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Qualifications Scotland – replacement for SQA – starts work and sets out early priorities

Scotland's newest public body – Qualifications Scotland – starts work today, ushering in a new era for the delivery of qualifications and assessments.

The new organisation was created by the Education (Scotland) Act 2025, passed by the Scottish Parliament last year, and will give learners, teachers and lecturers much stronger influence.

As work got underway today, Qualifications Scotland's Chief Executive and Chief Examiner set out the early priorities for the organisation. *Accelerating Change*, a plan for the coming months, pledges to:

- Push on with the reform of qualifications, including early engagement on plans to place less reliance on high-stakes exams in several subjects
- Bring in four classroom teachers to bolster the newly-formed School Partnership Team, which will build stronger relationships with schools and provide learners, teachers, parents and carers with more opportunities to have their voices heard
- Open up Qualifications Scotland so that people can get involved with shaping decisions, qualifications and services; this includes recruiting learners, educators and stakeholders to sit on newly-formed advisory groups
- Strengthen the accreditation function to reinforce its independence within the organisation, under the leadership of the new Chief Accreditation Officer, Liz Barron-Majerick

The Education (Scotland) Act 2025 sets out the establishment of two Interest Committees – one for learners and one for teachers and practitioners. Recruitment for these committees opens today.

The Interest Committees will advise Qualifications Scotland on how qualifications – and the policies and processes that support them – operate in real settings, from studying the qualifications to what it is like for schools, colleges, training providers and employers to deliver them. Members of the committees will share their own experiences and opinions to inform thinking, influence decisions, and shape future developments in qualifications and assessment.

Chief Executive Nick Page said:

“The arrival of Qualifications Scotland represents a reset: a reset for our qualifications system, a reset for Scotland and, most importantly, a reset for learners, teachers, head teachers, lecturers, principals, training providers and businesses.

“It marks an increase in pace on our journey of significant change. By delivering on the legislation passed by Parliament, by building on the strong support we have across the education, skills and business sectors and by harnessing the passion and commitment of our staff, we have an opportunity to accelerate change and to power long-term success.

“Our purpose is clear: to give every learner the opportunity to fulfil their potential and to deliver for Scotland through being the most productive and skilled workforce in the UK.

“We are already making important connections and relationships across Scotland. We are an organisation that is open, collaborative and forward-thinking, and that puts learner, educator and business voices at the heart of decision-making.”

Chief Examiner Donna Stewart said:

“Our qualifications are at the heart of what we do. The breadth of our offer, including vocational and technical qualifications, enables us to equip school, college and lifelong learners with the knowledge and skills to fulfil their potential.

“Over the next few years, we will reform our qualifications to ensure they are fit for purpose in a modern, flourishing Scotland. Changes will be made in collaboration with learners and educators, and the new School Partnership Team will play a vital role by building stronger connections with classrooms. Work is also underway to develop equivalent partnership approaches with colleges, employers and training providers.”

Qualifications Scotland has been built in collaboration with partners across the education and skills sector. A Transition Board – made up of representatives of learners, teaching unions, colleges, training providers, universities, businesses and local authorities – has met regularly to provide support and challenge during the replacement work.

Allan Lindsay, Director at Young Scot, said:

“Young Scot supports the work of Qualifications Scotland to ensure young people’s voices are central to the delivery of qualifications and assessments. Partnership working is key to making these changes reflect learners’ needs, and we’ve been pleased to contribute to the process so far.”

Andy Harvey, National Officer for Education at the Educational Institute for Scotland (EIS) said:

“Teachers have long called for a national assessment body that respects their expertise and is responsive to their concerns – not least in terms of workload and the practicalities of delivering qualifications in schools. The establishment of Qualifications Scotland presents an opportunity for the new body to demonstrate that it has teacher voice at its core, and to work *with* teachers as trusted partners. This opportunity must be grasped, to rebuild trust with the profession and to help deliver an enhanced senior phase based on rich learning which celebrates the achievement of *all* our learners.”

Stuart McKenna, Chief Executive at the Scottish Training Federation (STF), said:

“STF has enjoyed a long and positive partnership with SQA and I look forward to building on this with Qualifications Scotland.”

Mark Ratter, Vice President at the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), said:

“ADES welcomes the establishment of Qualifications Scotland as a positive step for learners and teachers. We look forward to working in partnership with Qualifications Scotland and other key stakeholders to ensure assessment approaches and the qualification system are relevant, trusted and ensure progress for all children and young people.”

Chris Kelly, Head of Policy at CBI Scotland, said:

“A modern, responsive qualifications system is essential to Scotland’s economic future, and business stands ready to play its part. Strong partnership between educators, government and employers will be key to ensuring young people gain the skills they need to thrive. CBI Scotland looks forward to working closely with Qualifications Scotland for this new chapter.”

Gavin Donoghue, Chief Executive of Colleges Scotland, said:

“I’m pleased to welcome the launch of Qualifications Scotland today, and the commitment to working with colleges now and into the future. Qualifications are part of the valuable benefits college students gain by choosing college, and it’s right that Scotland has a modern, agile and responsive offering for learners.

“Colleges are Scotland’s skills engines, and we look forward to working with Qualifications Scotland and industry on moving ahead at pace so that college learners can benefit from a refreshed vision for qualifications.”

Claire McPherson, Director of Universities Scotland. said:

“The establishment of Qualifications Scotland represents an important step forward for our national qualifications system in schools and colleges and we welcome the strong focus on learners, teachers and academic staff voices. We very much support the plans for wider collaboration and value the opportunity for universities to contribute to shaping the future of Scottish qualifications. A rigorous and consistent qualification system is essential for fair admissions, and it must fairly recognise the achievements of all learners.”

Notes to Editors

Qualifications Scotland becomes fully operational today. A new Board has been appointed, chaired by Shirley Rogers CBE and with at least five members who are practising teachers or lecturers. There will also be members able to represent the interests of learners and employers.

Recruitment is also beginning for two new Interest Committees – one for learners and one for teachers and lecturers, both underpinned by charters setting out what these groups can expect from Qualifications Scotland – and for the new Strategic Advisory Council made up of stakeholder representatives.

Together these represent a significant shift in how the organisation will be governed, with learners and educators much more involved.

