The Committee will meet at 1.45 pm in The Hub, Castlehill, Edinburgh

1. **Item in Private:** The Committee will consider whether to take item 2 in private.

2. **Scottish Qualifications Authority Trade Unions:** The Committee will consider its lines of questioning for witnesses.

3. **Arrangements for SEN Debate:** The Committee will consider the arrangements for the forthcoming debate on the report of its inquiry into special educational needs.

4. **Budget 2002-03:** The Committee will consider a report from the Deputy Convener.

5. **Scottish Qualifications Authority Trade Unions:** The Committee will take evidence from trade unions associated with the SQA.

The following papers are attached for this meeting—

- Annual Expenditure Report paper from the Deputy Convener (Agenda item 4)  
  ED/01/14/1
- Paper to follow

- Paper from the Trade Union group (ACTS, MSF, UNISON) (Agenda item 5)  
  ED/01/14/2

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General Comments

Last year, it was noted that “it is often difficult to link a target with the information in the tables”. While there is some improvement in detail, it must once again be noted that there is a lack of indicators, making it difficult to compare policy objectives and targets. This point has also been made in the course of other committee discussions, including (significantly) the Equal Opportunities Committee.

Additionally, much funding of Education, Culture and Sport is through Local Authorities. The document does not provide a breakdown of such expenditure.

In order to seek further information, it would be helpful to ask the Education Minister to appear before the committee to answer questions on the appropriate sections of the budget. It would, for instance, be helpful to have clear information on the implications of the McCrone report for the wider education budget.

Education and Children

There are difficulties reconciling figures on page 10 of the publication Making a Difference with those on page 69 of The Scottish Budget.

1. It is not clear whether the Making a Difference figures for “Schools” and “Children and Young People” include specific grants such as the Excellence Fund. Is this the case?

2. In the Scottish Budget, overall education budget does not increase as much as envisaged in Making a Difference. Is this entirely due to the McCrone settlement? If not, what other factors have affected the budget?

3. Why does the difference between the documents’ figures vary so much from year to year?

4. What impact has the McCrone settlement had on programmes in the “Schools” budget?

5. What impact has the McCrone settlement had on programmes within the Excellence Fund specific grant?

6. What is the estimated cost of the McCrone pay settlement? What other programmes are affected?
Funding

1. How much of the Changing Children’s Services Fund is allocated under the Young People and Looked After Children Budget?

2. Why is the increase in Curriculum Development, IT, etc., greater than that outlined Scotland’s Budget Documents 2001-02, published 29 Jan 2001? How much of this increase is a result of additional SQA funding, how much is devoted to other objectives, and from where have the resources been transferred?

3. To what extent does the increase in the HMI budget derive from a reallocation of staff costs from another budget heading, consequent to the change to Executive Agency status?

4. To what extent is the drop in pupil support under the “Schools” budget compensated for by additional funding elsewhere, such as drugs education funding in the Changing Children’s Services Fund?

5. How does the recurring £141.8m allocation for Childcare and Pre-School take account of the recent prioritisation of adoption and fostering?

6. Why has the Schools Standards and Improvements budget line 2000/01 been increased by £26.9m since the publication of Scotland’s Budget Documents 2001-02?

7. What programmes are affected by the Social Work Services budget fall in 2001/02?

Culture

It would be useful to be able to pinpoint how the Cultural Strategy is being translated into funding programmes, and to be able to ascertain whether these are meeting the objectives set out in policy. Without suitable indicators, it is impossible to ensure that money is being targeted to achieving policy objectives. We need for more detailed breakdown of the budget’s expenditure on culture.

1. Is the increase under sport and culture wholly accounted for through funding commitments to the Cultural Strategy? If not, what other areas are receiving funding increases?

2. What are the Capital Projects for Sport and Culture, as identified in Scotland’s Budget Documents 2001-02, but presumably aggregated under other heading in The Scottish Budget?

3. Where is the extra £1m for Scottish Opera accounted for within the budget?

4. How will the £1.5m for traditional arts be monitored to ensure that it is used effectively?

5. Who will administer and set criteria for the school culture co-ordinators project?

6. Is the money allocated to Traditional Arts Centres of Excellence intended for physical resources such as buildings, or for human resources?

7. How can the success of the budget objectives be assessed in the absence of a commonly accepted definition of what constitutes excellence within the Traditional Arts?
Sport
Again, there is insufficient breakdown of expenditure, and lack of correspondence between policy objectives and indicators.
1. Given the budget will be static at £13m, how is inflation taken into account?
2. How much money will be used to promote inclusion in sport, and how will this be done?

Historic Scotland & RCAHMS
1. Why does planned expenditure rise for 2001/2 and 2002/3 but then fall back in 2003/4?

