



# A Prospectus for Change

SQA Corporate Plan




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## Our Chair

As the recently appointed Chair of SQA, I feel privileged to be part of an organisation that is at the heart of public service in Scotland, and which helps change the lives of hundreds of thousands of learners every year.

My role — along with my fellow Board members — is to enable positive change within SQA and to ensure we work with our partners and stakeholders across the education and skills community to successfully co-create Qualifications Scotland.

The chance to be part of transformational change — to help build a brighter, long-term future and to work in partnership with others to deliver it — is one I cherish.

It is vital that Qualifications Scotland retains the best of SQA: our qualifications that are highly regarded not just here in Scotland but across the world, and the knowledge, skill and passion of our people. It is these strengths that have maintained the standard and credibility of our qualifications during SQA's lifetime.

Ahead of us now lies the opportunity to build upon those strong foundations, to look forward not backwards, and to grasp the potential to change the way we work. Resetting relationships, particularly with learners and teachers, through stronger, meaningful engagement so that we regain their trust. Harnessing the power of technology. Modernising our qualifications so that they meet the needs of today's society and economy.

Just as I am proud to be Chair of SQA, I am equally proud to help shape Qualifications Scotland and, subject to parliamentary agreement, lead the new Board to help support Scotland's learners and educators to achieve their very best. I look forward with relish to being an ambassador and advocate for an organisation I believe everyone in Scotland will be able to be proud of.

**Shirley Rogers CBE**



“ Ahead of us now lies the opportunity to...  
**change**  
the way we work. ”

# Our Chief Executive and Scotland's Chief Examining Officer

This new Corporate Plan arrives at a pivotal moment – not only for SQA, but for everyone within Scotland's education and skills community and those we serve. It provides a roadmap to Qualification Scotland – due to arrive in late 2025 – and sets out how we will continue to deliver now while also building for the future.

Above all, it represents our twin commitments – to pupils and students, teachers and lecturers, parents and carers, schools and colleges, universities and employers, and everyone we work with and work for.

Firstly, an ongoing commitment to standards, credibility and fairness in our qualifications and assessments; and, secondly, a commitment to transformational change that will deliver Qualifications Scotland for the future.

For a quarter of a century, SQA has played a vital role in Scottish education, maintaining the highest standards and delivering credible qualifications that learners, colleges, universities and employers can have confidence in. We have given millions of learners the opportunity to take their next steps into education, training or employment, improving and changing lives in the process. We are proud of that record.

We will remain steadfast and focused on those core responsibilities.

However, we recognise that we must embrace change in the way that we work and the work that we do. That change will be based around three pledges:

1. **Resetting our relationship with learners and teachers to win back their trust**
2. **Grasping the potential of technology to streamline the services we offer**
3. **Delivering qualifications and assessments that keep pace with rapid changes in society and the economy**

**Our first pledge is to reset relationships, to reconnect and to strive to give every learner and every educator the opportunity to have their voice heard and to help shape our products and services.** We will listen and we will provide feedback on the decisions we have taken based on what we have heard.

The emergence of new technologies, including the emergence of AI, stands out as one of the most significant developments relating to the delivery of qualifications and assessments. **Our second pledge is therefore to grasp the potential of technology and introduce new digital capabilities to streamline the delivery of our services, making them more accessible and efficient for learners, educators and centres.**



We are also seeing rapid developments around us, so **our third pledge is to make sure the qualifications and assessments we offer keep pace with changes in society and the economy.** This will include shifting the balance of assessment approaches, reviewing and rationalising the qualification portfolio and providing more digital access to assessments.

Our Corporate Plan represents an ambitious prospectus of change.

I am proud to lead SQA and to work with colleagues and the wider system on this journey of transformation to deliver for the future. This Plan is an important statement of intent – and a commitment to adapt and change.

Fiona Robertson

“**We recognise that we must embrace change in the way that we work and the work that we do.**”

## Our Role

SQA is the national accreditation and awarding body in Scotland. We develop, maintain, and continually improve a framework of qualifications gained at Scotland's schools, colleges, employers and training providers. These include:

- National Qualifications, studied at schools and colleges, such as National 1 to 5, Highers, and Advanced Highers.
- Higher National Qualifications, often studied at colleges but increasingly in schools too, which can serve as a bridge to further study at university.
- A range of vocational qualifications, developed with industry partners, and responding to skills needs.

As an accrediting body, SQA sets and maintains standards for many other awarding bodies, and for accredited qualifications such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications. These provide evidence that learners can do their jobs well (these can be studied in colleges or in the workplace).

SQA also plays an important role in supporting Foundation Apprenticeships and the wider Developing the Young Workforce policy. Our qualifications form part of the majority of Scotland's Modern Apprenticeships. Our accreditation function also makes an important contribution in this area.

Further to this, SQA has an international presence, with qualifications delivered across the world that promote and extend the reach of SQA's qualifications and services in education and skills. SQA provides a high standard of service and delivery to meet our customers' needs. We position SQA as the organisation of choice for our customers and are a trusted partner to governments and agencies.



## Our Purpose

We have a unique role in the education and skills system. Our work supports learners at all levels, helping them to realise their full potential, in many different types of centres, and impacts universities, employers and the wider economy.

In delivering the strategic priorities outlined in this Plan, SQA will work in partnership with our customers and other stakeholders, in Scotland and beyond. We aim to deliver qualifications and assessments that meet the needs of the future and, in doing so, play our part in supporting and delivering the Scottish Government's wider education reform.

## Our Mission

To provide people with credible recognition of their skills and knowledge to support their choices in life and work.

