



SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

Prime Minister

CONFIDENTIAL

N L Wicks Esq CBE
Principal Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

Colleagues have no comment:
Content w/L R Rifkind's proposed
statement? *par*

29 July 1988

par
19/8

Dear Nigel,

Yes

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN SCOTLAND: A POLICY FOR THE 90s

E(EP) yesterday approved the proposal in my Secretary of State's paper E(EP)(88)18 to issue a policy statement clarifying the objectives of my assessment programme for primary education in the light of the consultations which have been undertaken. The Committee also approves Mr Rifkind's proposal to take a statutory power to enable him if necessary to put a duty upon authorities to carry out schemes of testing.

I attach a draft of the announcement which my Secretary of State proposes to make. He intends to issue this early in September once the main school holiday season is over. He would be glad to know if the Prime Minister and the other members of E(EP), to whose Private Secretaries I am sending a copy of this letter, are content.

*Yours Sincerely
MS Jones*

PP **DAVID CRAWLEY**
Private Secretary

Enc

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN SCOTLAND. RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

Since the consultation paper was prepared in November last year some 30,000 copies have been issued and over 1,000 responses have been received. I am arranging for those responses to be available for public inspection in Edinburgh for a period of 2 months starting tomorrow.

Many respondents welcomed the opportunity the document gave to comment on the future of Scottish education for the years 5-14 and acknowledged that current practice was open to improvement in a number of respects.

Our proposal for clearer and more structured advice on the balance of the primary curriculum was generally welcomed. So too were our proposals to improve information for parents, particularly through a revised report card. I now intend to proceed with those developments as outlined in the consultation document.

The proposals to establish guidelines setting out for each aspect of the curriculum 5-14 the aims of study, the content to be covered and the objectives to be achieved were also welcomed by a substantial number of respondents although there were misgivings that the outcome of the exercise might be a reduction in teachers' scope to organise classroom activities and to make the most effective use of resources. I acknowledge the concern which underlies these fears. However the object of curricular definition will be to ensure that children everywhere follow a curriculum which is consistent in its quality and which provides for progression in their learning; and that they are given the opportunity to develop specified skills and competences. I believe that this will be helpful to teachers, parents and pupils alike and I have concluded that work on curricular definition should now proceed. As envisaged in the consultation document priority will be given to English and Mathematics but in the interests of preserving curricular balance it will be important that all areas of the curriculum are reviewed and new guidelines developed as soon as possible.

The proposals on assessment and testing produced the greatest interest and occasioned much comment. There was general agreement that assessment is an integral part of education and that testing is a valid and important instrument of assessment. Nevertheless, many respondents

were concerned about our proposals for standardised tests in key elements of English and Mathematics in Primary 4 and Primary 7. There were 4 areas of concern:

Firstly, tests might be used to rank children in class or to determine their progress to secondary school.

Secondly, tests might put intolerable pressure on children who would risk being branded failures as early as 8 years old.

Thirdly, tests might be used to construct league tables of schools without regard to the circumstances under which schools operate.

Fourthly, tests might distort the curriculum by forcing or encouraging teachers to teach to the test.

The Government recognise that these concerns exist and that they are sincerely held by many people. The first three however are based on misunderstandings of what is proposed. Tests would be for the prime purpose of ensuring that parents have a clearer understanding of how their child is progressing in key subject areas and also to enable a child's teacher to identify whether that child needed extra help in literacy or numeracy. The results of each child's tests would be private to the teacher and the child's parents. Tests would not be permitted to be used for the purpose of placing children in rank order in class or for selecting them for secondary school. Accordingly the pressure that might accompany tests intended for those purposes and any associated risks of failure would simply not arise. Moreover tests would be administered by schools themselves in such a way as to reflect their primary purpose which is to serve as one element of assessment, complementing teachers' own continuous assessment of pupils' work. Finally, when it comes to evaluating results, the full context - including the circumstances under which schools operate - would require to be considered.

The fear that the curriculum might be distorted does deserve careful consideration. Guidance would be available on the appropriate balance of the primary curriculum and guidelines would cover all aspects of the curriculum, not only those subject to testing. Moreover, as I indicated, testing would complement teachers' own assessments. In the

circumstances there is no reason to believe that teachers would teach to the tests to the detriment of other curricular areas. This is, however, a matter to which particular attention will be given in the preparation of guidelines in order to ensure that balance is maintained.

