

Scottish Government
National Improvement Framework: Enhanced Data
Collection
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The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to share its views on the Scottish Government Consultation on the National Improvement Framework: Enhanced Data Collection. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

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Q1: Our proposals for the key measures of progress towards closing the poverty-related attainment gap are based on a number of key principles set out above. Are there any other principles that should be included?

The key principles reference Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintiles but it is important that we recognise their limitations. SIMD identifies deprived areas, not people: not everyone who is deprived lives in a deprived area and vice-versa. This limitation is particularly apparent in rural areas, where small populations may live in geographically large and socially heterogeneous areas. SIMD does not provide absolute ratings for deprivation, and because of this it is not possible to say how much more deprived one area is compared to another, or to provide average scores of deprivation for multiple data zones. As a combination of domains are used to determine relative ranking, this also means that two data zones with similar ranks can have very different issues. Direct comparison of individual data zones between 2020 and previous iterations of SIMD is not possible because changes are relative and may not reflect actual changes in the neighbourhood. Due to ward boundary changes, introduced by the Electoral Commission in April 2016, it has been noted that ward-level comparisons are also not necessarily possible between this SIMD dataset and previous ones. Accurately identifying poverty and disadvantage is particularly noteworthy right now, given forecasts by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) that another 250,000 households will 'slide into destitution' as a result of the current cost-of-living crisis.

It is disappointing that there is no mention within the key principles of intersectional impacts. There are existing institutional barriers facing particular groups, including Black and minority ethnic (BME) young people. Given that poverty and disadvantage can have a profound impact on pupils' educational achievement, the Scottish Government must adopt an intersectional approach to addressing socio-economic disadvantage. Links must be made with the ongoing work of the Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme (REAREP) and the LGBT Inclusive Education Implementation Group. Intersectional disadvantage is not going away. In the UK today, children from Black communities continue to be affected disproportionately by material disadvantage. The most recent official data shows that BME children are twice as likely to grow up in poverty as their white peers. The right to grow up free from poverty and socio-economic insecurity is one of the most important of children's rights, and the disproportionate impact of poverty on Black children must not be ignored; indeed, to do so would not be consistent and coherent with their rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Within the key principles there should also be some mention of how the data is used. It is essential that not only the overarching purpose is crystallised but that we also have clarity on how the data will be used and by whom. Equally important will be the mechanisms to reduce unnecessary workload and duplication, as well as the means to ensure changes have been effected. While the following section hints at that coherence, it might be more clearly articulated as a progression with a review built in, rather than standalone bullet points:

'there also needs to be a clear line of sight from the key measures in the NIF [National Improvement Framework], to the strategies and approaches adopted in schools, and local authorities, to improve outcomes for children and young people'.

In summary, the NASUWT believes the following should be given prominence throughout the NIF:

- The use of data should always be guided by an understanding of its limitations as a way of measuring pupil progress and attainment. No test or assessment has 100% reliability and validity and its outcomes should always be contextualised with other information and evidence of pupil achievement. Any assessment or test will always fail to capture some essential aspects of learning. This is particularly true of standardised assessments.
- Pupil assessment data should never be used as the basis for forming judgements about the effectiveness of teachers' work in classrooms. Data can provide a backdrop to professional discussion and reflection but no assessment is designed to assess the professional competence or performance of teachers. Pupil performance in tests and assessments is influenced by many factors that are beyond the reasonable control or influence of individual teachers.
- Pupils do not learn in a strictly linear way. It is not possible to produce precise estimates of (or targets for) future pupil performance based on prior attainment. At best, assessments can point out where pupils need to go next in their 'learning journeys'.

- Children’s learning experiences should be curriculum-led, not assessment-led. Assessment is the servant of the curriculum. Children’s learning entitlements are set out in the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and are much broader than any single assessment can ever be. Learning experiences should not be designed around the imperatives of assessment.
- The use of assessment should be manageable and not create unnecessary and excessive workload for teachers and school leaders. Assessments should be designed in such a way that they do not distract teachers and school leaders from their core responsibilities for teaching and leading teaching and learning. Burdensome and unwieldy assessment policies and practices undermine rather than enhance efforts to raise standards, particularly if the information and data they generate are of limited use to practitioners and learners.