## Our Values

### Trusted

- We are open and transparent in our communication and decision-making.
- We demonstrate honesty and integrity in everything that we do.
- We are consistent, equitable and fair.
- We are recognised as credible and actively seek feedback on our performance.

### Enabling

- We set and uphold high standards of behaviour in line with our values.
- We support people as they develop to achieve their full potential.
- We encourage collaboration to support learning and exchange of best practice.
- We provide our people with the resources and environment to succeed.

### Progressive

- We challenge the status quo and embrace new ideas and ways of working.
- We have an appetite for change and actively seek out best-in-class performance.
- We nurture creativity, innovation and leadership.
- We are responsible for establishing a culture of progressive thinking.



## Our Ambition: Delivering now, building for the future

The planned arrival of Qualifications Scotland in late 2025 provides an **opportunity for transformational change** and this Corporate Plan sets out how we will deliver that change.

At the same time, we need to continue delivering our services to learners in Scotland, the rest of the UK and overseas. They will still need qualifications that recognise their achievements and allow them to take the next steps in their learning, training or employment.

However, while still **delivering now**, SQA also needs to be **building for the future**. We need to prepare the ground for Qualifications Scotland, helping the body to succeed from day one and to be ready to **deliver in a way that will feel significantly different for learners, educators and the wider education community**.

Broadly speaking, the functions and responsibilities of Qualifications Scotland will be the same as those of SQA. It is therefore how these functions and responsibilities are carried out that will be the litmus test for the new body, and this is where the biggest opportunities for ambitious change exist:

- to **reset and build stronger relationships** with teachers, lecturers, pupils and students
- to **grasp the potential of technology** to change the way Scotland's awarding body works
- to **deliver qualifications and assessments that keep pace with rapid changes** in our society and the economy.

To realise our ambition we will need to work with learners and educators as well as for them, embrace innovation and change, and clearly demonstrate how data and evidence underpins our decisions. And we must have an organisational culture – brought to life through our people – that enables transformational change.



## Changes planned for the period ahead include:

**Overhauling the way SQA engages** so that every learner and every educator has the opportunity to have their voice heard and to shape decisions and services. Commitments in place which clearly set out what learners and educators can expect when they engage.

**Increasing digital access to qualifications** and streamlined digital processes to deliver them.

**Transforming digital delivery** – subject to budgetary considerations – so that learners, educators and other users can easily and seamlessly access services online. This includes providing access to marked papers to improve learning and teaching.

**Reviewing the balance of approaches to assessment** across National Qualifications – for example, between exams and non-exam assessments.

Continuing to pilot the **next generation of skills-based vocational qualifications** and developing new model apprenticeships so that learners are equipped with the knowledge and skills to thrive in a modern, digital world.

Reviewing and **rationalising the current qualifications portfolio** so that it is focused on both the needs of learners and the needs of colleges, universities, employers and society.

Developing a **fresh commercial roadmap** to drive sustainable growth and income generation.

Providing **leadership on the use of AI in qualifications and assessment**, recognising the opportunities it provides as well as the challenges it poses.



**At the heart of all change will be the voices of our service users and of our customers.** SQA will work not only for users and customers but with them. We will listen, act and feed back on the decisions we take and the reasons for them.

Change often requires investment but, in recognition of the challenging financial backdrop, investment will be targeted where it can drive savings and efficiencies, in both SQA and the broader education system.

Change will be informed by wider education reform. SQA is committed to making a full and positive contribution to implementing Scottish Government decisions flowing from the independent reviews of assessment and skills.

**There is an unprecedented opportunity for change and improvement in education.** It will require bold decision-making, a strong will and a commitment and willingness to change, among all of those who work in, with or to support the education community. In the weeks and months that lie ahead before Qualifications Scotland starts work, **SQA stands ready to play its part in creating a brighter future.**



# Our Plan

To help us deliver on our purpose and mission, we have identified the following outcomes. These will be our strategic priorities.

## 1. We provide a credible qualifications system

SQA's mission is to provide credible recognition of people's skills and achievements and thus support their life choices and progress. This means SQA must ensure that all stages of the design and delivery of assessments support and increase their credibility. This includes our approach to quality assurance, resulting and certification, and operational activity for all qualifications – including National Qualifications, and vocational and technical qualifications.

SQA plays a crucial role in the Scottish education and skills system, and the progression of education reform will influence that role. Even before the Scottish Government gave its response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA) in September 2024, we had already started looking to the future, with reference to Ministerial priorities set out in documents such as the 'Post-school education, research and skills – purpose and principles'. SQA is working with wider organisations to review and update the 3-18 Curriculum as part of the Curriculum Improvement Cycle. In addition, we plan to review our portfolio of qualifications, starting with post-school qualifications, and this work will be developed during the course of this Corporate Plan. It is, therefore, important that we work with others in the education and skills community, including the Scottish Government, other public bodies, schools, colleges, training providers, employers, universities, parents and, of course, learners.

We need to support our learners, as they are impacted by decisions made by SQA. To facilitate this, we involve learners in discussions and decisions so we can better understand the challenges and opportunities they face and work with them to identify areas of improvement.

SQA takes the same approach to delivering a credible system when we operate outside of Scotland. Wherever SQA is active, we ensure we play our part in delivering a credible system – taking what we already know to new markets and bringing back to Scotland the best practices we discover there.



## 2. We are flexible in meeting user and customer needs

SQA needs to ensure it can deliver its products, services and support in a way that works for the people who need them.