And finally …
What was the print run of the document “The Scottish Budget” and why is it not listed under the Finance section of the Scottish Executive website?
Education, Culture and Sport Committee

Scottish Qualifications Authority

Paper from the Trade Union group (ACTS, MSF, UNISON)

February 2001
Members’ views on progress to Diet 2001

1 Introduction

Between February 28 and 13 March 2001, by meetings, e-mails and face to face discussion, the three trade unions have been consulting with members and seeking their views on SQA’s progress towards a successful Diet 2001. During this consultation a variety of concerns, observations and suggestions were expressed with regard to a number of areas.

This paper provides a snapshot of members’ views during this period. It makes no forecast as to whether Diet 2001 will be successfully achieved or not. It is hoped that its value will be as an aid to discussion between management and unions and that it will be useful when targeting issues that are of concern to the staff. The format is intended to be readable and succinct, with accompanying notes being used for further detail and examples where these would be helpful.

It should also be noted that the TU side is aware that some of the issues raised are being dealt with under the action plan. These have been included as they help establish that staff and management concerns can be broadly within the same area.

2 Data management

There are still a number of concerns surrounding this area. Concerns fall roughly into two areas: Diet 2000 clear up and preparation for Diet 2001. The impression is that a lot of resources are still being expended on trying to mop up outstanding issues relating to Diet 2000. This is hampered by inaccurate or missing data. It is also having an adverse affect on morale as staff feel that they are not able to look to the future.

Although SQA is in a better position than it was at this time last year in terms of entry information, there still appears to be a certain uneasiness about data and our ability to handle it. It is known that some records are wrong (e.g. in some reports last year’s open entries have been combined with this year’s, giving an inaccurate picture). Also, the expectation is that we will be swamped by unit results during May. There is no guarantee this will easier to handle than last year. Staff were led to believe that the “default pass” solution would make a considerable difference. Having raised staff confidence in this approach management then announced that it would not work. The impression is that we will be handling unit results in the same way we did last year. This is affecting morale.

3 Workload

There are a number of reports from across the organisation that staff are being asked to work significantly beyond their role profiles with no recompense. Generally, staff are willing to help and will very often go that extra yard. However, the feeling is that management are taking advantage and there are also worrying suggestions of intimidation. Some staff report this is particularly noticeable when being asked to work overtime.

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* Additional notes corresponding to superscript letters begin on Page 4

Joint TU paper on members' views.
The view from staff is that IT is still inadequate to meet the needs of the task confronting us. It appears to be fragmented with information being handled by disparate groups. This increases the opportunity for data to go missing or for mistakes to creep into the system. Retrieval of data from Navigator is slow and the information is not presented in a user-friendly way.

Stress/Morale

There is no doubt that stress levels within the organisation are reaching a worrying level. Most of the stress can be attributed to the items noted above. Turnover of staff and sickness leave affect not only the individuals concerned but also staff in those sections where this is a problem. Where these features occur regularly it puts more pressure on staff in the section involved and ultimately adds to their stress. It should also be noted that insensitive management is adding to stress.

Almost everyone we spoke to is also concerned that at some point over the next month or so they will be pulled from their job to work on a school desk system similar to last year. This is having a very adverse affect on morale as it increases uncertainty and anxiety.

Question papers

Delays are creeping into the production of QPs. These are being addressed and all QPs will be ready for Diet 2001. However, taken as part of the process and not in isolation, the delay in QPs does send an early warning that all is not well. It should also be noted that practically all subjects are finalising Diet 2001 papers. This means that we are already behind in preparing papers for Diets 2002/2003. It should also be noted that at the moment delays arising in the development stage have an obvious effect on the printing stage. This indicates that working patterns in Development Division need to be looked at.

Management/Appointments

One point stressed at Inchyra Grange was the need for the organisation to work together as a team. Everyone would surely agree to this as a general proposition, as fractured lines of communication were clearly at the root of many of our problems last summer. This does, however, sit uneasily with the prospect of a few senior officers alone collecting performance-related bonuses on the basis of the collective efforts of all staff within SQA. The initial reaction to this development was not positive and it is likely to be a continuing and underlying factor in staff/management relations. The rather secretive nature of similar arrangements in one of our predecessor bodies is not a happy precedent. We have yet to be convinced of the benefits of this development to the organisation as a whole.

Also worrying for the immediate future are reports that a lot of decision making at best is ad hoc, at worst it is not happening. This leaves staff perplexed and frustrated as they cannot get answers to particular questions from managers.

Winter Diet

SQA's commitment to a Winter Diet will have severe resource implications on all key areas within the organisation. The view of staff is that these implications have not been properly thought through or discussed meaningfully with staff likely to be at the sharp end of this activity. The Winter Diet, although only involving a limited number of subjects, will require all the support and resourcing the normal diet does. Added to this new proposals for openness, access to scripts and so on, it is imperative that Senior Management take immediate action to ensure the project is fully resourced and that staff involved will not be put under undue pressure.
Conclusion

All staff who volunteered views expressed concern and apprehension about the immediate future. Communication is a key aspect here and this will not be solved at a stroke by the appointment of any one individual or the holding of a staff conference. If Senior Management is to have the confidence of staff then they must ensure that staff feel involved and are contributing to the work of the organisation on a day to day basis.

