

## **THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND**

### **EIS Submission to Education and Culture Committee's Review of Public Bodies' Spending and Outcomes**

#### **Scottish Qualifications Authority**

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) welcomes the opportunity to provide an initial written submission as part of the Committee's review of the spending decisions made and the outcomes delivered by, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The SQA has made significant contribution in recent years to the development of courses and qualifications - courses such as Skills for Work which offer opportunities for a wider range of learners to gain qualifications. In addition, it has designed qualifications upwards from National 1 which means that those with additional support needs have recognition and the possibility of more coherent pathways for progression. The SQA has also made progress in developing qualifications which match the needs of modern society- for example, adaptations to STEM qualifications which are more sharply tailored to meet the skills demand within this context.

The also EIS acknowledges the efforts made by the SQA to engage with stakeholders, the EIS included, and formally and informally with teachers. It asks participants in its training events for feedback, for example. However, the EIS has been disappointed at the SQA's apparent inability to respond appropriately to much of the feedback in the interests of learners and teachers. Indeed, this has been a matter of deep and ongoing frustration for the EIS and its members.

In spite of numerous alerts to the SQA about unmanageable teacher/ lecturer workload and stress resulting from the burden of internal assessment, the late arrival of combined assessment approaches, changes to units and assessments at short notice, the absence of exemplification and practice papers, less than the promised fully fleshed out course material, poor communication and inadequacy of professional support, the SQA has been, on the whole, slow, at best, to react. This would raise some questions about the effectiveness of the body's leadership throughout the implementation phase and of its self-evaluation processes overall.

In terms of the effect of this upon teachers and lecturers tasked with delivering the new qualifications, there can be no doubting the detrimental impact of the SQA's activities on their health and wellbeing. A survey of EIS members' health and wellbeing towards the end of the first year of new qualifications drew worrying conclusions: wellbeing and satisfaction with the teaching profession were at an all-time low caused by excessive workload, linked to which was the

very large amount of paperwork as well as the number and speed of changes, in particular to the curriculum and assessment. Much of this can be attributed to shortcomings in the level of support provided by the SQA for teachers and lecturers, and to the cumbersome nature of assessment design and verification.

Furthermore, the EIS has received considerable anecdotal evidence from its members that the weight of the internal assessment burden has been onerous for pupils and students, also. Much of their time in the classroom is spent completing assessments, this causing heightened stress for these learners as well as a serious diminution of the amount of time available for teaching and learning. Representations to this effect have been made by the EIS on numerous occasions and by parents' groups.

Regarding specific groups of learners, the EIS has given feedback to the SQA on a number of occasions on the revised additional assessment arrangements for candidates with additional support needs. These new arrangements have resulted in the withdrawal of human readers and scribes for candidates whose additional support needs impact on their literacy skills and who are seeking to gain Literacy qualifications at National 4 or below. Instead of human support, as was an option at Standard Grade and continues to be an option for more able candidates within the new qualifications, support by technological means is the provision. The SQA maintains that such a measure has been introduced to the new qualifications to safeguard the integrity of Literacy qualifications and to encourage learner independence. The EIS, however, has highlighted the lack of consistency of approach to assessment arrangements across the suite of English qualifications- candidates who require additional support in literacy at N5 level and above are entitled to the support of human reader/ scribes; those sitting National 4 English and below are not. Effectively, the candidates who are most disadvantaged are the least well supported. The SQA maintains that these arrangements apply to Literacy qualifications only, not English. However, candidates sitting English at N4 level and below cannot achieve an overall qualification without passing the Literacy unit. The EIS remains uncomfortable with what appears to be discriminatory arrangements for this set of learners.

The EIS regards the possible transition of the SQA from publicly funded body to self-financing status as concerning. There is a significant danger that costs to presenting centres will increase which will have a disproportionately damaging impact on publicly-funded education providers. The SQA currently pays, albeit modestly, a number of teachers and lecturers to undertake tasks such as preparing exam questions and ensuring standards are consistent for internal assessments. Any increase in exam fees arising from the SQA's status as a self-financing body could have an impact on education providers' willingness to release staff to support the work of the SQA as budgets would require to be redressed. It could also lead to schools and colleges only presenting pupils and students who were certain to get a qualification, rather than risking presentation for those whose chances of success were borderline; candidates' failure could be

seen as a waste of money. In addition, following the removal of the appeals process, which, it may be argued, was partly motivated by a desire to reduce costs, the recently established post-results service might cost more. Schools and colleges would then have to limit requests even further than at present, this causing yet more disadvantage to pupils and students. Yet another concern is around the affordability of important events organised by the SQA such as those focused on understanding standards. In the event of the SQA becoming self-financing, these events may no longer be affordable for all providers as costs would be likely to increase in order to satisfy the demand for income.

On the other hand, if fees and charges remained static, the other option which would allow the SQA to be self-financing would be for it to reduce its permanent staffing. If schools and colleges need support in the delivery of new courses and qualifications, particularly looking to Developing Scotland's Young Workforce for example, a reduction in staffing could be detrimental.

Overall, the EIS view is that the SQA has been slow at times to react to the needs of schools and colleges in terms of supporting development and delivery of new qualifications. If finance dictates policy within the SQA in the future, the situation in terms of this is likely to deteriorate. To make matters worse, there would be no public accountability.