So, SQA wants to ensure it satisfies its service users and customers. To do so it needs good quality insight into what those needs are, and good two-way engagement with users and customers to ensure that the commitments we make are met and, if they are not, that we take responsibility and put things right.

SQA understands that to do this it needs to be open to new ways of working, both in terms of technology and how we operate. We need the capability to consider new markets and opportunities, and to be able to alter our products and services to meet new or emerging user and customer needs, basing our decisions on research and insight.



## 3. We have a sustainable business operating model that is appropriately funded in order to deliver our remit now and in the future

SQA is a public body that has a duty to the people of Scotland to use the money it receives sensibly, carefully and in a way that is sustainable. So SQA must be mindful of committing funds in ways that deliver best value. SQA must always be alert to opportunities for improving efficiency and reducing costs.

At the same time, SQA seeks to take advantage of opportunities it may have to utilise its core capabilities to generate income from commercial activity. SQA must therefore also be competitive, opportunity-focused, and have an appropriate appetite for risk.

SQA knows that the commercial revenue we generate lowers our overall reliance on the public purse, so we are committed to pursuing additional income and returning that to Scotland.

SQA also knows that dialogue with the Scottish Government is vital, and that we must continue to make the case to secure the support we need both for ongoing operations and to facilitate change.



## 4. We are a thriving organisation, with quality jobs and a fair work environment for all our people

Through the activities within our People Strategy, we will continue to ensure that the Fair Work Framework is fully embedded and each aspect – respect, effective voice, security, opportunity, and fulfilment – is intrinsic in our employment practices.

SQA's purpose is to help people achieve and demonstrate their full potential, and this applies to our workforce as much as it does to our users, customers, stakeholders and partners.

Our staff are in a unique position to influence education in Scotland, so SQA will thrive through successfully attracting and retaining talented people – and we will take the wellbeing and skills of our workforce seriously by providing good quality, fair work, training and support for all our people. This requires a commitment to sustainable workforce planning, mainstreaming equalities, responsive leadership, and fostering the right workplace culture.

A thriving organisation has people doing the right things the right way, so a shared priority for all must be to recognise, understand, and reinforce the behaviour and attitudes that combine to create the right culture for success.



## 5. We are trusted, respected and valued by our customers, stakeholders and partners

Trust is a necessary component of the education and skills system; it is the currency that gives SQA's qualifications value. The belief that an SQA qualification can be trusted to mean the holder has the skills and abilities we say they do is central to our value proposition.

Consequently, trust is vital to SQA. Without the trust of those we work with and for, we cannot fulfil our mission. Consequently, understanding, nurturing and maintaining our reputation is of critical importance.

SQA maintains and enhances trust through the work of our people, as well as our products, so we will seek to become increasingly influential through our research, data reporting and other contributions to public debate. We will not shy away from a public presence but will tell our own story in a conscious attempt to be a thought leader.

Being trusted to do what we say we will do underpins SQA's relationships. So SQA must be serious about driving user and customer satisfaction, engaging with stakeholders at a strategic level, and building partnerships of mutual respect.

All of this comes together to ensure SQA is truly valued. In all markets, sectors and relationships, SQA will demonstrate the unique value we bring. This will build confidence, drive ambition and make sure SQA's positive contribution to Scotland and elsewhere is acknowledged – and this will further enhance trust and thus our ability to deliver on our purpose and mission.



## Our Deliverables

The outcomes outlined in this Plan are devised with a three-year horizon in mind. Therefore, we have developed a series of specific deliverables we will commit to prioritising, with accompanying ambitions for each deliverable. These provide a view of SQA's future goals as Qualifications Scotland. Performance against the deliverables will be overseen by SQA's Performance Committee, a subcommittee of the SQA Board of Management.



### Deliverable: Qualifications, assessments and quality assurance delivered to plan. A E

#### Measure

- Delivery of key business milestones for NextGen HN (Digital Awarding Programme)  
**Target:** August 2025 and March 2026



#### Ambition

Implement a new set of digital capabilities that transform the end-to-end delivery of our qualifications, assessments and supporting services. These will be designed in collaboration with our key users, saving time for centres and teachers, reducing cost of delivery, and making it easier for learners to take their next steps.

## Deliverable: Maintain, develop, and improve our portfolio of qualifications.

A

E

### Measure

- Portfolio development and maintenance: Completion % YTD  
**Target:** 90%
- Portfolio development and maintenance: Months from business case to end of project: % performance vs forecast variance  
**Target:** 90%
- Projects progress updates  
Project milestones achieved
- Complete first iteration of Qualifications Service Strategy and roadmap  
**Target:** October 2024



### Ambition

Carry out a review of all qualifications, ensuring that the portfolio meets current and future needs – of learners, colleges, universities, training providers, employers, society and the economy – and is right-sized.

Ensure learners and educators are able to be involved in the development of all qualifications, building on the collaborative design approach used in SQA's review of its Higher National (HN) qualifications known as Next Gen HN.

## Deliverable: Secure and deliver contracts in line with service level agreements.

A

B

C

E

### Measure

- Service level agreements completion rate  
**Target:** 100%
- Produce commercial roadmap  
**Target:** October 2024
- Increase commercial income  
**Target:** 20% by 2027



### Ambition

Develop and implement a commercial roadmap to drive income growth as part of a sustainable financial model for the organisation.

Implement a strategy for our international and external awarding markets to diversify and grow the revenue base and our Diploma to Degree pathways, as part of our support for Scottish Government's international education strategy.

## Deliverable: Ensure people can be the most effective in their job by delivering relevant learning and development activities.