Standardised testing as part of a general framework of assessment and as a benchmark against which parents and teachers in Scotland can gauge children's progress in key elements of education represents a benefit and an advance which we should not forgo. I have concluded, therefore, that the production of new advice and guidelines on assessment and the development of Scottish standardised tests suited and matched to the curriculum in Scottish schools would be beneficial to children, their parents and their teachers. Tests will enable pupils' attainments to be measured against objective, subject-based criteria. It is also my intention that achievement in the various aspects of the curriculum should be profiled separately in the new report card and that that document should be constructed so as to focus assessment on the full range of pupils' achievements. The Scottish tests will be a part of this total picture to be set alongside the teachers' own assessment of these aspects and others not subject to such tests.

I have also given careful thought to the suggestion put forward by several respondents that testing in Scotland might be expanded to cover areas of the curriculum other than English and Mathematics. I believe that an extension in due course to Science would be beneficial and I intend that the appropriate curricular guideline should be framed with this in mind. Initially however testing will be applied to key elements of English and Mathematics.

I have also considered the mechanism which will be appropriate for carrying forward this major programme of work on curriculum and assessment. I shall now invite the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum (SCCC) to consider the overall balance of the primary curriculum, to review and where necessary revise curricular guidance in each of the main curricular areas 5-14, giving priority to the completion of work on English and Mathematics, and to produce parallel guidelines for parents. At the same time the Scottish Education Department (SED), along with other interested parties, will take forward work on the new Pupils Progress Report, the production of new guidelines on assessment

and the development of Scottish standardised tests. I also intend to establish a High Level Committee to steer and coordinate all aspects of the development programme under the Chairmanship of the Head of HM Inspectorate of Schools. My intention remains that the new guidelines, at least in English and Mathematics, and the standardised tests in these subjects will be introduced in the 1990/91 school session and that parallel guidelines for parents and the new Pupil Progress Report will be ready about the same time.

As the consultation document said, adequate resources will be made available for the purposes of curricular definition and for the development, administration and maintenance of the standardised tests. The forward programme for in service training of teachers will also be reviewed to give due place to staff development in assessment and testing.

I have considered carefully the arrangements necessary to ensure the smooth implementation of this programme. It is desirable that it should be introduced in the spirit of cooperation and good will that has characterised developments of this kind in the past. Powers already exist enabling me to prescribe general requirements in conformity with which education authorities are to carry out their functions. These existing powers should be extended to enable me to put the new testing arrangements on a formal basis should that prove appropriate.

My aim is to give greater direction and purpose to Scottish education and better to equip our children for the challenges of the 21st century. Everyone concerned with education has a part to play in this but parents have a key role and the developments I have described pay particular attention to giving parents the information they need and want to discharge this role effectively. The specially prepared guidelines on the curriculum will show parents the pattern of progression their children should follow; the new report card will let parents know how their children are performing against these curricular objectives and how in key subject elements their progress measures up nationally. Along with the establishment of school boards these developments mark a new deal for parents as fully participating partners in the education process.

The consultation document produced a lively and wide ranging debate and I would like to thank all the many individuals and associations who responded.

EDUCATION Policy pt 19

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File *SN*
ccBj

10 DOWNING STREET
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From the Private Secretary

22 August 1988

Dear David

The Prime Minister has seen your letter of 29 July to Nigel Wicks about the curriculum and assessment in Scotland: a policy for the 1990s. She is content with his proposed announcement.

I am copying this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of E(EP) and Trevor Woolley (Cabinet Office).

Tom

Andy

P. A. BEARPARK

David Crawley, Esq.,
Scottish Office

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mbpm

11 August 1988

Dear David

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN SCOTLAND: A POLICY FOR THE 90s

You sent me a copy of your letter to Nigel Wicks of 29 July about your Secretary of State's proposed announcement.

While there are differences between the proposals for Scotland and the requirements of the National Curriculum in Chapter 1 of the Education Reform Act 1988, these are justified by the differences in our education systems. As with your earlier consultation paper, therefore, my Secretary of State sees no difficulty in what is proposed and is content with the draft statement.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries of other members of E(EP).

Yours
Tom
T B JEFFERY
Private Secretary

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nbpm



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My ref:

Your ref:

David Crawley Esq
Private Secretary to
The Rt Hon Malcolm Rifkind MP
Secretary of State
Scottish Office
Dover House
Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2AU

4 August 1988

Dear David

CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT IN SCOTLAND: A
POLICY FOR THE 90s

My Secretary of State has seen the draft statement attached to your letter of 29 July to Nigel Wicks. Subject to the views of colleagues, he has no comments.

Alar

I am copying this to Nigel Wicks, and to the private secretaries to other members of E(EP).

Yours sincerely
Roger Bright

R BRIGHT
Private Secretary

EDUCATION: POLY PT 19.