1. Introduction

Scottish education has been going through a period of fundamental reform since the creation of the Scottish Parliament, to ensure we have a system which is fully fit to meet the needs of Scottish learners in the 21st Century. This has included the first ever comprehensive reform of the whole curriculum framework, from age 3 to 18, through the development and implementation of *Curriculum for Excellence* and a major reform of the education workforce in response to the recommendations of *Teaching Scotland’s Future*. We have also seen major initiatives to improve the quantity and quality of provision in the Early Years, radical reform of the College sector and the implementation of the *Developing the Young Workforce* programme designed to strengthen the extent to which education equips young people with employability skills and helps them access coherent pathways into the world of work in ways which align with both individual needs and our country's workforce requirements.

The creation of Education Scotland as an innovative new style of national improvement agency for education was a deliberate step to build a more coherent national infrastructure which could support this ambitious reform agenda as efficiently and as effectively as possible. It grew from a growing realisation that there were great benefits to be had through joining up work around evaluation and scrutiny of the system with work designed to provide the right guidance and support for practitioners, drawing directly from the rich source of intelligence and expertise that our inspection and review activities provide.

2. Who we are and what we do

Education Scotland is Scotland’s national agency for quality improvement in education. We promote improvement in all sectors of education and at all stages of the learning journey, from the early years to adult and continuing education. ES was created in July 2011 through merger of the former inspection (HMIE) and curriculum development (LTS) agencies to form a new integrated improvement agency for the education sector. It sits within the DG Learning & Justice portfolio, responsible to Cab Sec for ELL and works closely with Directorates for Learning, ESLL and Children & Families. The agency also provides direct policy support for Ministers in a few areas, specifically Community Learning and Development, Youth Strategy and Adult Learning.

**Our Vision**

Learners in Scotland will progress in one of the most effective education systems in the world, renowned for the ability of national and local partners to work flexibly together to achieve high-quality and equitable outcomes for all.

**Our Mission**

To provide the best blend of national support and challenge to inspire and secure continuous improvement in experiences and opportunities for all learners in Scotland.
Our Ambition

To ensure that Scottish education ranks among the best in the world, demonstrating excellence at all ages and stages from early years to school years to post school education and training and on to adult learning provision.

Our Objectives

To support the achievement of our vision and mission, we have identified six strategic objectives which we believe can help us to make the strongest contribution.

- Build a world-class curriculum for all learners in Scotland
- Promote high-quality professional learning and leadership amongst education practitioners
- Build the capacity of education providers to improve their performance continuously
- Provide independent evaluation of education provision
- Influence national policy through evidence-based advice
- Improve our organisational capability and invest in our people

Our Reach

Our work covers the full range of education provision in Scotland for all learners in:

- Early learning and childcare, primary and secondary settings
- Special schools
- Publicly and privately funded colleges
- Third sector organisations
- Community learning development (CLD)
- Prison education
- Teacher education
- Educational psychology services
- Independent schools
- Modern apprenticeships and careers information and guidance.
3. Generic issues

The Committee asked Education Scotland to address a set of generic questions. We have endeavored to answer these concisely below.

3.1 The role of your organisation in seeking to narrow the educational attainment gap in schools.

As Scotland’s National Improvement Agency, Education Scotland has a key role in supporting schools and local authorities to narrow the educational attainment gap in schools. We provide direct support to schools in the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence where our focus is on ensuring the highest quality learning experiences for all learners regardless of their age, ability or background. Our work focusses on providing bespoke and targeted support, advice and resources for teachers in schools across all sectors and every curriculum area. We also organise and lead events which encourage headteachers and practitioners to come together to share their practice and learn from each other. ES also plays a key role in both providing and supporting professional learning activities for practitioners, working alongside Education Authorities and Professional Associations such as the EIS. We have a specific focus on developing inclusive practices and strategies for tackling inequity. Our work has also included the very successful School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) where we are working with local authorities and universities to broker and facilitate partnerships within and across schools and local authorities. The partnerships share the commitment to improving outcomes and raising attainment for all children and young people from the most deprived backgrounds. This work encourages staff to learn from each other, improve their practice and monitor and evaluate change.

