

# THE LEARNED SOCIETIES' GROUP ON STEM EDUCATION

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John Swinney (Chair)

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
MSP

Stephen McCabe (Co-Chair)

Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA)  
Children and Young People Spokesperson

Scottish Government COVID-19 Education Recovery Group

29 May 2020

Dear Mr. Swinney and Mr. McCabe

## **COVID-19 and a reduction in examinable course content for 2020-21**

I write to you as Chair of the Learned Societies' Group on Scottish STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Education (the LSG). The LSG brings together the learned societies and professional associations to identify and promote priorities for STEM education in Scotland. The LSG comprises the: Association for Science Education; British Computer Society, The Chartered Institute for IT; Edinburgh Mathematical Society; Institute of Physics; Royal Society of Biology; Royal Society of Chemistry; Royal Society of Edinburgh; and the Scottish Mathematical Council. While all of these organisations are individually active in their own right in supporting STEM education in Scotland, the LSG provides a forum for them to come together to discuss and take action on shared interests and concerns.

The ongoing disruption to learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic has not only reduced the effectiveness of teaching and learning for pupils during session 2019-2020 but also for the start of 2020-2021. Especially in subjects such as the sciences, which have a practical element, preparation of pupils cannot be as effective using remote and online teaching strategies as normal face-to-face classroom and laboratory learning under the direct supervision of a teacher. It is the custom and practice for most schools in Scotland to change timetables and start new courses sometime during May or June. The preparation of pupils for the externally assessed courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, all generally run as one-year courses, will therefore be significantly disrupted during 2020-2021.

It would be unreasonable to expect the same extent of course content to be assessed in external examinations and assignments in the 2021 assessment diet as would normally be the case. If the assessed content of courses is to be reduced for session 2020-2021, it is important that the decision as to which parts of courses are to be removed are made soon and communicated clearly to schools,

teachers and pupils. As teachers have flexibility in deciding on the order of teaching of courses, if this is not done very soon, preferably by the first week of June 2020, it is inevitable that some pupils will be disadvantaged as they may spend time studying the parts of the courses removed during this early part of the 2020-2021 session.

The Learned Societies' Group is well placed to draw upon its collective experience and networks to support this process. We would be pleased to discuss this further. To this end, we would be grateful if you could follow up with the LSG's secretary, Daria Tuhtar, [dtuhtar@these.org.uk](mailto:dtuhtar@these.org.uk), 0131 240 5006

Yours sincerely,



Professor Maggie Cusack FRSE  
Chair of the Learned Societies' Group

CC Maree Todd, Minister for Children and Young People, MSP

Alison Cumming, Scottish Government, Director of Early Learning & Childcare

Carrie Lindsay, Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), President

Eddie Follan, Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (CoSLA)

Fiona Robertson, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Chief Executive

Gayle Gorman, Education Scotland, Chief Executive of Education Scotland and Chief Inspector  
of Education

Gillian Hamilton, Education Scotland, Strategic Director

Graeme Logan, Scottish Government, Director of Learning

Greg Dempster, Association of Head Teachers and Deputes in Scotland (AHDS), General  
Secretary

Jane Brumpton, Early Years Scotland, Chief Executive

Jim Thewliss, School Leaders Scotland (SLS), General Secretary

Joanna Murphy, National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS), Chair

Karen Reid, Perth & Kinross Council, Chief Executive

Ken Muir, General Teaching Council of Scotland (GTCS), Chief Executive

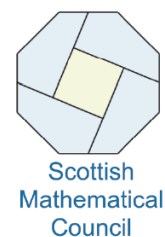
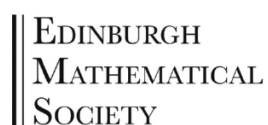
Larry Flanagan, Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), General Secretary

Sam Anson, Scottish Government, Improvement, Attainment and Wellbeing

Sheena Devlin, Perth & Kinross Council, Executive Director

John Gallacher, Regional Manager (UNISON)

Scottish Parliament Education and Skills Committee



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