In addition, we must also not lose sight of the vocational qualifications that SQA has responsibility for.

We end this paper with a reminder that SQA staff were identified as being highly significant last year in ensuring that the “fiasco” was not worse than it was. This contrasts with weak and ineffectual management highlighted throughout the various reviews. It is now time for staff to begin to see some reward for their outstanding efforts. The best reward would be to see the organisation transformed into one where management and staff are genuinely working together to face the considerable challenges ahead.
Reference notes

These notes expand on some points indicated by a superscripted letter in the main paper.

Page 1 - a

The main areas staff expressed concerns over are:

- Data management
- Reference data
- Communications
- IT
- Management
- Stress/morale
- Winter Diet
- Moderation
- PMRs
- Pay and Grading
- Staff turnover/sick leave
- Customer Service
- Neglect of non-NQ provision.

Page 1 - b

Although this paper primarily represents the views of TU members, it should be noted that many staff who are not members of any union expressed views and opinions to officers.

Page 2 - c

Because of its central importance, the use of IT and the way we structure the organisation are inextricably linked. We have tended to structure functionally, by giving operational domains to Directors (Development, Awards etc) and then on to Unit Heads (Moderation, Appointments, Question Paper etc) and Managers. The argument for this is that it helps to maintain a uniform approach across the entire provision. The downside is that it creates a fragmented style of working and it encourages staff not to take responsibility for the bigger picture - it can always be shifted on to someone else. IT offers us the prospect of letting the technology do the work of holding the procedural aspects of our work together while allowing staff a more fulfilling and, indeed, empowering role as the team responsible for, say Science or Languages, right through from the development of qualifications to assessment arrangements and all but the most basic of queries. It should enable teams to respond more effectively to feedback and thus ensure a more 'customer-focussed approach'. The implications of this are radical - but we do need to consider proposals like this.

We also need to examine the way that we gather, disseminate and use information within the organisation. We are an information organisation and if we do not optimise our internal and external communications we are by definition underperforming. There are resource implications in that our IT infrastructure does not appear to be sufficient even for our current needs, nevermind what we may require for future developments. We can, however, begin to sketch out some of what we may wish to put in place and even begin to get them running in some kind of rudimentary form. We are starting to set up online resources for some stakeholder groups and this is the away we need to be heading. Another big IT topic is metadata and how we enable individuals to make best use of the vast amount of information now available in networked environments. Staff in SQA often struggle to find the information which they need and which might impact on their own work.

Joint TU paper on members' views.
Again, we should be using technology to bring the relevant information to peoples’ fingertips using, for example, a powerful internal search facility on the intranet. We talk a great deal about flatter structures and empowerment - people are not going to believe in it until they actually see it happening.

Page 2 – d

To help establish any patterns there may in staff absence it would be helpful if HRMU could share statistics for staff sick absence (with a breakdown to show absences attributed directly to stress) and staff turnover since August last year. This would be a useful indicator of staff morale and could help in targeting resources to deal with it.

Staff are still concerned that management is not addressing the low morale. HR have indicated that an external consultant has been engaged to help combat low morale. To avoid rumour and speculation as to the purpose of this exercise it is recommended that information be shared with the Unions and the staff in general.

Page 2 - e

While we have properly considered pay levels and how these impact on recruitment for specialist posts, we are likely to be considerably constrained in this respect by our weak financial position. This makes the issue of staff morale and productivity particularly acute and we must make every effort to ensure that factors impacting adversely on this are dealt with promptly and effectively. The Chief Executive has spoken of his belief that we have the skills and knowledge to do the job - but this will only happen if the working environment is conducive to allowing staff to work at or near their best.

Staff are very concerned about the process being used recently for the appointment of staff. An organisation of SQA’s size and complexity needs to operate by rules which are generally seen to be fair and transparent. To help with the recovery of SQA, staff were willing to accommodate a temporary suspension of JNC agreed procedures. However, from the staff point of view there appears to be no imminent return to the agreed procedures. There is a lack of clarity surrounding recent appointments and this has shaken staff confidence in Senior Management and has had a damaging effect on staff morale. This will certainly have implications in the post recovery phase.

Page 3 – f

SQA also has responsibility for a full range of vocational qualifications. The qualifications are very important to a wide range of interests within Scotland. SQA should not allow its standing in these areas to slip. Immediate and positive action must be taken to assure stakeholders that their concerns are being addressed and that the level of service provided by SQA will be improved to acceptable levels. Key to giving this assurance will be the future structure of SQA. This is something that Senior Management should discuss with key personnel.