ADES Response to the
Request from the Scottish Parliament Education & Culture Committee
on the work of the SQA

THE MAIN WAYS IN WHICH THE SQA CONTRIBUTES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION POLICY AND THE MAIN OUTCOMES IT HAS HELPED TO DELIVER.

SQA is the main provider of Qualifications to the school and college sector in Scotland. It has been very closely involved in the development of Curriculum for Excellence and has introduced a new Qualifications Framework, in partnership with the other key organisations and representative bodies in Scottish Education. Any change in Qualifications adds risk to the system but in this case, and over a three year period, the whole system has had to change to accommodate a new suite of examination and assessment approaches whilst also maintaining dual running of some existing courses. The risk of system failure in such circumstances should not be underestimated and it is to SQA’s credit that they have delivered in 2015 certification to 142,862 candidates.

The complexity of introducing a new assessment and examination framework should not be underestimated, particularly with the combination of internal and external assessment. While this has taken place successfully, SQA has also been involved in a wide ranging series of staff development and training events for thousands of teachers and practitioners to enable them to understand and come to terms with the new qualifications and standards.

ADES has congratulated SQA for its successful delivery of the 2015 diet taking into account the challenges outlined above.

HOW THE SQA ASSESSES WHETHER IT IS PROVIDING VALUE FOR MONEY.

SQA has a number of external partners with whom it regularly liaises on many aspects of its work. Value for money issues are part of that dialogue and ADES was particularly anxious to ensure that, in a period of declining resources, examination and assessment costs were kept to a level that meant school and authority budgets did not come under pressure. The three year freeze on SQA costs to Councils has been much appreciated.

There are other issues in providing value for money, and SQA will have to be ever vigilant, as we enter a period of deeper austerity, that a balance is struck between value for money and guaranteeing standards and delivery of Qualifications to learners in Scotland.
To a large extent SQA is dependent on a series of partners in the manner in which it delivers its core products and we have grown used to a very well-resourced and successful system in Scotland over the last 15 years. Aspects of the way in which we manage and deliver the existing system may have to come under closer scrutiny and ADES has some suggestions to make which could bring greater efficiencies but would require system change.

**HOW IT EVALUATES THE IMPACT OF ITS ACTIVITIES.**

ADES is one of many partners who regularly contribute to evaluations of SQA activities. This is done in a variety of ways depending on the activity. Over the last three years, one of our ADES networks has had a very regular and open dialogue with SQA on the new qualifications framework which has proved very helpful but there are many other committees and groups that we are involved in with SQA and its partners: this is a strong and significant feature of the Scottish Education system. While much negative publicity can quickly gather pace over one question in one examination (in Maths for example), it should acknowledged just how well placed we are in Scotland compared to many other nations, with our Qualifications and Examinations Authority.

**HOW IT HAS DEMONSTRATED LEADERSHIP IN ENSURING THAT QUALIFICATIONS CONTINUE TO BE RELEVANT TO THE NEEDS OF LEARNERS, EDUCATORS AND EMPLOYERS.**

It is essential that our Curriculum and associated Assessment and Qualifications framework are relevant and appropriate for our learners, employers, higher education and essentially for the nation. That is why Curriculum for Excellence was introduced and why we needed to change the Assessment and Qualifications Framework. SQA has had to liaise with a range of interested bodies in order to do this and it is essential that this happens as part of the ongoing review of Assessment and Qualifications. Many of the new courses recently introduced are examples of this activity.

**HOW THE SQA PLANS TO BECOME SELF-FINANCING AND THE LIKELY IMPACT OF THIS ON PUBLICLY-FUNDED EDUCATION PROVIDERS.**

While it is a worthy aspiration to be a self-financing organisation, and some innovative moves, such as working in new markets abroad, have been introduced by SQA, there is a huge challenge involved in keeping costs to a minimum and standards to the optimum; ensuring engagement and confidence; whilst also delivering a new Assessment and Qualifications system for Scotland.

Scottish Local Authorities are now in an era of austerity, unprecedented in recent times, and any increases in costs for core aspects of its functions will cause greater pressures elsewhere in their budgets. This is why ADES would like to see, in the short term, an extension of the freeze on charges from SQA, but in the longer term a debate over how we finance the Assessment and Qualifications system in Scotland. We feel that there are more efficient ways that, collectively, partners in Scottish Education, including local and national government, can contribute to a funding approach for the Scottish Qualifications Authority to ensure equity in every part of Scotland.

*Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES)*

*August 2015*