Q2: Should the two sub-measures covering attendance and exclusion at secondary schools be promoted to key measures?

The NASUWT agrees that school absenteeism is a key vulnerability that likely locks young people into path dependencies of disadvantaged life-course trajectories. Recent research by Markus Klein and Edward Sosu of the University of Strathclyde supports this conclusion (<https://schoolattendance.org/index.html>). An important point within their research is that both authorised and unauthorised absence may have a detrimental outcome. While the pandemic remains with us, an increase in pupil absence is to be expected. Focusing on attendance numbers as a key

measure may have the unintended consequence of encouraging pupils to attend school when they should stay at home to reduce COVID spread.

Equally, the NASUWT believes that promoting exclusion to be a key measure is undesirable, particularly given that one of the key principles mentioned earlier is *'the need to avoid perverse incentives through whatever milestones or stretch aims are set'*. Evidence shows that positive pupil behaviour stems from a whole-school approach where management leads and supports staff in maintaining good discipline. The NASUWT wants to see behaviour policies which are agreed with school staff, enacted appropriately and consistently enforced, so that pupils are not only encouraged to reflect on their own behaviour, but also face clear and consistently enforced sanctions for verbal abuse or physical violence. Any attempt to make exclusion a key measure of the NIF would further contribute to existing pressure to reduce exclusion figures when there is often no effective framework in schools to support pupils and staff. This could further contribute to a culture of abuse and harassment which fails both pupils and staff.

Q3: Should data on confidence, resilience, and engagement from the new Health and Wellbeing census be included in the basket of measures?

Health and Wellbeing should be included in the basket of measures: wellbeing must be at the heart of education recovery. The wellbeing of pupils and teachers cannot be written off as collateral damage from the pandemic, but must be put at the heart of the schools agenda. Ninety-one per cent of

teachers who responded to a recent NASUWT survey say their job has adversely affected their mental health. Schools are failing to promote workplace wellbeing for their staff, with 78% of teachers saying they feel inadequately supported. Wellbeing and mental health must no longer be an afterthought, but a priority embedded into our education system.

Having said that, the Consultation document itself makes clear that:

‘Since the introduction of the National Improvement Framework in 2016, there has been an increase in the data and wider performance information that is collected by the Scottish Government and Education Scotland and published in the National Improvement Framework Interactive Evidence Report (NIFIER).’

A further increase in data collection through the rightful inclusion of Health and Wellbeing measures should prompt a review of the effectiveness of existing data collection (for example, many NASUWT members continue to question the effectiveness of some Standardised Assessments).

Q4: At the moment, the measure of achievement in the senior phase is the National Qualifications achieved by young people at the point which they leave school (SCQF levels 4, 5, and 6 – 1 or more on leaving school). Do we need to add other measures to cover wider achievement and attainment?

The Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is already well-established and is gaining traction in schools as a way of recognising a range of awards.

The Union is concerned, however, that this question is hinting at involving the four capacities in NIF measures before a wider national discussion about the purposes of education, and that to do this would be back to front. As suggested immediately above, it would be better to focus initially on whether the existing measures in the NIF are robust and effective. For example, the NASUWT has been calling for appropriate exemplification of CfE levels for a number of years to improve the reliability and validity of the collection of data on achievement at these levels, but this has never been properly supplied.

Also, measuring the four capacities as part of the NIF would potentially be very challenging, as some of these are quite nebulous and prone to subjective assessment. The failure to provide clear exemplification of CfE levels gives the NASUWT little confidence that sufficient clarity would be given to practitioners about measuring the four capacities.

The NASUWT does support a move away from narrow measures of attainment but first needs to explore the National Discussion on Education, including the purpose of the four capacities. Rather than rushing to measure them, the system should look to first revisit and possibly refresh them.