C

D

### Measure

- Volume of training delivered each quarter, including mandatory training  
**Target:** 90% attendance at scheduled training events
- Fundamentals of line management training completion % and any feedback from sessions  
**Target:** 100% of line managers complete  
Reduction in lack of learning and development opportunities being given as reason for leaving
- My Review and development conversation completion rates at mid and end of year including those colleagues identified as non-performers  
**Target:** 90% of mid-year and year-end reviews complete



### Ambition

Ensure a learning and development proposition for the fundamentals of management is fully implemented and embedded.

Create a new leadership proposition to build on values-led leadership.

Continue to create a workplace in which 'you can be you', where individuality and difference are embraced, and appropriate support for learning will underpin expectations of excellent performance.

## Deliverable: Embed SQA's cyber resilience and response capabilities.

C

E

### Measure

- Continue to maintain and improve our security position in line with government cyber security frameworks over the period of this Corporate Plan to ensure we are well equipped to manage any potential cyber threats.  
**Target:** Complete an annual self-assessment against the Scottish Public Sector Cyber Resilience Framework



### Ambition

Increase cyber resilience and response capabilities across SQA's technology estate, culture, policies and practice, demonstrated by meeting industry good practice benchmarks.

# Deliverable: Deliver our People Strategy by developing our organisational design and culture to: improve our performance; improve our health, wellbeing and environment; be a responsible business.



## Measure

### Develop our organisational design and culture:

- Implementation of new leadership development programme Q2 2025-26 and planned rollout

**Target:** Percentage to programme timeline delivery

- Implementing a new performance management approach

**Target:** October 2025

### Improve our performance:

- Absence reporting: further analysis of absence trends included mental health related will also be reviewed

**Target:** Below public sector benchmark of 3.80%

- Turnover reporting: data showing colleague movement will also be reported to see whether any trends can be identified

**Target:** Below public sector benchmark of 12.70%

- Leaver (exit analysis)

**Target:** Increase to positive scores received via leavers question



## Ambition

Continue to engage with staff and our trade unions to develop and deliver our People Strategy covering each dimension of the Fair Work Framework.

Work with Scottish Government on a fit-for-purpose organisational design for Qualifications Scotland. Ensure the cultural changes needed for the future are clearly identified and their change supported through appropriate interventions.



# Deliverable: Deliver our People Strategy by developing our organisational design and culture to: improve our performance; improve our health, wellbeing and environment; be a responsible business. (cont.)



## Measure

### Improve health, wellbeing and environment:

- Wellbeing strategy (attainment of individual learning plan)  
**Target:** Progress through levels
- Progress towards achievement of operational plan objectives  
**Target:** Delivered to plan
- Health and safety award  
**Target:** Retain ROSPA standards and gold status. Retain Investors in People accreditation

### Be a responsible business:

- Progress towards achievement of operational plan objectives  
**Target:** Delivered to plan
- Mentoring programme (numbers)  
**Target:** 100% of mentors identified as providing sufficient support, as requested



## Ambition

Continue to focus on the health and wellbeing of colleagues and to seek formal Investors in People accreditation as a mechanism for ensuring good practice.

Optimise the use of building facilities for collaboration and to continue to provide a relevant, healthy and inclusive physical work environment.

**Deliverable:**  
**Build credibility and trust among those we work with and those we work for, particularly learners and educators, through high-quality, inclusive and accessible communication and engagement.**



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**Measure**

- Double teachers' engagement score in schools  
**Target: 2027**
- Double score for credibility with teachers in schools  
**Target: 2027**
- Increase learners' engagement score in schools by 50%  
**Target: 2027**
- Increase learners' credibility score in schools by 50%  
**Target: 2027**



**Ambition**

Reconnect with learners and educators and reset relationships, striving to give every learner and every educator the opportunity to have their voice heard and to shape our decisions, our products and our services.

Create a new SQA educator panel to sit alongside the existing learner panel, and develop a clear statement of what learners and educators can expect from the qualifications body. Provide feedback on the actions we have taken – and why – as a result of listening to learners' and educators' views.

## Deliverable: Ensure SQA is an exemplary public body that is fully compliant with all legislative, statutory, and regulatory requirements (including qualifications regulators).



### Measure

- Compliance activity calendar  
**Target:** On track
- Delivery of corporate publications and Annual Report and Accounts  
**Target:** Milestones achieved



### Ambition

Develop approaches and responses to new legislative and regulatory requirements, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act.

## Deliverable: Promote a culture of openness and evidence-based decision making within SQA and across the education community.



### Measure

- Key statistical and research publications completed in accordance with planned dates  
**Target:** Milestones achieved
- Publication of research and evaluation strategy  
**Target:** January 2025
- Delivery of milestones in research and evaluation strategy  
**Target:** Milestones achieved



### Ambition

Share evidence and analysis across the education and skills community by publishing our research and sharing data with other bodies securely and effectively.

Implement a research and analysis strategy that provides the evidence base for our decisions on qualifications and assessments and that commands the confidence of the education community.

## Deliverable: **Deliver SQA's Equality Outcomes and mainstream equality throughout SQA ensuring SQA is a place where diversity is embraced.**



### Measure

#### People responsibility:

- % progress towards equality outcome deliverables  
**Target:** Milestones achieved
- Annual equal pay gap  
**Target:** Continued reduction disclosed for protected characteristics
- Protected characteristic reporting for current colleagues and applicants, highlighting any significant changes  
**Target:** Increase in applications from individuals with protected characteristics that represent the population of Scotland as reported through the 2022 Scotland Census (not yet reported) leading to an increase in diversity throughout the organisation
- Exit data analysis linked to equality  
**Target:** Leaver questionnaire results present no link to protected characteristics
- Equality and diversity training completion % and any feedback from sessions  
**Target:** 100% complete
- Inclusive recruitment training completion % and all recruitment managers trained ahead of undertaking recruitment  
**Target:** 100% complete



### Ambition

Review the effectiveness of SQA Equality Outcomes using learner engagement, internal delivery of development and evidence-based evaluation to develop and improve our approaches as part of a wider commitment to continuous improvement.

