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Douglas Ross MSP
Convenor
Education, Children and Young People Committee
The Scottish Parliament

4 December 2024

Dear Convenor

I welcomed the opportunity to discuss the Education (Scotland) Bill with the Education, Children and Young People Committee on 9th October 2024. I am writing to update the Committee on changes to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Board and on the work being taken forward on the shared Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) inspection framework following my appearance.

SQA Board Appointments

In our discussion, the Committee was interested in the leadership of the SQA and plans for Qualifications Scotland (QS). I informed the Committee of my commission to the SQA Chair to look at options for QS's leadership structures and the public appointment round to select new members to the SQA Board.

Today (Wednesday 4 December) I am pleased to announce the appointment of five new members to the SQA Board. They are Ronnie Erskine, Simon Hewitt, John Morton, Caroline McFarlane and Michelle Wailes. They have been appointed through a rigorous Public Appointment process, regulated by the Ethical Standards Commissioner. The appointment criteria reflected the needs of the SQA now and in preparation for QS, bringing in members with frontline teaching experience, financial acumen and, managing change and communications skills.

These appointments are a key milestone in the establishment of QS. Subject to the passing of the Education (Scotland) Bill, the agreement of Parliament, and review of individual performance, the new SQA Board members are expected to transfer to QS. The Board members will support the refocusing of the leadership of the SQA, bringing in fresh perspectives to help drive the delivery of reform. When they transfer to QS they will have significant experience of the functions of a qualifications body including delivery of an exam diet, built up during their time at the SQA, which will support QS to deliver from day 1. I look forward to working with the refreshed SQA Board as it supports the organisation to improve its engagement with teachers and learners, and to make the transition to QS whilst continuing to deliver for the people of Scotland.

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Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) Shared Quality Framework

In our discussion, the Committee asked how the Care Inspectorate and Chief Inspector of Education would work together to inspect ELC services.

High quality ELC is essential to the care, learning and development of Scotland's young people. The Care Inspectorate and the new Education Inspectorate will continue to have specific regulatory and/or statutory functions related to the inspection of funded ELC settings.

In response to concerns raised regarding potential duplication of effort, complexity and unnecessary burdens on ELC providers, the Care Inspectorate and His Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIE) have been leading work to develop a Shared Framework for inspection. The aim of the Shared Framework is to provide clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the inspection bodies, ensure consistency and a common language wherever possible for inspection of ELC services, reduce bureaucracy and minimise any burdens on practitioners.

The Scottish Government is supporting the development of the Shared Framework in consultation with the sector. We are committed to ensuring that the Framework supports high-quality care, play and learning and meets the needs of the sector.

The Inspectorates are also continuing to work together to plan their inspection programmes, undertake shared inspections and reduce burdens on the sector wherever possible. Neither organisation will inspect a service within an 18-month period of the other unless there are exceptional circumstances. They have confirmed that they will continue with this approach until September 2025. Should the Education (Scotland) Bill be passed by Parliament, the authority for ongoing engagement with the Care Inspectorate to reduce inspection burdens on the early learning and childcare sector will continue under the direction of the HM Chief Inspector.

Yours sincerely

JENNY GILRUTH

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