Each year, we inspect and report on the quality of education in a sample of early learning and childcare centres, primary, secondary and, special schools, community learning and development services, colleges, and residential educational provision. To support improvement, inspectors focus on the quality of learners’ experiences and their attainment and achievements. This year, we carried out a total of 298 inspections. We identify examples of innovative practice in schools and share this with practitioners to support improvement. We also continue to engage with schools where they have not improved attainment sufficiently and where they have not focused sufficiently on meeting the learning needs of all. We also set clear expectations of schools through our inspection advice note for schools which provides a clear focus on raising attainment and tackling inequity.

We have directly supported the Scottish Attainment Challenge, quickly flexing our resources to allocate a senior manager and a range of other staff to support this key new priority. We are in the process of putting in place an Attainment Advisor for every local authority in Scotland and have an Advisor already in post for the seven Challenge Authorities. Attainment Advisors are now working in collaboration with all local authorities in Scotland to support raising attainment in the areas of literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing and providing children and young people with the opportunity to fulfil their potential. ES also has a network of Area Lead Officers who have an evaluative role and provide support and challenge to local authorities in ensuring that they are fulfilling their role to bring about improvement in schools. Where we identify specific issues in local authorities we provide targeted support and intervention and we also highlight risks that may require further scrutiny.
At the extreme end of educational and social disadvantage ES has also worked intensively with HM YOI Polmont to support the work with the most vulnerable and excluded young people. This innovative work has led to significant improvement in the experiences of this group of learners.

3.2 The extent to which your organisation, in seeking to deliver relevant Scottish Government priorities, has autonomy over spending and policy decisions.

The organisation’s status as an Executive Agency means that it operates independently and impartially, whilst remaining directly accountable to Scottish Ministers for the standards of its work. This status safeguards its independence of inspection, review and reporting within the overall context of the National Performance Framework. The agency is led by a Chief Executive who is the Accountable Officer for the agency.

The Chief Executive is answerable to Scottish Ministers for the outcomes delivered by the Agency and for planning its future development. Responsibility for all operational matters is delegated to the Chief Executive. The Agency’s Framework document also sets out the Chief Executive’s relationship with the Director-General learning & Justice, who acts as the ‘Fraser Figure’ for the agency, ensuring alignment of the agency’s strategy and activities with Minister’s objectives and the broader expectations and requirements of Scottish Government.

As Agency Accountable Officer, the Chief Executive is personally answerable to the Scottish Parliament for the proper, efficient and effective use of all the resources provided for the administration of the Agency (including budget provision). The Chief Executive is also responsible for ensuring compliance with relevant guidance issued by the Scottish Government and for putting into effect any recommendations of the Auditor General or the Scottish Parliament that have been accepted by Scottish Ministers. The Chief Executive, as Agency Accountable Officer, has a duty to secure Best Value, which includes the concepts of good corporate governance, performance management and continuous improvement.

The agreed funding for the Education Scotland budget is allocated as a discrete element within the overall budgetary provision for the Learning and Justice portfolios, alongside budgets for policy directorates and other Agencies. The Chief Executive ensures the Agency participates in ‘Director-General wide’ strategic budget planning and monitoring processes appropriately.

The Agency develops, maintains and publishes a corporate plan. This plan is for a three year period and is submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval. The Corporate Plan sets out the strategic management priorities for the Agency and is used as a framework for a more detailed annual business plan for operational management of Education Scotland. The current corporate plan is for the period 2013-2016, and the agency has just started a process to develop and publish a new version by Autumn 2016.
3.3 The measures your organisation takes to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of its work and to report on this in as transparent and accessible a manner as possible.

Education Scotland continues to develop a performance management framework and to monitor the effectiveness and impact of our work through our Strategic Impact Board. We engage with and seek the views of our stakeholders using a variety of mechanisms, including impact visits and regular questionnaires. We publicly report on our work through our annual review and business plan, and have a level of external scrutiny through the non-executive directors who form part of our Management Board.

In 2014/15 our Knowledge Management team provided support for the evaluation of the Food for Thought: Education Fund, Game on Scotland and the Scottish Learning Festival. In partnership with the Robert Owen Centre, we undertook research to inform how Education Scotland can best support practitioners to put knowledge into action. We report annually to the Scottish Funding Council on the impact and effectiveness of our work in the further education sector.

