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Convener, Education Children and Young People
Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Education
EH99 1SP

21 April 2022

Dear Stephen,

Education Reform

Thank you for your letter dated 1 April 2022 seeking additional information on the various aspects of education reform work in Scotland, including how they will come together and timescales for implementation.

This response covers the totality of the Education Reform Programme, which includes the structural reform of the national education bodies Education Scotland and SQA subsequent to Professor Ken Muir's report, the work on reform of qualifications and assessment being led by Professor Louise Hayward, and the other actions documented in our [Implementation Framework](#) arising from the report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, [Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence Into the Future](#), on Scotland's curriculum for excellence.

National Education Body Reforms

On 9 March I set out to Parliament the [Scottish Government response](#) to the recommendations made by Professor Ken Muir in his report [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education](#) on reforming our national education bodies.

Professor Muir worked within the remit I set and provided me with advice and recommendations on designing the implementation of the OECD's recommendations for structural change of the SQA and Education Scotland. As you will be aware, Professor Muir engaged and consulted widely with a broad range of stakeholders in reaching his conclusions.

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Professor Muir concluded that, in the main, the existing functions of our national bodies remain necessary and important, and in my statement to Parliament I set out the foundations of where these function should sit in the future, with the intention for these to be further developed and built on with partners and staff in Education Scotland and SQA in the next phase of the work.

Since my statement to Parliament, we have now moved in to this next phase to create a new qualifications body, a new national agency for Scottish education and a new independent inspection body, and will shortly be finalising the governance and programme structures required to drive forward the work. As set out in our response, detail on these will be published later in spring following further engagement, and I will write again to the Committee at that point.

I have committed that the operating models will be developed for the new bodies by winter 2022, and that there will be a period of shadow operation before they become operational later in 2024. I anticipate this being dependent on legislation and the Scottish Government's future legislative priorities will be set out in the annual Programme for Government in the normal way.

Final decisions on the future location for the accreditation and regulation function (currently located within SQA) and the Registrar for Independent Schools (currently located within ES) will be made in the coming months.

I understand from a number of opposition members that there is an appetite for more pace with these reforms, however I can reassure the Committee that the timetable I have set out is already demanding for the scale of the work that will be taking place. It is also vital, as I have set out a number of times, that during the transition period both Education Scotland and SQA continue to deliver their functions in order to meet the needs of learners and the wider education sector. I am confident in their ability to do that and I hope you will share and support my view that staff in those organisations continue to do their best in challenging circumstances given the reforms that are underway.

Reform of Qualifications and Assessment

I have also announced a review of qualifications and assessment that will be led independently by Professor Louise Hayward. I expect to be able to publish a final terms of reference for this work shortly. In addition I am aware that Professor Hayward intends to write to the Committee once her terms are agreed to explain her approach and timetable, and will also seek to meet with yourself and the Deputy Convener to discuss her work in more detail.

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OECD Implementation Framework

The areas above are key elements of the overall programme of reform, initially set out in our Implementation Framework on 27 October. Work is currently underway on the development of a further iteration of the Framework in order to take in to account the developments outlined above and elsewhere since. In particular while the OECD called for a review of the vision for CfE and increased stakeholder involvement, including with children and young people, my acceptance of Professor Muir's recommendation for a national discussion on the future vision of Scottish Education goes one step further. I anticipate launching the national discussion later this year and will provide the Committee with further information on this, as well as a copy of the updated Implementation Framework, in due course.

I hope this update is helpful.

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE

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