Higher Geography
The final grade for Higher Geography is made up of two parts, an exam worth 60 marks and an assignment worth 30 marks giving a total of 90. The average mark for the exam was 31/60. It was actually possible this year for pupils to get less than 50% in the exam but get full marks in the assignment and therefore gain an 'A' overall in 2016 (59/90). In my opinion, this brings into question the validity of the new qualification.

Marking
I have numerous concerns about marking. Probationer teachers with very little or no experience of marking were employed to mark by the SQA. Teachers were being desperately phoned early on a Sunday morning asking them to mark. Bonus payments were offered to staff who agreed to mark more than the number of papers that they were originally given to mark. The system came close to collapse.

Assignment
It is clear that these pieces of work are exacerbating the attainment gap. According to the SQA, class teachers are only able to give 'reasonable assistance'. However parents, and tutors are able to give more assistance than the class teacher. A simple Google search will show you private tutors advertising that they can give more assistance than class teachers can. Field trips to Outdoor Centres where tutors can give more than reasonable assistance are also being organised by schools in more affluent areas, asking parents to pay for the visits.

As someone who works in an Inner city school, many of the parents of my pupils do not speak English and most definitely haven't the money for tutors and so on. It would be fascinating to see a correlation between all the exam marks for Higher Geography against the assignment mark.

Assignment scripts along with some examinations still require pupils to write in the name of the school and the town. Why? Even at Universities these things are anonymised.

Please consider scrapping the external assignment or at least reducing its percentage value.

Board of Management
I believe that the Board of Management of the SQA is predominantly privately educated.
Any teaching representatives who are on the Board are not from the areas where you really need to reduce the attainment gap. There is a lack of understanding of the reality of our country’s education system at the SQA.

I believe that the percentage of SQA Higher markers from the Independent sector is around 15% of the total number of markers. This is way, way higher than one would suspect. SQA markers should reflect the make up of the teaching force. This will allow all schools, State and Independent, to have an equal understanding of the exam system.

At SQA Nominee and Understanding standards events, the Independent sector has a much higher representation than one would expect it to have compared to that of the state sector. This therefore increases Independent sector knowledge of the new curriculum to a greater extent than that of State sector staff, which in turn exacerbates the attainment gap.

The SQA is not currently fit for purpose. It is institutionally biased towards the Independent sector.

And in case you are thinking all this is finding excuses for poor attainment, every pupil studying a subject in my Department achieved higher marks than the national average.