Education Scotland undertook a comprehensive survey of Directors of Education to establish their views on the range of our support and challenge activities, including inspection and review and the resources available on the Education Scotland website. A detailed report was developed following this survey and helped to inform our planning and priorities for 2015/16. Other sources of evidence come from systematic evaluations following conferences, events and inspections and from less formal small-scale surveys using Survey Monkey targeted at key stakeholder groups.

Since 2014/15 Education Scotland has established a number of Curriculum Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Support forums, the membership of which is drawn from stakeholders across Scotland. These groups provide important feedback across the curriculum areas and will advise on future development or amendments to the curriculum.

Recent examples of Education Scotland’s approach to feedback from stakeholders would be consultations in relation to the development of the Careers Education and Work Placement Standards. These documents were published in draft form and feedback sought from stakeholders using an online survey. The development of How Good is Our School 4, is another example of how extensive consultation with stakeholders informed the final document.

In terms of communicating and sharing this information in a transparent way, a range of communication channels are used, including the Education Scotland website, e-bulletins and social media. A significant channel that Education Scotland uses to engage directly with a large number of stakeholders is Glow, the Scotland-wide schools intranet. A key vehicle for this are our professional learning communities where we are able to engage directly with groups of stakeholders with similar interests.
3.4 How your organisation, in seeking to work in partnership to deliver national objectives, can still be held accountable for its particular contribution.

Partnership working is key to successful delivery of much of the work undertaken by Education Scotland. To ensure that roles, responsibilities and therefore accountability is clear, Education Scotland utilises different approaches, depending on the nature of the partnership working. For example, in Curriculum for Excellence, there is a clear programme plan which outlines our specific responsibilities for which we are held accountable. Education Scotland has its own clearly defined plan which sets out key activities, ownership of that activity and timescales for delivery. These plans are monitored and tracked on a monthly basis through our internal Programme Review Boards and ultimately to the CfE Implementation Group. This approach to planning for delivery is used across a range of our programmes of work and tailored to suit the needs of programme partners and governing bodies.

Our extensive involvement in the national DYW programme across early years, primary, secondary, colleges, MAs, CIAG and CLD, together with the effectiveness of our work with national partners and employers is reported to the national DYW Programme Board. Working with local authorities, we have established formal partnership agreements which clearly set out our commitments to each local authority for the forthcoming year. Other examples include Strategic Partnership Agreements with 23 voluntary organisations.

3.5 How your organisation’s key spending programmes – both individual and collective (i.e. with other agencies or bodies) – help to achieve relevant outcomes in the National Performance Framework.

Education Scotland is fully committed to ensuring that its activities as a public body make a strong and effective contribution to the Scottish Government’s over-arching National Purpose of creating a more successful country with opportunities for all to flourish through sustainable economic growth.

All of the Agency’s business activities are organised within thematic delivery programmes. Each programme is aligned to one or more of Education Scotland’s six strategic objectives and support and contribute to achievement of a number of the National Outcomes. Overall, the Agency’s work contributes most directly to the following outcomes:

- we are better educated, more skilled and more successful, renowned for our research and innovation;
- our young people are successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens;
- our children have the best start in life and are ready to succeed;
- we have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk; and
- our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people’s needs.
3.6 *In light of budget pressures, how effectively your organisation undertakes long-term financial planning.*

Education Scotland undertakes extensive consultation in establishing and agreeing with Ministers a Corporate Plan setting out our priorities for a three year period. This plan is reviewed and refreshed each year in line with our business planning cycle and a business plan established for the year ahead. We play an integral part in the Scottish Government’s arrangements for each Spending Review and this allows us to secure the resources required to deliver on our published commitments.

In 2010-11, the combined budgets of the component organisations that came together to form Education Scotland totalled just over £40m. Expenditure for 2014-15 was just over £35m, a reduction of some 12.5%. During this period we took on additional significant responsibilities in relation to adult learning and youth work (almost £2m) – reflecting a reduction of 17.5% to the original figures in broadly comparative terms. Throughout this period Education Scotland has continued to deliver on its priorities. We believe this demonstrates our ability to plan effectively for the long-term.

As mentioned earlier, we have just begun the process of producing our next corporate plan publishing in Autumn 2016. Education Scotland takes a “zero-based” budgeting approach to its annual business planning each year. This ensures that all projects and programmes are reassessed during each business planning cycle for their impact, effectiveness and value for money. Our main programmes of work have a recognised “life cycle” which provides a strategic context to their anticipated resource requirement each year, whether growing, reducing or staying roughly the same. This allows us to project further ahead and identify resource peaks and troughs that we may have to take account of by, for example, adjusting anticipated delivery dates of specific projects.