# Deliverable: Deliver SQA's Equality Outcomes and mainstream equality throughout SQA ensuring SQA is a place where diversity is embraced. (cont.)



## Measure

### Corporate responsibility:

- % progress towards equality outcome deliverables  
**Target:** Milestones achieved
- Progress towards the actions to deliver SQA Corporate Parenting Plan 2023-26  
**Target:** Milestones achieved
- Progress towards the Children's Rights Steering Group action plan to embed Children's Rights and the UNCRC Act 2024  
**Target:** Milestones achieved
- Deliver an annual equality questionnaire to all colleagues  
**Target:** Achieve an above average response rate of 50% or above
- Equality, diversity and inclusion ownership throughout the business  
**Target:** Work with colleagues throughout the business to ensure each area has at least one key equality, diversity and inclusion deliverable within operational plans
- Volume of Equality Impact Assessments published  
**Target:** As per schedule
- Colleagues engage and support the development and delivery of EqIAs **Target:** 100% of EqIAs completed and signed off on all policy and projects
- Deliver against our equality outcomes  
**Target:** 100% completed in line with timeline



## Ambition

Review the effectiveness of SQA Equality Outcomes using learner engagement, internal delivery of development and evidence-based evaluation to develop and improve our approaches as part of a wider commitment to continuous improvement.

## Deliverable: Support the development and delivery of Qualifications Scotland.



### Measure

- Deliver required outputs in line with Transition Board timetable  
**Target:** Deliver the plan
- Percentage of number of tasks completed aligned to plan  
**Target:** Aim for green RAG status



### Ambition

Work with Scottish Government to develop and implement a transition plan across all business areas to facilitate the effective creation of Qualifications Scotland and wind up of SQA.

## Deliverable: Transform our business model to deliver digital services that support learners and educators in the future.



### Measure

- Progression towards delivery plan milestones  
**Target:** Milestones achieved



### Ambition

In collaboration with broader education system change, transform our organisational and technological capabilities. Provide user-centric digital services that cater to the needs of our key users and, by doing so, position Qualifications Scotland as an innovative and highly efficient organisation.

# Deliverable: Deliver Best Value in line with the Scottish Public Finance Manual.



## Measure

- Deliver outputs within agreed full year income and expenditure budgets  
**Target:** Delivering financial balance at year end against agreed budget for capital and revenue
- Outline Efficiency Programme and monitor progress  
**Target:** Against the annual target



## Ambition

Implement a Best Value Development Plan to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in the context of constrained public finances and delivering best value for money.

Deliver financial balance against SQA's financial targets in the context of constrained public finances.

Develop and implement a medium-term financial strategy which considers approaches to cost, income and grant in aid, and which is aligned to workforce and operational planning.

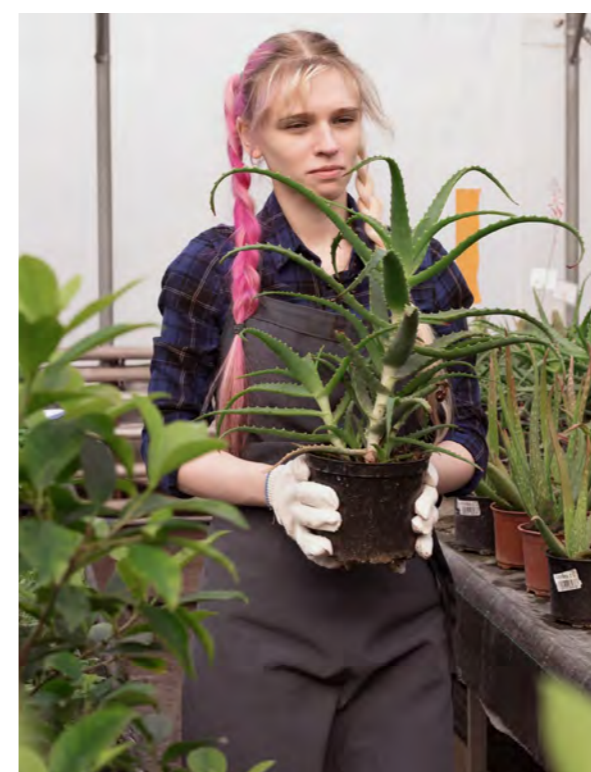
# Our Sustainability and Equality Promise

## A whole organisation approach to sustainability

SQA is committed to playing its part in developing a more sustainable world in which to live, work and learn in the 21st century. In this context, SQA has social, moral, economic, environmental and legal imperatives to enable sustainability to become the heart, head and mindset of the organisation.

The United Nations (UN) has set a series of Sustainable Development Goals; these can be understood as global internationally agreed targets to be achieved by 2030. In Scotland, these translate into the National Performance Framework (NPF), which focuses on tackling inequalities in Scotland. SQA's deliverables are connected directly to five areas of the NPF that SQA feels it can contribute to meaningfully. In addition to the four areas of the NPF that the previous Corporate Plan had committed to, this Plan has committed to a fifth area relating to Human Rights.

