As a PT of physics of 32 years (~18 years a higher marker) and having experienced the introduction of Standard Grades, numerous other innovations and now the new NQ’s I feel I am in a reasonable position to offer a view on the performance of SQA.

I will base my comments on the elements of the stated SQA Corporate Plan that I have direct experience of.

- Provide leadership and expertise in a range of areas including assessment, qualification development and quality enhancement.

I would say that the SQA has failed spectacularly on every aspect of the above statement.

Leadership: Fail

The introduction of the NQ’s has been a shambles caused by lack of leadership and an unwillingness to listen in the lead up to their introduction and is still causing problems (they consulted but didn’t listen!).

Expertise: Fail

The lack of detail in the absolutely basic fundamentals of course design namely course content and method of assessment is still causing issues as I write this 2 years in to the new courses.

Guidelines are written in an overly verbose, jargon heavy way which has resulted in the meaning of many statements being left open to interpretation.

Quality: Fail

The design of the courses may have looked good in theory however, it was perfectly clear that there was never going to be enough people to act as volunteer verifiers or markers. This is clearly the case given the number of people I know who are doing multiple SQA tasks. I have attended verification meetings where no one at the meeting knew what the required standard was in order to make assessment decisions. This uncertainty still permeates the profession. How reaching agreements at a department/school/Authority level guarantees quality and uniformity nationally beats me.

The assessment materials being issued nationally contained numerous typographical and formatting errors which I would not have accepted from a student teacher in their first teacher placement. The level of the assessments issued were so far removed from the level required to pass the final exam as
to be meaningless. Teachers had then to produce A/B tests in order to give pupils a more realistic idea of the level they had reached.

The introduction of Assignments/Added Value Units as a significant component of a pupil’s final grade has simply helped widen the attainment (equality) gap. Pupils with affluent parents will be able to employ tutors to help train their children to pass and will be able to give their children far more access to ICT than schools can.

The marking of Assignments/Added Value Units differ across the sciences resulting in pupils having to learn, in some cases, three different ways of gaining the same marks. There is some evidence that pupils are being turned away from the STEM subjects as a result of the perceived complexity. Confusion over the lack of consistency between subjects is not helping.

SQA claim these assess skills. If this is the case why are pupils doing multiple Assignments/Added Value Units in the sciences. The skills are the same only the contexts change. There is also a strong argument that the Higher Assignments/Added Value Units simply retest those skills that pupils demonstrated successfully at N5. There is some evidence that pupils are being turned away from the STEM subjects as a result of the perceived complexity.

- Ensure our culture and values support the engagement and wellbeing of our staff and foster their commitment to the success of SQA. Pass

The support they give their staff is excellent to the point that they defend the indefensible as a matter of course. The problems with the Higher maths paper and N5 computing paper are an excellent example of this. Despite there clearly being an issue with both papers the SQA defended them immediately and only after widespread complaints did they grudgingly admit to there being issues. In the case of the maths paper I seem to remember that the previous highly experienced Qualification team left en masse. SQA put out a statement saying that effectively there would be no change as to the quality of the papers. I felt at the time that their lack of understanding and naivety was worrying and so it proved.

- Deliver high-quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive services to our customers.

  continually improving: Pass

  The starting point has been so low that the only way is up.

  efficient: Fail

Materials were/are constantly being updated and posted on a website for teachers to find. There has been no definitive place or time for changes to be made. Thousands of hours have been spent by staff nationally looking for “the most recent” documentation and thousands more hours finding the
changes therein. Critical assessment information is put on a secure site to which only a few people in schools have access. In my school this is a Faculty Head. She is then burdened with retrieving the most recent assessment tests (~5 per unit inc. Assignments and write-ups). Across the three sciences this amounts to well in access of 150 documents which then have to be copied and distributed. If staff are trusted to professional then there is no need for this level of security. It did not exist with the old NAB system and it seemed to work perfectly well.

**responsive:** **Fail**

The responsiveness of SQA so far has been very poor. Clearly there is so much wrong that it would be impossible to be able to fix things as they have been raised. I would imagine the dropping of the units (if this happens) will prove a godsend to SQA as it should free up time to unravel the many underlying problems that remain with the rest of the courses.

- **Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body and key player in the skills, training and education landscape.**

  *Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body: ?*

  is an excellent example of the type of meaningless and unquantifiable statement that permeates so many SQA documents.

  *Key player: ?*

  So far as I am aware, in schools, SQA are the only “player in the skills, training and education landscape” so it should not be too difficult to remain the key one!

- **Independently accredit, quality assure and regulate approved Awarding Bodies and qualifications thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers and the Scottish Government.**

  **Fail**

  *See all of above*

**Conclusion**

In my view, although jaded and tired in places, the previous assessment regime and course structures were essentially sound and could easily have been adapted and modernised. To take the decision to start again with a clean sheet was bold to say the least. To then remove what was there and replace it with such ill thought out course and assessment structures borders on negligent. The fact that we have reached a stage where unions are considering strike action in order to find time for teachers to teach really says it all. SQA has single handedly set back senior secondary school education
by years. The tragedy is that the same people who are responsible for the situation will be the same ones tasked to fix it.

*Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results* – A. Einstein.