We operate a comprehensive business planning process each year, and all of our work is catalogued in an electronic tool used for programme management and management information purposes. We have a central Planning and Performance Team who offer support and challenge to programmes in areas including financial forecasting, programme management and securing efficiencies. All of this ensures that we have a strong handle on our expenditure, and can accurately predict the impact of changing priorities on our existing work programme. The same information helps us to accurately predict future resource requirements and the impact, both financial and educational, of resourcing decisions.

We produce monthly performance reports, which include financial forecasting, at project, programme, directorate and organisational levels. These reports are discussed at our Corporate Management Group and also at our Management Board. As part of this constant monitoring and review we re-profile or stop lower priority work to accommodate higher priority work.
3.7 The key future challenges for your organisation and the steps you are taking to address them.

Education Scotland has been changing and developing since its inception in October 2010, when the creation of a new agency was announced. We have reached a point in our development where we need to reflect carefully to ensure that we have learned as much as we can from the experiences we have had thus far, and make strategic and coherent decisions about what changes we need to make to the organisation in the next few years to maximise our potential. We need to ensure we are flexible and adaptable to respond to the changing external environment. We know that financial austerity will continue to affect us and those with whom we work. This will put pressures on our reducing resources and it is likely that at the same time local government may be looking us to provide greater support due to their resource reductions. We therefore need to consider new ways of working and focus on doing more and better with less.

As we move forward as an organisation, we have identified some large-scale systemic change priorities which will support us in becoming more agile and better equipped to deal with change. We need to review carefully our approaches to business planning, our organisational structure, our staffing model and how we deploy our staff. We work within Government priorities and we must be aligned with these. We retain independence for specific aspects of our work, but we need to be better able to respond quickly and flexibly to new demands and requirements. To do that, we need to know the pressures we are working under already and build in flexibility from the start. We want our work to have the highest impact possible. We need to understand the outcomes we are trying to achieve and how well we are achieving them.

3.8 The role played by your organisation in advance of its budgetary allocations being published in Scottish Government draft budgets.

Education Scotland staff are an integral part of the Scottish Government’s Spending Review process through the finance arrangements within the education and Lifelong Learning portfolio. We contribute throughout the development of the Spending Review through to agreement of the draft budget proposals published by Scottish Government.

We are represented on the ELL portfolio finance group which meets regularly throughout the year to discuss financial management issues.
4. Specific themes for Education Scotland

In addition to the generic set of questions, there were some specific questions which Education Scotland were asked to address. Again, we have attempted to answer these concisely below.

4.1 How Education Scotland assesses:

- the uptake of the advice and support it provides; and
- the effectiveness of this advice and support in delivering improvement.

All the main delivery channels that are used by Education Scotland, from national events to online resources to localised training and support, gather information about how well they are received and being used. For example, we systematically evaluate every event that we run and gather detailed metrics on the use of our online resources. We engage in regular discussions with practitioners, through such diverse mechanisms as inspection and Glow professional communities which gleans valuable information about how well our support has been received and used to improve practice.

Our inspection processes, including our thematic evaluation reports, gather important evidence about what resources practitioners are using to improve their practice, whether they are aware of what is available and how useful they have found it. It also helps to identify gaps in the support available that we can either respond directly to, or inform relevant partners about.

Increasingly we are following up on events, resources and inspection to help identify the role that these interventions have played in improvement. Whilst it is unlikely that any particular intervention by Education Scotland would be the sole reason for improvement happening in any establishment, it is important for us to understand the contribution that particular interventions play, and so how we can further improve them to have even greater impact.

