I have been a classroom teacher for over 30 years now. At the very start of my career I presented O’ Levels and have presented subsequent generations of qualifications including Standard Grade, Intermediates and Nationals and the various generations of Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications which ran along side. I have lived through 5-14 and the BGE.

As the various generations of qualifications have passed I have been struck the increasing complexities of each system and how the support for the latter systems has been scales back. The current Nationals system is a national disgrace both for teachers and pupils. The systems have been designed by ES managers and seconded staff who’s primary focus is to make sure that they don’t get returned to schools to deliver the courses and qualifications that they are out of school to design. The disconnect and lack of trust between ES and SQA at the moment is worse than I can ever remember. The recent removal of National 5 NAB assessments and changes to verification procedures has done very little to address the stress and workload issues currently experienced by serving teachers. In typical SQA fashion the advice issued regarding interim arrangements for NAB assessments and verification procedures has been vague and unclear. The credibility of these large administrative bodies amongst teachers is at an all-time low. Meanwhile teachers continue to wrestle with major workload issues precipitated by ES/SQA while the Scottish Government over the past 8 years has just sat back and expected teachers to deal with all of the associated problems.

Had the Government listened to teachers 5/6 years ago– they would have clearly heard that what was required was an update of the standard grade course and assessment. National 5 has been problematic from day 1 and National 4 is a complete disaster. The problems with the BGE years S1 to S3 and the interface with National qualifications has been very poorly introduced and managed and the Scottish Government need to ensure that there are changes at ES/SQA to allow teachers to have confidence in the public bodies which control and govern our education and qualifications system. Its little wonder that it is so difficult to get experienced markers and verifiers.

Allow me to give you an example of what I mean by the attitude of staff at ES. I attended a business meeting of heads of department about three years ago (a bit out of date now as due to budget cuts we no longer have departmental heads and also my local Authority no longer runs Business meetings for what are now Faculty heads of multiple departments). On the agenda for that day was an update regarding National qualifications provided by an officer who was seconded to ES. This woman gave out glossy coloured specification sheets which on inspection were written in a language which teaching staff did not understand. The audience of 25 experienced Principal Teachers were not impressed and being presented with a document which was useless in schools. One experienced PT who has been a PT for over 20 years
put forward the view to this woman that we were not being given materials from EC which would allow us to do our job in school. The woman’s reply was quite unbelievable. She said to the experienced PT of over 20 years “you should not be asking me what I have to give you, I should be asking you – what are you going to give me? After all, you do wish to make the standard for full registration”. At this point the QIO from the Authority had to rescue this woman before she was lynched. Interestingly during the tea break the young lady who it transpired had been teaching a total of four years, was chatting to the QIO asking what she would have to do next to get a QIO’s job. This is typical of my experience of ES staff who have burning ambitions but don’t stay in post long enough to become proficient in their current job and whose major goal is to avoid being sent back to work in mainstream!

The Scottish Government need to take charge of both ES and SQA and ensure that they are working for both pupils and teaching staff and that the plans produced and not so overly complex that they are undeliverable. It’s a major embarrassment that the recent concessions (which are as yet to be properly implemented) have been grudgingly extracted by the teaching Unions. Scottish teachers will not be placated by the simple removal of NAT 5 and Higher NAB assessments. The workload issues for teachers have been allowed to develop over a decade and require major restoration otherwise by the time I retire in 10 years’ time there will be no young graduated willing to come into teaching to replace me. The latest nonsense of having a Masters Level workforce will do nothing for recruitment. Graduate teachers in Scotland have taught in a world class education system for the last 50 years and this Masters Level nonsense only serves to increase the coffers of the Universities.