The world is changing very quickly, so SQA, and Qualifications Scotland, which has 'sustainability' as one of its design principles, need to adapt quickly to a post-carbon world. This will ensure that we collectively work to embed sustainability into educational and structural reform. It is a key driver for the future of education. We recognise our collective responsibility for continuing to reduce our own carbon emissions by integrating sustainable and low carbon practices throughout services, products, processes and activities.





## Mainstreaming equalities in our organisation

SQA has an important role to play in supporting the Scottish Government's vision to embed human rights, including children's rights, in all aspects of society.

As an employer and public body, we can play a leading role in the promotion of equality and diversity more widely. We recognise that equality of access to education is crucial in unlocking significant opportunities in life, and we are aware of our responsibility to uphold both fairness for learners, and the credibility of Scotland's qualifications system.

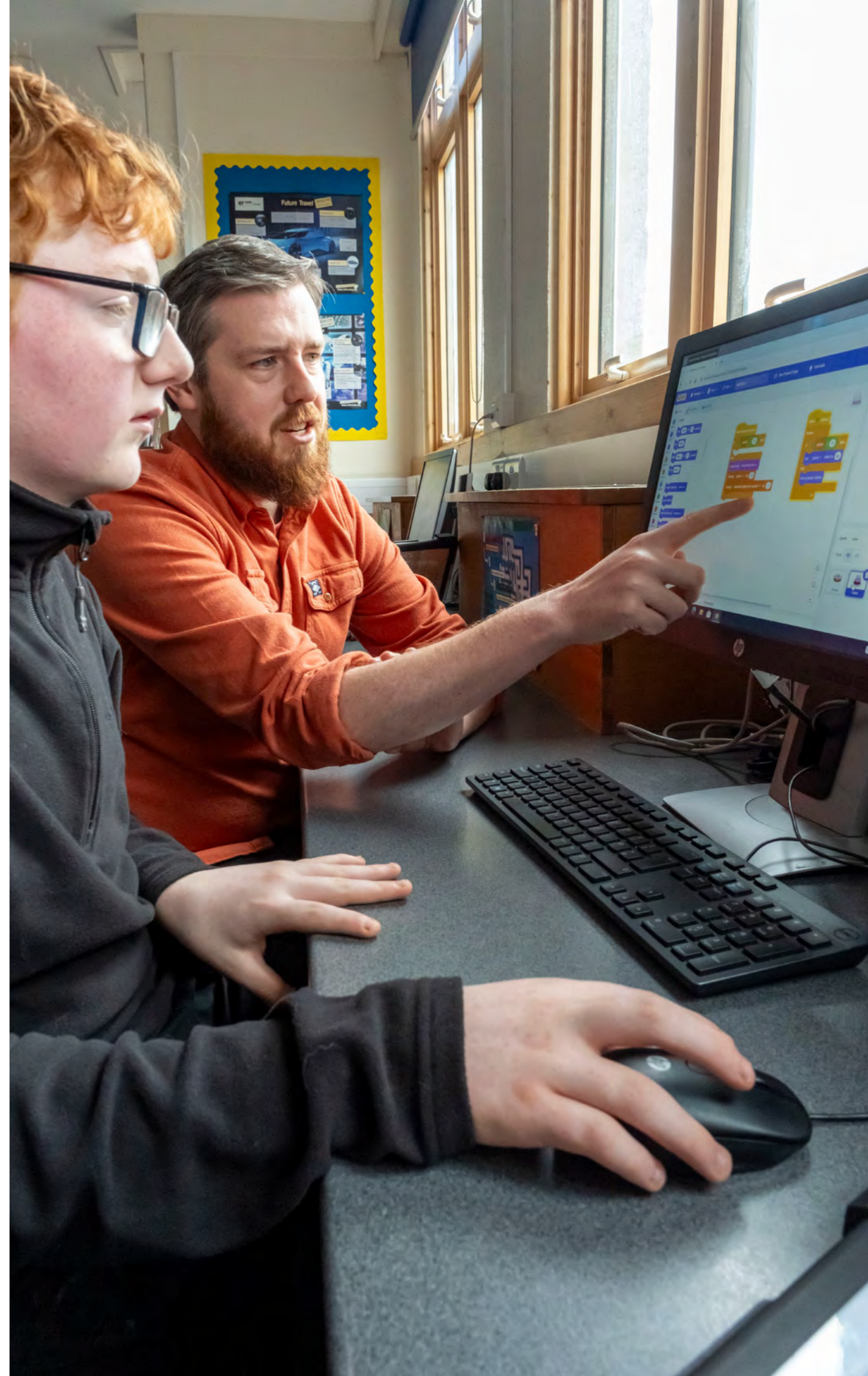
We have continued to strengthen our representation of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) across all areas of the business, with particular focus on our corporate and human resource functions, as well as continuing to meet the diverse needs of learners. This way of working has mainstreamed equality into the day-to-day working of SQA.

We aim to put research and evidence at the heart of our decision-making and have a robust Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) process in place to support this. For example, our research around dual entries under National 4 and National 5 levels, and on Assessment Arrangements, has allowed us to open wider and more informed conversations across the education sector.

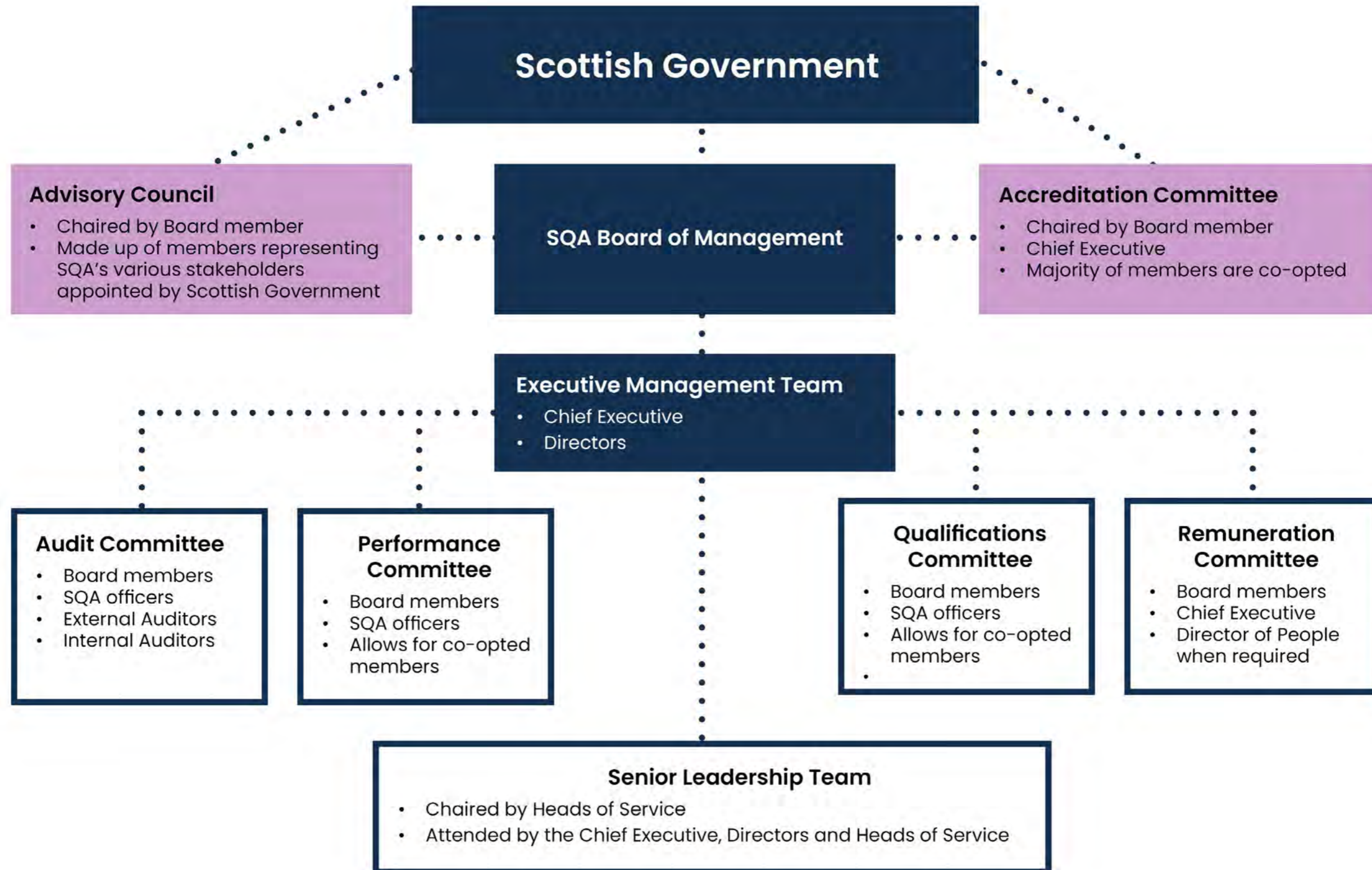
We are a proud Corporate Parent and committed to the vision of a Scotland where all people with experience of care are understood, believed in, and given every opportunity to thrive. We are also a key voice in moving forward the Scottish Government Anti-Racism in Education Programme.

HR Equality, Diversity and Inclusion lead on the development, review and implementation of effective EDI policies, processes and engagement activities. This ensures SQA is an organisation where all colleagues can bring their authentic selves to work, are valued for their uniqueness, and have a voice that is heard.

Our new EDI deliverable strengthens and demonstrates our commitment to mainstreaming equality into everything we do.



# Our Governance



## Our Budget

	£m
Qualifications Entry Income	-42.3
Other Operating Income	-8.3
<b>Total Operating Income</b>	<b>-50.6</b>
Staff	51.0
Appointees	24.5
Property Costs	3.3
Other Operating Costs	26.6
Programme Grant Expenditure	1.1
Depreciation	5.2
<b>Total Resource Expenditure</b>	<b>111.7</b>
<b>Net Resource Expenditure</b>	<b>61.1</b>
Capital Expenditure	3.9
<b>Total Net Expenditure</b>	<b>65.0</b>

### Total Net Expenditure Funded By:

Resource Grant in Aid per Scottish Budget	21.6
Additional Resource Grant Funding*	29.6
Programme Grant Funding	1.0
Property Related Grant in Aid	3.3
Non-Cash Resource Grant (Depreciation)	5.2
Capital Grant in Aid	3.9
<b>TOTAL SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT FUNDING</b>	<b>64.6</b>

\*Please note that this is subject to approval by Scottish Government and could change.



# Our Context

## The policy landscape — the National Performance Framework

In June 2018, the Scottish Government published a revised National Performance Framework (NPF), and a revision of the outcomes is expected in 2024. This sets out the purpose of government and its strategic priorities.

For SQA, the NPF is the key guide to ensuring that our strategic priorities are aligned to those of government. Appendix 1 shows how we aim to contribute a positive impact to the National Outcomes and provides further detail on the policy context for SQA.