4.2 Education Scotland’s relationship with schools and local authorities, reflecting on Keir Bloomer’s comments.

ES has a broad range of customers including early learning and childcare settings, schools, colleges, community learning and development services and local authorities. Our approach to business planning includes regular engagement with our stakeholders and partners to better understand their expectations and requirements from our work which in turn ensures that we can target where we make the biggest difference. We engage regularly with practitioners during direct support, inspection and at events and we routinely ask whether our support has been helpful and how it can be improved. In 2014 / 15 we undertook a survey of a range of our customers to help us better measure our impact. Our customers views include:

- Participants at Education Scotland early learning and childcare learning events held in 2014/15 agree that there has been a positive impact on learning and teaching as a result of participating/attending the event

- Directors of Education and participants report that collaborative outreach activities lead by Area Lead Officers in 2014/15 had a positive impact on learning and teaching.
• Participants report that collaborative outreach activities in CLD led by Education Scotland in 2014/15 had a positive impact on learning

• Headteachers and depute headteachers across Scotland report increased confidence in implementing CfE in languages, literacy and Gaelic.

• Evaluation has shown that training on Social Emotional Health & Wellbeing has helped staff to understand and support the young people better, improving interactions and relationships between staff and young people.

• In addition, practitioners, schools and local authorities make extensive use of the events we run and the resources we provide. For example;

• The 2014 Scottish Learning Festival (SLF) attracted 3015 visitors from Scottish establishments and local authorities as well as 120 international delegates and 150 exhibitors.

• There were 103,000 visits to the professional learning area of the Education Scotland website.

• 659 headteachers and depute headteachers attended the CfE Leadership conferences for secondary schools.

• 822 primary headteachers attended the CfE leadership conferences for primary schools.

ES also works closely with local authorities as key customers. We have in place partnership agreements with every local authority in Scotland. These agreements, which are co-ordinated by our Area Lead Officers, are being used to plan and coordinate a range of support from Education Scotland to build capacity in the local authority. In our recent survey, Directors of Education were very positive about the extent to which we work in partnership with them and how much they value the support and challenge role we provide. ADES have now asked us to support more inter-authority collaboration. For example, the Island authorities have asked us to directly support their shared endeavours to support improvement and have cited their Area Lead Officer as crucial to the success of this work.

4.3 How its inspection of schools delivers accountability.

The approach developed to external scrutiny of education provision in Scotland is distinctive and commands broad support amongst stakeholders. It is fundamentally based on the belief that the best way of ensuring quality continues to improve is to encourage practitioners at the ‘front line’ to take responsibility for continuously evaluating and improving their own performance, with a carefully judged level of support and challenge from external inspectors to ensure this is happening effectively and that appropriate intervention occurs where it is not.

There are a number of key principles that underpin our school inspection processes:
• **Improvement-focused approach.** International evidence from bodies such as the OECD and McKinsey have been clear in demonstrating that the role of inspection should be designed to match the current state of a country’s education system. Whilst one approach may be appropriate in countries trying to establish basic teaching standards, a different approach is required in countries on the journey from “good” to “great”. The general consensus in Scotland is that we are on the good to great journey and we have therefore developed an approach to external scrutiny which is more focused on improvement, building capacity and providing ‘professional coaching’ for schools than one which is based heavily on compliance, public ‘naming and shaming’ and high stakes accountability.

• **Focus on building capacity** – the way inspection is carried out in Scotland is designed to build the capacity of schools to self-evaluate and improve themselves. Rather than being something to “get through”, we have developed inspection as a helpful process to identify areas for improvement and assist in securing it. This is often described as doing inspection ‘with’ schools rather than doing it ‘to’ them. The hard edge of accountability still remains, but inspection is viewed as more of a partnership activity, underlined by our use of peer inspectors drawn from currently practising educationalists on all inspection teams.

• **Improving attainment and closing the attainment gap** – The Scottish Attainment Challenge has provided considerable additional funding to support improvement. There will be increased intelligence about the performance of the system, at a greater level of granularity than in recent years. This increased intelligence is a key source to allow risk-based and intelligence-led scrutiny.

• **Independence of judgement and reporting** – confidence amongst the public and practitioners that we report ‘without fear or favour’ is a crucial pre-requisite to both our credibility and also the importance attached to our judgements. When Education Scotland was formed, from HMIE and LTS, the independence of inspection was a matter for considerable debate amongst key stakeholders. They wanted to be assured of this independence, which was achieved through measures outlined within the Education Scotland Framework Document.

• **Professional credibility** – HM Inspectors have high credibility in Scottish schools. There is strong mutual respect overall, and very limited stakeholder negativity towards inspection, which is generally seen as a helpful process designed to help schools improve. This is supported by high quality recruitment processes and ongoing professional development. Post-inspection questionnaires completed by school staff tend to be very positive, with 94% of schools indicating that the inspection helped them to identify areas for improvement in the past year. Complaints about inspection are low.

