Dear Janet

Thank you for your attendance at the Education and Skills Committee last week. The Official Report of the meeting has been published and can be found here: http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=10653&mode=pdf

During the meeting you indicated that you would provide the Committee with additional information on a number of topics.

- The subjects included in the SQA’s definition of STEM subjects and therefore have enhanced quality assurance processes. (Column 10 of the Official Report);
- Details of the proposed update of the SQA’s information systems (Col. 14)
- Detailed response to the assertions that the latest Geography Higher exam was of a low standard and did not resemble the specimen or previous paper (Col.15) (reference is to the submission from the Scottish Association of Geography Teachers)
- Details of how the SQA knows whether invigilators are paid above the living wage and the SQA’s analysis on the length of exams (Cols. 16-19)
- More information on the costs of supporting qualifications with few candidates. (Col. 32)
- More information on the provision of scribes in examinations and assessments. (Col. 39)

In addition, the Committee would appreciate it if you could reflect again on the submissions we have received, particularly in relation to comments and survey responses from teachers, including on the lack of trust and confidence from many teachers in the SQA. You will be aware that the Committee found the level of criticism of the SQA in the submissions it received striking. What struck the Committee were not only the strong views and the numbers of responders, but also the consistency of the themes.
The Committee would also wish to highlight to you the sheer range of criticisms raised in evidence submissions and invite you to provide further comment on any of these criticisms should you wish to do so. For example, some of the themes were:

- Quality, volume and frequency of changes to guidance;
- Quality assurance of exams and consistency of marking assessments;
- Structure of the senior phase –
  - National 4 certification
  - Three consecutive years of exams and the associated levels of stress on teachers and children
  - Narrowing of choice
- The extent to which the SQA focuses on international work.

I should be grateful for a response to the specific points mentioned in the Committee session by 14 December 2016. I appreciate this is a challenging deadline so please contact Ned Sharratt from the clerking team should you wish to discuss further on 0131 348 5204.

Members were concerned by some of the evidence it received and I am copying this letter to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to highlight some of the issues raised.

Yours sincerely

JAMES DORNAN MSP
CONVENER

Copied to John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills