We welcome the development of a National Improvement Framework. Currently, as is the case with several other local authorities, we use standardised assessments in primary and secondary schools to support pupils’ progression and our planning for improvements. A national mechanism which supports a consistent approach is positive. A Framework which creates clear and reliable data and is used for benchmarking progress and supporting children and young people’s progress in attainment can be valuable in evaluating progress, planning improvements and recognising success.

The Framework, nevertheless, should be to support teachers’ professional judgements of progress through the curriculum and not to provide a national test. The intention to publish information about children’s progress in the broad general education phase at school, local authority and national levels could lead to unintended consequences where ‘league tables’ of performance are created. There would need to be very careful consideration of the publication of such data.

Whether through statutory or non-statutory approaches, local authorities are committed to raising standards and closing the gap in attainment between those in our most and least deprived areas. We would urge careful consideration of how statutory measures are used to deliver the priorities of the Framework; at the moment, it is not clear what this expectation of local authorities would look like in a public domain.

We would urge the Scottish Government to work directly with local authorities in developing the Framework in a collaborative manner, ensuring that the views of education professionals in local authorities are directly influential. The speed of intended development is fast, making it all the more important that appropriate consultation and involvement of local authorities is a key element.

Whilst a statutory Framework will enhance accountability for performance reporting at national level, there will be similar accountabilities at local authority level. Again, we would expect that a constructive approach is taken in developing the methods and mechanisms for this, ensuring that it supports the improvement agenda and not used as a tool to measure schools’ and local authorities’ performance in a competitive way.

There are many approaches being taken to improve attainment and reduce the attainment gap at national and local levels. It would need to be clear that the Framework is one tool to provide a measurement of progress and is not in itself the vehicle for improvement. Effective learning and teaching across the curriculum, professional development, effective partnerships, the wider achievements of children and young people and the GIRFEC aspirations will be amongst the core approaches which the Framework should support. Not all elements of the curriculum or wider
areas can be measured in a robustly quantitative way and the need for qualitative approaches is equally important. Additionally, children and young people should not feel pressured and anxious about performing in a test, albeit that this may not be the intention. Teachers should also be able to exercise professionalism in delivering the curriculum in a flexible and creative way and not teach in order to ensure children and young people will perform at a certain standard to the detriment of their wider curricular entitlements.

**Standard for Headship**

A programme which is designed to support the professional development and leadership of individuals in becoming Head Teachers is positive. In addition, the experiences that staff have in their day-to-day work is key to their development.

Making the qualification compulsory from 2017 could present unintended challenges to individuals, schools and local authorities. Where recruitment of Head Teachers is currently challenging, the compulsory nature of the qualification could be a disincentive and create barriers where those who do not hold the qualification cannot become Head Teachers. The professional development opportunities that this qualification brings would be positive, but financial expectations on individuals and local authorities to contribute to the cost are of concern.

The age profile of our Head Teachers indicates significant turnover in the next few years. It would be unhelpful if the already limited pool of aspiring Head Teachers were to be compromised or reduced further due to having to hold a mandatory qualification.