The approach we currently adopt to get best use from our available resources can be described as a combination of drawing a representative national sample, with the addition of a ‘risk-based’ element, whereby we actively bring additional schools into the inspection programme, over and above the routine national sample, where we judge there is clear evidence that a particular school is in need of being inspected. We identify such schools through our ongoing engagement with each of the local authorities, analysis of data and other evidence from parents or others that may come to our attention.
All of our inspection reports are openly published on our website, and we conclude every inspection by rating a school on five Quality Indicators, using the six-point scale which ranges from ‘unsatisfactory’ to ‘Excellent’. Three of these indicators are ‘core’ indicators which are used to generate an overall evaluation for the National Performance Framework measure on school inspection outcomes. At the conclusion of the inspection, inspectors can choose from one of four main types of follow-up response, depending on their assessment of the school’s needs.

1. No continuing engagement

In this option, we are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the establishment’s self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The local authority or Board of Governors will inform parents about the establishment’s progress as part of their arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of their establishments.

2. Additional support

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that most of the school’s self-evaluation processes are leading to improvement. With support from the local authority or Board of Governors, and possibly some limited additional inputs from Education Scotland, the establishment will be able to make the necessary improvements.

Our Area Lead Officer or Independent schools link inspector, along with local authority or Board of Governors, will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement and will maintain contact to monitor progress. Parents will be informed of the extent to which the establishment has improved. If we become concerned that sufficient progress is not being achieved the school can be escalated to the next category for further inspection.

3. Further inspection

As a result of our inspection findings, we think that the establishment needs substantial external additional support and more time to make necessary improvements. Our Area Lead Officer or Independent schools link inspector, along with the local authority or Board of Governors, will discuss the most appropriate support in order to build capacity for improvement, and will maintain contact to monitor progress.

We will return to evaluate aspects of provision and the progress in improving provision within an agreed timescale following publication of the inspection letter. We will then issue another letter to parents on the extent to which the establishment has improved. In that letter, we will inform the school and education authority if we are going to carry out a further inspection visit.

4. Innovative practice

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the establishment’s self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. There will be no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection.
During the inspection, we identified an aspect or aspects of innovative practice which we would like to explore further in order to share the practice with others. As a result, we will work with the establishment and local authority or Board of Governors in order to record and share more widely the innovative practice. We will ask the establishment, in discussion with the local authority or Board of Governors, to let parents know the outcome of the innovative practice visit(s).

The use of each of the approaches outlined above is tailored to a school’s individual circumstances, and they are not exclusive. For example, we would provide additional support to a school in addition to a return inspection visit where that is required.

4.4 The extent to which it has helped to ‘promote high-quality professional learning and leadership amongst education practitioners’, and the challenges that remain.

ES has a key role in promoting professional learning in all education sectors. This includes our work in implementing the recommendations to improve teachers’ professional learning set out in the ‘Teaching Scotland’s Future’ report, but it also applies to our work in education sectors beyond schools, such as early years settings and adult services and for professionals beyond teachers, such as educational psychologists and those with the Childhood Practice Degree.

We are taking a strong lead in working with our national partners to implement effective approaches to the development of career-long professional learning (CLPL) including masters level learning and improving leadership capacity in Scottish education. We are working closely to support the development of the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) and its key programmes of work. We run the The Flexible Routes to Headship (FRH) Programme, which continues to make a significant contribution to our work in increasing leadership capacity in Scottish education. Professional learning resources which have been developed include The Framework for Educational Leadership, Mentoring Matters, the Teaching Scotland web resource for aspiring and new teachers and the online resource which provides details of high quality professional learning ‘PL Find’. We have been working to increase the range of our professional learning activities for practitioners from a wide range of roles and sectors. We have had a particular focus on developing inclusive practices and strategies for tackling inequity. This has included the School Improvement Partnership Programme (SIPP) which has been creating leadership opportunities and professional learning through collaborative enquiry.

