Dear Mr Kemp

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, 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 SFC at a Committee meeting in November to explore these issues. In advance, the Committee would be grateful if you would provide a written statement. There are a number of issues the Committee would like specific commentary on, which are outlined below. For information, the Committee will also be seeking views on the performance and strategy of the SFC from a number of relevant stakeholders prior to the evidence session taking place.

The Committee notes that the SFC received three letters of ministerial guidance covering the current budget period, two of which were sent after the SFC published its Strategic Plan 2015-18 in November last year. The Committee would be grateful if you could set out concisely what the key outcomes are that the Scottish
Government expects the SFC to deliver for the current budget period and how these relate to National Outcomes and Indicators in the National Performance Framework.

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

The Committee is also interested in how the SFC 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 and that there remain constraints on public sector spending. The Committee would be grateful if you could outline how the SFC undertakes long term financial planning and provide evidence and assurance that SFC is able to manage change effectively.

Finally, the Committee is interested in how the SFC is contributing to the Scottish Government’s targets on climate change. The Committee would be interested to hear how the SFC is encouraging and enabling Scottish society to use natural resources more efficiently and how the SFC is also encouraging colleges and higher education institutions in this regard.

We would be grateful for a submission covering these issues, along with any other matters in regard to the performance and financial strategy of the SFC 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