at P1, P4, P7 and S3.

11. The Scottish Government has been clear that teacher judgements should take into consideration the full range of assessment evidence available.

National standardised assessments

12. The SNSA were made available to schools in August 2017. In the spring and summer of 2018, a number of concerns were raised about the SNSA, particularly at Primary 1, for example around the impact of the assessments on children and young people and the value of the information they produce for teachers. The focus of the three reports/recommendations and the actions flowing from them is therefore on the SNSA. Much of the priority activity however, is also relevant to the MCNG which was made available in December 2018.

The P1 Practitioner Forum

13. The 2017/18 SNSA User Review Report acknowledged the concerns raised about the assessments and, as part of the SNSA continuous improvement model, recommended a number of changes and enhancements to the SNSA system. The User Review also recommended the establishment of a P1 Practitioner Forum – to bring together a group of those with first-hand experience of the assessments to generate practical advice for staff carrying out the assessments to help address the concerns that had been raised.

14. Professor Sue Ellis of Strathclyde University chaired the Forum and more than 30 practitioners contributed to its work, along with a number of academics and interested stakeholders. The Forum Report makes a number of recommendations for the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities and schools to take forward.

The Education and Skills Committee SNSA Inquiry

15. The concerns raised about the SNSA led to considerable Parliamentary discussion during autumn 2018. Given this considerable Parliamentary interest in SNSA, the Education and Skills Committee decided to undertake an inquiry into the evidence base for the SNSA. The Inquiry focused on:

- The evidence base for moving away from the Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy
- The evidence base for introducing SNSAs at P1, P4, P7 and S3
- International comparisons to understand similar and differing approaches used elsewhere, and
- What information the Scottish Government's assessments can provide that contribute to improving the educational outcomes of children and young people.

16. In conducting its inquiry the Committee held five formal evidence sessions and a small focus group of teachers and teaching union representatives. The Committee also wrote to all local authorities for their perspective. It received numerous written submissions including from members of the International Educational Assessment Network (IEAN) which provided detail on experiences from its constituent countries.

17. The Committee's Report makes a number of recommendations for action primarily for the Scottish Government.

Independent Review of P1 assessments

18. As part of the Parliamentary discussion of SNSA, a debate took place in September 2018 at the end of which the Parliament voted in favour of a motion calling for an end to P1 SNSA and asking the Scottish Government to reconsider the evidence and the whole approach to evaluating the progress of children in P1. In order to address these concerns, the Scottish Government commissioned an Independent Review to be led by Mr David Reedy, formerly Co-Director of the Cambridge Primary Review Trust, Past President of the United Kingdom Literacy Association and Principal Advisor for Primary Schools, London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

19. The remit of the Independent Review was to consider and provide recommendations on the following issues:

- the compatibility of the assessments with the play-based approach to early level of CfE;
- the alignment of the assessments to the Benchmarks for early level;
- the effect of taking an on-line assessment on P1 children;
- the usefulness of the diagnostic information provided to teachers and how it supports their professional judgement;
- the implications of the Review for the ongoing development of the national Gaelic Medium Education standardised assessments; and
- the future of the assessments considering in particular whether they continue in line with the current continuous improvement model, whether they be substantially modified, or whether they should be stopped.

20. From January to March 2019, Mr Reedy visited schools to observe the SNSA being undertaken and to interview the staff involved. He interviewed headteachers, deputies and P1 teachers, key stakeholders, local authority staff and HMI, and looked at relevant documentation, for example the conclusions of the P1 Practitioner Forum and the evidence to and report from the Education and Skills Committee SNSA Inquiry. In addition, Mr Reedy sought evidence through anonymous surveys completed by local authorities, headteachers and P1 teachers and a dedicated email address was established for general responses. During the course of the Review, other issues arose which were not specified in the remit of the Review: the purpose of the P1 SNSA; the use of the P1 SNSA data for school improvement purposes, and the challenges associated with implementation of the assessment. These are included in the Review Report. In total, there were around 325 participants in the Review including 142 P1 teachers and 131 headteachers.

21. These sources of evidence, scrutiny of relevant documentation and reviews of recent research into key themes, were used to gather evidence for the Independent Review.

22. Mr Reedy's Report recommends that the P1 SNSAs should continue, subject to a number of modifications and enhancements. The Report makes a number of recommendations for action, primarily for the Scottish Government, in order to deliver those modifications and enhancements.

2018/19 SNSA User Review

23. The 2018/19 User Review has been led by David Leng, SNSA Product Owner, Scottish Government. For the User Review, David (along with a number of Scottish Government colleagues) has observed a number of children and young people undertaking the assessments and held a series of focus groups with practitioners and local authorities. This engagement will continue until end June 2019 and the final User Review Report will be published thereafter. A progress report based on the engagement that David and colleagues have had so far has been prepared and makes a number of recommendations to enhance the SNSA experience for the coming school session.

DRAFT IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITY 2019/20

Ref No	Action	Action responds to recommendation:			
		Independent Review of P1 assessments	Education and Skills Committee Inquiry	P1 Practitioner Forum	2018/19 User Review
1	Improve communications and engagement on SNSA and clarify key messages	1.1, 1.4, 1.5 7.1, 7.2	6-8 17-19 23	1a, 1b 3d	AP4 AP9
2	Work with key partners to develop a practical framework and Code of Practice on the purpose and use of SNSA data	1.2, 1.6, 1.7 1.8		4f	
3	Work with key partners to improve and enhance SNSA guidance and support materials	1.3 2.1, 2.2 4.1 5.2, 5.5	22	1c 2a, 2d 3c, 3d, 3e, 3g, 3h 4c	AP3 AP5 AP6
4	Enhance, expand and raise awareness of SNSA professional learning opportunities	2.3 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 4.2, 4.3 5.1, 5.4	27 31	2c 3a, 3b, 3f, 3g 4a, 4d	AP1
5	Review and reflect on user feedback to enhance the assessments for future years	3.1 5.3, 5.6 7.3	6-8 27-28 30 33-34	2b 4b	AP2 AP7 AP10
6	Continue to work with partners to enhance the Gaelic medium standardised assessments	6.1			
7	Revisit the 2014 review of the SSLN to assess the comparative burden and costs of conducting the SSLN and the Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels data collection.		4-5		
8	Work with key partners to assess and enhance the value of the SNSA		14-16 25-26 29-30	4e	AP8