We work with around 500 Associate Assessors who work with us on both inspection and capacity building work. These are highly skilled leaders in their field who remain in their substantive posts and who work with us for short periods of time throughout the year (usually a week). Associate Assessors receive high quality professional learning which improves their knowledge and understanding of educational best practice and enhances their own ability to bring about improvement.
We recognise that challenges still remain. Practitioners need to be able to access support quickly and easily and in the last year we have further developed our website to ensure greater accessibility. We have also begun to develop a National Improvement Hub which will be designed specifically with the practitioner in mind and will provide access to support, advice and evidence of ‘what works’ as well as opportunities to try new ideas and collaborate with others. Developments such as the newly launched How Good is our School? Have also been designed to be used by the practitioner to support improvement in classrooms. We will continue to we consult with practitioners to ensure that opportunities for professional learning are targeted where required and explore further ways to collaborate with organisations such as SCEL to ensure leadership development is as seamless and as accessible as possible.

4.5 The risks and benefits of spreading its activity across a wide range of education settings.

The key benefit to Education Scotland’s interests spreading across all sectors of education is in ensuring a joined-up approach to our education system. We can bring synergies and efficiencies to bear and, most importantly, promote a seamless system from the point of view of the learner. This overview is a powerful contribution to the system, bridging a number of Government policy divisions, priorities and policies. We also play a key role as an interface between education and other relevant interests including health, criminal justice and social services. This is critical in bringing coherence to the range of agencies and interventions that need to be brought to bear if we are to make a significant impact on improving life chances for children, young people and adult learners. For example, the impact of disadvantage on educational attainment cannot be overcome by the school alone. It requires consideration and support for the home environment, the vibrancy of the community, housing, health and much more.

Potential risks would clearly relate to spreading resources too thinly, and so diminishing our impact. We mitigate these by having clarity of our priorities, increasing awareness of the impact of our many interventions and focusing on that which makes the most significant contribution to delivering our intended outcomes. So, the cross-sectoral range of our work is important, but we have to focus within that on the most important priorities.

4.6 How effectively it is addressing the principal risks listed in its annual accounts.

4.6.1 Successful implementation of CfE

Educators need a clear framework of national guidance on what learners are expected to learn. We have a clear role in ensuring that such guidance is established in all areas and that it is kept under review to ensure that it remains fit for purpose in the years ahead. Support for the implementation of Curriculum for Excellence is therefore a significant priority for Education Scotland, with much of our focus on providing support and advice to establishments and local authorities on tackling bureaucracy, streamlining assessment practices and in working with practitioners to develop and publish further resources to support learning and teaching in the new National Qualifications.
Examples of specific support that we provided over the past three years includes:

- Guidance on planning for learning and assessment in the Broad General Education including monitoring and tracking progress.
- Support for all curriculum areas, including published exemplars of innovative practice in schools.
- Support for Literacy, Numeracy and Health and Wellbeing, including the development of a virtual Numeracy and Mathematics Hub.
- Extensive support for the sciences – online resources, professional learning communities, events.
- Development of guidance to support a 1+2 approach to modern languages.
- CfE Leadership events for primary and secondary headteachers.
- Advice, guidance and exemplars on curriculum plans and structures to support the new curriculum.
- Course materials developed and published to support the full range of new national qualifications from National 1 to Advanced Higher.
- The annual Scottish Learning Festival which attracts over 3000 visitors.
- The development of Parentzone Scotland to support effective parental involvement in CfE.
- Significant work with Universities and Colleges and employers to help build their understanding of what CfE and the new qualifications will mean for them.

This year we published support for the new courses in Nationals 1 and 2 as well as support materials for every Advanced Higher subject. We continued to publish a wide range of curriculum and assessment evaluation and support materials on our website and hosted many events – large and small – to support practitioners across all sectors and across every curriculum area.

In partnership with Scottish Government, in August 2014, we published “Building the Ambition” - national practice guidance to support staff in providing high quality early learning and childcare. It provides support for putting theory into practice by offering case studies and reflective questions to provoke discussion and to help support improvement.

In December 2014, the Youth Employment Strategy for Scotland was launched by Scottish Government. The strategy incorporates a seven year programme of work - Developing the Young Workforce that aims to better prepare children and young people from 3–18 for the world of work. Education Scotland has a key role to play in delivering this programme, building on the foundations already in place as part of Curriculum for Excellence and on work already undertaken by our Post 16 team in relation to colleges.

