Dear Principal,

The Education and Skills Committee is focusing its current scrutiny, in the main, on school education. This has included looking at subject choice availability in the senior phase.

During its evidence session with the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board last week and with the SQA in November, the Committee considered the potential impact of the narrowing of subject choices in the senior phase. This included questions on how many Highers could be taken in a given period. We heard divergent perspectives on the ability of students to receive offers from universities where they have taken Highers over more than one year, or where they cannot take certain subjects in tandem in one year (in particular the three sciences).

The Committee has decided to test the evidence. As such, I am writing today to ask for details on your approach to admissions for a sample of specific undergraduate degree programmes. These are Medicine; Law; and Mechanical Engineering.

I should be grateful for your responses to the questions below. Please provide separate answers for each of the three undergraduate degree programmes listed above, where your institution offers them. We recognise that there are a variety of programme options within these subjects. If you could focus your responses on those programmes that are most popular/high demand – making clear which specific undergraduate degree programme you are providing information on – that would ensure that we are analysing your information correctly.

- For those applying with SQA qualifications, what was the 'standard offer' (as opposed to minimum requirements) for 2016-17 entry? Please include information on all element of the offer, including whether specific qualifications
are required to have been achieved in a single sitting or in a single academic year.

- How many of the 2016-17 entrants were accepted onto the programme having achieved SQA qualifications?
- How many 2016-17 entrants were there in total?

In addition to above, if you were also able to provide us with views or information (evidence based or anecdotal) on any SQA qualification applicants who applied for (or made pre-application enquiries relating to) these undergraduate degree programmes where they were unable through curriculum limitations to take the required number of Highers in a single sitting, that would be most welcome.

The Committee would very much appreciate a response within the next 4 weeks, with a closing date for responses of Friday 24 February 2017.

For reference, I have also written to all mainstream state secondary schools in Scotland with a survey (http://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/SeniorPhaseSurvey/). The purpose of the survey is to ascertain the availability of courses at Higher level, including the time periods over which students can complete all three sciences at each school. As you will appreciate, what is being tested here is whether schools are inadvertently limiting options for gaining entry to university by limiting the subject choices available at Higher level either that can be taken over a single school year or that can be taken in a single sitting.

I very much appreciate your co-operation in this work. Should you have any queries on the nature of the Committee’s work or any issue with the deadline please contact the Clerk to the Committee, Roz Thomson at es.committee@parliament.scot

Yours sincerely

JAMES DORNAN MSP
CONVENER