The Education and Skills Committee has decided to undertake scrutiny of a number of NDPBs and Agencies prior to the publication of the Draft Scottish Government 2017/18 budget. The Committee will scrutinise the work of:

- Education Scotland;
- Scottish Qualifications Authority;
- Skills Development Scotland; and
- Scottish Funding Council.

The focus of the scrutiny will be how these bodies deliver the outcomes expected of them by the Scottish Government and how their strategic direction reflects the Christie Principles and their contribution to the Scottish Government’s climate change targets. This approach is in line with recommendations of the Finance Committee guidance to all subject committees and follows on from the work of the Education and Culture Committee last year.

It is likely that the Committee will seek the attendance of the SDS at a Committee meeting in November to explore these issues. In advance, the Committee would be grateful if you would provide a written statement and there are a number of issues the Committee would like specific commentary on which are outlined below. The Committee will also be seeking views from a number of stakeholders on the performance and strategy of SDS prior to the evidence session taking place.

The Committee understands that the letter from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills of 25 June 2016 sets out the outcomes the Scottish Government expects SDS to deliver for the current budget period. It would be helpful to know if there any
other documents that SDS uses to benchmark its performance against high-level outcomes.

I note that the Cabinet Secretary’s letter states:

“When you report back against your operating plan, I expect you to make clear links between the outcomes of SDS activity and the National Outcomes and Key Indicators.”

The Committee would be grateful if you could confirm how SDS measures its impact on National Outcomes and Key indicators and please highlight the latest data and assessment available on SDS’s impact in this regard. As part of this it would be helpful to understand how SDS quality assures the programmes it delivers and whether this quality assurance is performed internally or externally. I would also be grateful if you could identify how SDS’s strategies and financial plans prioritise SDS’s work to ensure that it has the greatest effect on delivering National Outcomes.

The Committee is also interested in how SDS has and is taking forward its work on the basis of the four Christie Principles of reform. We would be grateful if you could point to any particular programmes or reforms that demonstrate this.

The Committee is aware that the policy landscape you work in is fluid, that you are doubtless undergoing change, and that there remain constraints on public sector spending. The Committee would be grateful if you could outline how SDS’s undertakes long term financial and strategic planning and provide evidence and assurance that SDS is able to manage change effectively.

Finally, the Committee is also specifically interested in how SDS is contributing to the Scottish Government’s targets on climate change. The Committee would be interested to hear what you consider SDS’ reach to be, for example whether it goes beyond SDS itself and extends to encouraging and enabling Scottish society to use natural resources more efficiently.

We would be grateful for a submission covering these issues, along with any other matters in regard to the performance and financial strategy of SDS you would wish to highlight, by Friday 14 October 2016.

I appreciate that the Committee is seeking a large amount of information from you, and your time to attend Committee. So if there is anything you wish to discuss having read the above, please call Ned Sharratt the Assistant Clerk to the Committee on 0131 348 5204.

Yours sincerely

James Dornan
MSP
Convener