This year also saw the introduction of our Curriculum Learning, Teaching and Assessment and Support (CLTAS) Forums whose purpose is to secure, consolidate and embed improvements to the curriculum, assessment and support. The CLTAS forums will work to deliver high-quality outcomes for all learners by keeping learning relevant into the future, thus reducing the need for major educational reform.
As well as providing support and advice, we also disburse grants for a range of purposes and to a range of different organisations and use these to help focus improvements in priority areas. For example, the Access to Learning Fund was introduced this year with £1.5million made available to support schools to reduce the barriers to learning for those from the most deprived areas, and help improve attainment.

Our inspections have a specific focus on how well the new curriculum is being delivered and continuing engagement post inspection (where required) enables us to tailor support to individual schools.

4.6.2 Successful transition of Education Scotland and Local Authority sites onto SWAN

Almost all local authorities have now successfully transitioned to the Scottish Wide Area Network (SWAN) with only 4 sites out of a total of 50 remaining. Authorities are benefiting from the increased bandwidth this transition has achieved. Some authorities are also taking the opportunity afforded within the new contract to fund yet further additional bandwidth at competitive cost.

4.6.3 Successful implementation of Glow

Glow is a national learning platform which is used to support learning and teaching in Scottish education. A new suite of Glow services were successfully completed in October 2014 together with the introduction of clear service management processes. This work formed part of an ICT in Learning programme with Education Scotland working in partnership with Learning Directorate and Digital Directorate in Scottish Government. New governance arrangements were established and programme management processes, including risk management, were applied. Local Authorities, who are the main customers, were represented on the board from both an education and ICT perspective. Customer engagement was undertaken through Glow Key Contact meetings and wider consultation is being conducted via a National Digital Learning Forum. The programme is continuing to work with customers to evolve and support the services available and to promote and exemplify the educational use.

4.6.4 Future budget reductions as part of an overall tightening on public sector funding

In 2010-11, the combined budgets of the component organisations that came together to form Education Scotland totalled just over £40m. Expenditure for 2014-15 was just over £35m, a reduction of some 12.5%. During this period we took on additional significant responsibilities in relation to adult learning and youth work (almost £2m) – reflecting a reduction of 17.5% to the original figures in broadly comparative terms. Throughout this period Education Scotland has continued to deliver on its priorities. We believe this demonstrates our ability to plan effectively for the long-term.

4.6.5 Recruitment and retention of suitably qualified staff

Recent experience through external recruitment exercises and calls for secondees suggests that we are able to attract and retain sufficient staff with the required skills – apart from in very specialised areas such as Gaelic.
4.6.6 Ensuring that grants awarded contribute to Education Scotland’s objectives

Education Scotland has recently reviewed and updated the process by which grants are issued, with assistance from SG Internal Audit. Processes are in place to ensure that the criteria for grant awards are directly linked to our strategic objectives and that they are focussed on outcomes and impact – for example in relation to the CLD Strategic Funding Partnership.

4.6.7 Ensuring best use of resources through improved business planning and performance management

The Agency has a well-developed business planning cycle and as part of that reviews its approach to business planning every year in light of the previous years’ experience. This year we are adopting more of a top-down approach to focus on priority programmes of work with a yet more focused approach to resource utilisation.

4.6.8 Ensuring the Education Scotland IT system meets enhanced security and records management requirements

In 2014, Education Scotland decided to move corporate IT support to the Scottish Government platform in order minimise both risks and costs. The SCOTS IT system meets GSI standards. All Education Scotland staff have now moved to the SCOTS platform. Additional enhancement to document security and storage will also be implemented during 2015-16 as we move to the SG electronic records management system.

4.6.9 Lack of clarity on the VAT treatment on non-Education Scotland staff who undertake inspections and develop guidance on the Scottish Curriculum

This is an area where we continue to be in dispute with HMRC over the treatment of secondees in relation to VAT. We are working closely with SG colleagues in VAT unit who are assisting in presenting the ES case and to date we have been successful in that HMRC have agreed that secondees used for inspection work can be considered exempt from VAT, but we continue to press for the same consideration for those involved in supporting the curriculum and assessment.

5. Summary

Education Scotland very much welcomes this opportunity to discuss our development and future strategic direction. The opportunity is timely given that we are coming to the end of the period covered by our first strategic plan, and are about to start developing our next plan for publication in Autumn 2016. We look forward to a productive discussion with the Committee.