Q5: If you answered yes to Q4, some options for consideration are set out below. However, we would also welcome any other suggestions for additional measures:

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In determining any additional measures it is important that the collation of data is not categorising pupils as 'academic' or 'vocational', which could be seen as embedding division. As stated above, the SCQF is becoming increasingly well-known and utilised, which is reflected in the Option 1 suggestion. Having a completely separate measure for vocational qualifications, as suggested in Option 2, does not, therefore, seem the best approach.

More broadly, feedback from teachers indicates that they have seen a significant decline in vocational offerings in schools in recent years and have been calling for more to be done to champion vocational options and fund them.

There has long been agreement in many parts of the education system that vocational options should be better promoted and carry a similar status to academic options; however, this does not seem to have yet carried over to convince one key demographic – parents/carers – and more still needs to be done on this.

Again, the key NASUWT conclusion here would be that simply agreeing to measure something in a different way does not address some of the fundamental challenges; in this case, the offer and take-up of vocational options in schools, a topic which will also no doubt form part of the National Discussion on Education.

Q6: In terms of measuring progress beyond school, should the percentage of school leavers going to a "positive destination" on leaving school be included alongside the participation measure?

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The NASUWT would support including data on positive destinations, though it is recognised that this information is a snapshot of the activity being undertaken by school leavers on a given day and that this therefore is not necessarily the best indicator of long-term sustained success for young people in accessing future work or study. Having said that, the further from school that leavers go, the greater the number of other factors which will impact on their learning/work journey, so the snapshot provided by the positive destinations of school-leavers seems a useful one to collect. Any broader measures of the success or otherwise of the learning/work journey of the population are a matter for Government (and a reflection of the success of its policies).

Q7: What more do we need to do in order to ensure that a wider range of measures are in use across the education system, and that they are valued as equally as traditional attainment measures?

The NASUWT has remained strongly supportive of the broad principles set out in the CfE of breadth and balance. A range of learning experiences is central to ensuring wellbeing, and both breadth and balance in learning is necessary to close the attainment gap. Accountability systems should value the range of ways in which schools help learners to engage in learning, progress and achievement. Teachers should be actively engaged in decisions about the design and implementation of curricula and assessment and the related accountability arrangements.

The NASUWT would again suggest that this question may currently be premature as its answer will be founded upon the outcome of the National

Discussion on Education and the Hayward Review of the Senior Phase. On their own, accountability measures are only one vehicle through which system change can be achieved. Both inspection and accountability systems should respect the professionalism of teachers, not impose excessive and unnecessary workload burdens, and provide genuine support to the work of schools in raising standards and promoting educational achievement. The Union is concerned that rushing to gather data, without the foundational national policy work having been completed, will potentially create unnecessary bureaucracy and workload for the profession and not be proportionate in the circumstances.

Q8: Are the existing wider data collections, and the new data developments enough to ensure that the National Improvement Framework reflects the ambitions of Curriculum for Excellence, national policy priorities such as health and wellbeing and confidence, and key priorities for COVID-19 recovery and improvement, as recommended by Audit Scotland?

Data on its own will not close the poverty-related attainment gap: this needs investment in time and money alongside central sharing of good practice by national agencies, such as Education Scotland and the SQA, with a supportive, consistent and coherent inspection system. Given the significant variations across each local authority in terms of staffing and funding (and how these are allocated), we need to exercise caution in promoting any

measure as one which would fully reflect the ambitions of the CfE, national policy priorities, key COVID recovery priorities and improvements.

The Scottish Education and Skills Committee, during the previous parliamentary term, undertook an inquiry into child poverty and attainment. The NASUWT submitted evidence to the inquiry and supported the Committee recommendations that:

- better measures be developed to assess levels of poverty;
- education authorities review their school practices to ensure that they do not discriminate against low-income families;
- the Scottish Government survey schools to assess the level of charging for school activities;
- schools should poverty-proof their uniform policies; and
- the Scottish Government should review how pupil equity funding is being used and give more support and guidance to schools on interventions to address poverty and the attainment gap.

The Committee recommendations remain relevant and must be progressed, including establishing better measures to assess poverty (see comments under question 1 above).

