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General Secretary: Dr Patrick Roach

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John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
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By email: DFMCSE@gov.scot

Dear John

As the Covid-19 situation evolves it is recognised that all of our usual working practices have had to change to ensure strategy to address the crisis is developed at pace.

The NASUWT has welcomed the positive engagement with government officials in working together to provide guidance and support for all education staff working to protect our children and young people and to create and deliver new ways of learning.

It is unfortunate therefore that this model of engagement does not extend more widely; in particular, with regard to the SQA and the essential work being done to address the issues affecting national qualifications. All of us have a part to play in achieving the best outcome for pupils, yet the SQA has engaged in no formal public consultation on how this can be achieved. This approach is at sharp variance with that of other UK regulators, all of which have consulted widely with stakeholders, including all nationally recognised trade unions in the development of their proposals. This extensive and wide-ranging engagement has ensured that there is a relatively high level of understanding not only of the proposals themselves but why they are being considered for adoption. This approach has provided the reassurance and clarity to many teachers that is still required in Scotland. The absence of a comparable approach by the SQA is difficult to justify given that it is operating in similarly pressured circumstances to those of its UK counterparts.

The NASUWT has raised the lack of consultation with Fiona Robertson, SQA Chief Executive, who has advised that stakeholder engagement has been taken forward through the Qualifications Contingency Group. Our understanding is that this group is convened by Scottish Government to deal with emergency situations such as the one we are currently facing and that the teaching profession is represented on the group by only EIS and SLS. It is not helpful that information and decisions emanating from this group are not shared with all stakeholders before announcements are made, particularly when they have unintended consequences.

One example of this was the announcement that access to schools would be given for teachers to collect materials and evidence to support their judgements of pupil grades and ranking. As you will be aware, it is not just a simple matter of opening up buildings that have been completely closed. HSE legislation is clear that a number of steps need to be taken, particularly in relation to the treatment of water systems, to ensure the safety of anyone returning to a site that has not been occupied. It appears that some councils may not have considered this in the context of Covid-19 and whilst we are engaging directly with those councils there are still concerns that unless this is addressed, teachers will be put at unnecessary risk in their efforts to do the best for their pupils.

It is essential that information relating to SQA arrangements is shared with all stakeholders in advance of announcements being made and in the current climate it is not acceptable that any organisation is excluded from the process. The NASUWT has a wealth of experience to bring to discussions and I ask that you ensure we are included in the work of the group moving forwards.

Finally, in relation to the publication of the guidance relating to supporting learning during term 4, I note that a number of work streams are being taken forward by Education Scotland. I appreciate the recent invitations received for the NASUWT to be included in a number of these working groups.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Patrick Roach
General Secretary

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