Equally, data on universality and take-up of free school meals should be considered. The NASUWT has repeatedly sought assurances that the Support and Wellbeing Unit will be working closely with the National Improvement Framework Unit within the Learning Directorate to facilitate

policy coherence between the expansion of free school meals and the work to close the poverty-related attainment gap. Any pilot or expansion of free school meals (FSM) must be linked to critical issues such as wellbeing and attainment.

Q9: How can we make better use of data to focus and drive improvement activity at school, local, regional and national level?

Alongside data collection, research must be undertaken nationally. The NASUWT responded to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's inquiry into the health and wellbeing of children and young people which made the following recommendations in support of our written and oral evidence:

'The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to set out how it plans to address current significant gaps in available nationally representative data to support accurate evaluation of specific interventions to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people in schools.'

'The Committee also recommends that the Scottish Government should commission further research to help inform future evidence-based policy development in this area.'

'The Committee recognises the particular challenges teachers face in measuring health and wellbeing outcomes as part of the curriculum, particularly in relation to mental health.'

'The Committee accepts that supporting the health and wellbeing of Scotland's children and young people needs to be underpinned by a universal approach, coupled with more specialist interventions for those children and young people who are disadvantaged or have particular needs.'

'The Committee highlights calls it has heard as part of the inquiry for better data collection to improve evaluation of the impact of universal interventions aimed at improving health and wellbeing of children and young people.'

An honest approach is also necessary which recognises the limitations of data and expresses these clearly; in particular, the challenges teachers face measuring health and wellbeing, as highlighted above. For example, the notion of the NIF as a tool to be used in schools, driving improvement from the ground up, is rare: too often, the NIF is used to write the Local Authority Improvement Plan, which is then imposed on schools to shape their School Improvement Plan. Guidance needs to address the realities on the ground, as well as the aspirations.

Q10: How can we make better use of data to help reduce variation in outcomes achieved by young people in different parts of the country?

Through a number of significant omissions and policy decisions by the Scottish Government, education in Scotland has been placed in an increasingly fragile position over a significant number of years because:

(a) the education budget has not been ring-fenced, leaving individual authorities able to divert key resources from schools and providing limited accountability in relation to the overall education budget;

(b) there is no real enforcement mechanism between central and local government in circumstances where an individual council signs up to an agreement and then reneges on these commitments after the funds have been handed over.

Sharing of good practice and national research will help, but the variability cannot truly be overcome without increasing and red-circling education funding.

Generally speaking, the NASUWT supports the broad principles which inform the vision, priorities and drivers of the NIF, but greater cohesion is needed in the national policy framework which would also help create improved national clarity of the overarching education vision and priorities and would, therefore, reduce local variations. At the moment the policy framework across education is, at best, fudged, and the relationship between groups such as the Scottish Education Council, the Teachers' Panel, the International Council of Education Advisors and the NIF itself is unclear. A stronger, more robust education policy framework would improve data-sharing and streamline decision-making. This lack of policy coherence can be further seen in the continued use of How Good is Our School? 4 as a self-evaluation tool – which is something the NASUWT has always had difficulty with, given that the terms of HGIOS 4 were never discussed and agreed with the profession. Feedback from members is clear that HGIOS 4 creates bureaucracy and excessive and

unnecessary workload burdens for staff and schools. Is a tool developed before the NIF the best way to self-evaluate under the NIF? HGIOS 4 takes no account of the implications of the pandemic.

It is also unhelpful where inter alia the media narrative leads practitioners to believe that data collection is solely for political use, to divert attention or to simply tick box against manifesto commitments, rather than with the intention to improve education. This concern is often felt most keenly where teachers see there has been a lack of genuine reflection on the expanse of data we already have.

It is important that the Scottish Government does not rush to make significant changes without knowing how these will fit within a coherent national recovery plan for education, as this will likely end up being costly in terms of our members' time, effort and goodwill. Many teachers would support data collection which takes the burden off teachers and, equally, provides them with the trust and capacity to look more holistically at the curriculum and learning of their pupils. There is a real risk that changing the data-gathering process for the NIF, before the National Discussion on Education and the Hayward Review of the Senior Phase have taken place, will be seen by practitioners as a cynical attempt to re-write the existing data-set without actually investing in the education system in order to enact the necessary changes.