## Our place in the education community

SQA will continue to be a collaborative organisation and we are proud of the critical role we hold within the Scottish education and skills community. We will work closely with stakeholders in the system, including the Scottish Government, and other public bodies including local authorities, as well as with schools, colleges, training providers, employers, universities, parents/ carers and, of course, our learners.

We also recognise the desire for a culture change in the way we operate; not just as an organisation, but also in how we collaborate with our service users, customers and stakeholders. We will continue to work with key partners in the delivery of National Qualifications, ensuring it is clear what everyone's roles will be. This also extends to engaging with learners, educators and parents in a meaningful way that results in clear outputs.

To be successful in delivering this plan we will demonstrate our commitment to learners, educators and others by working collaboratively to bring about change to the education system across Scotland, and internationally. We want to be clear in what our role is, but also need to be clear how our partners need to change too to help us deliver the change that is needed. Transforming one organisation alone will not create the system-wide change and reform that is required.



## The education reform landscape

The Scottish Government announced in June 2021 that SQA would be replaced, and in March 2022 said a new qualifications body would be created. As the Education (Scotland) Bill, published in June 2024, makes clear, Qualifications Scotland will continue to be responsible for developing and awarding qualifications, with a governance structure that is more representative of, and accountable to, learners, teachers and practitioners.

Qualifications Scotland is expected to be established during the life cycle of this Corporate Plan, and as such the Plan will be refreshed in due course to reflect the strategic goals of the new body. This will build on the deliverables in this Plan.

The Scottish Government's response to the recommendations in the IRQA was published in September 2024. SQA and Qualifications Scotland will contribute towards implementation of the response and many of the deliverables set out in this Corporate Plan will support successful implementation.



# Appendix 1 – The policy context

## How we contribute to the National Performance Framework

### **ECONOMY – We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy**

SQA's portfolio of qualifications, and the way we deliver them, makes a significant contribution to the Scottish economy and helps make Scotland a good place to do business. Our product quality and our reputation enable SQA to succeed wherever we operate, which in turn further boosts Scotland's reputation as a nation with a successful and sustainable economy.

### **EDUCATION – We are well-educated, skilled and able to contribute to society**

SQA plays a full part in an education system that inspires everyone to reach their potential. We know that education and skills are about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to succeed and that they can demonstrate their knowledge, skills and creativity. Education is a public good; we value our relationships with education practitioners and aim to support them to achieve their goals.

### **FAIR WORK AND BUSINESS – We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone**

SQA is a fair work employer and we take seriously our commitment to enabling the right environment in which people can succeed. Both as an employer and through our portfolio of qualifications and our working relationships, SQA plays an active role in supporting people into quality jobs where they can build successful careers.

### **INTERNATIONAL – We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally**

SQA is proud to operate internationally and to show the world what Scotland has to offer. We demonstrate in practice that working with SQA – and so with Scotland – is beneficial and positive for our international partners and customers.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS – We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination**

SQA believes that everyone should be treated with equal respect and is committed to the principles of fairness, dignity, equality and respect. We will embed these into everything we do, through effective policies and practices, reporting and governance. We will ensure that the Rights of the Child are considered and embedded as standard practice.

## Policy and strategy landscape

The Scottish Government looks to ensure its vision and outcomes are met through a range of strategies and policies. The work of SQA aligns with and helps to fulfil many of these, from playing a part in overall economic strategy, to contributing to government plans on disability employment, race equality and closing the gender pay gap. Relevant national policies are listed in Appendix 2, section A.

More specifically, SQA plays a key part in many of Scotland's education and skills strategies and policies, from wide-ranging programmes such as Curriculum for Excellence, Developing the Young Workforce and A Vision for Higher Education in 2030, to more specific initiatives such as the National Gaelic Language Plan and implementing the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. We are also to the fore in nationwide initiatives on skills development. For example, SQA will play its part in work to adapt qualifications and develop new ones, informed by the post-school education, research and skills purpose and principles. Relevant education and skills policies are listed in Appendix 2, section B.

As a public body, SQA complies with a range of legislation, covering areas such as freedom of information, data protection or procurement reform. Relevant requirements are listed in Appendix 2, section C.

## How SQA is regulated

SQA Accreditation itself is a regulator and meets the standards required by several other regulators.

SQA Accreditation quality assures qualifications offered in Scotland by approving awarding bodies and accrediting their qualifications. It does this by regulating awarding bodies and their qualifications against published regulatory requirements.

SQA as an awarding body is itself regulated by Accreditation; it is held to the same standard and on the same terms as all other awarding bodies. As an awarding body that operates in both England and Wales, SQA must also meet the regulatory requirements of Ofqual and Qualifications Wales.



# Appendix 2

## Government strategies and policies applicable to the work of SQA

### A. National strategies and policies

- National Performance Framework
- Equality, Opportunity, Community: Our Programme for Government: The Government's programme for Scotland 2023-24
- Scotland's Economic Strategy
- Scotland's Labour Market Strategy
- Fair Work Action Plan
- A fairer Scotland for women: gender pay gap action plan
- Disability Employment Delivery Plan
- Progressing the human rights of children in Scotland 2018-21: Action Plan
- Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA): Guidance
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- National Gaelic Language Plan
- Scotland's Languages Bill
- National British Sign Language Plan
- (Scottish Government) Guidance on taking a children's human rights approach
- The Promise Scotland

### B. Education and skills strategies and policies

- National Improvement Framework (NIF)
- Curriculum for Excellence
- Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
- 15 to 24 learner journey review
- Enterprise and Skills Review
- Post-school education, research and skills — purpose and principles
- Career Service Review — Skills Development Scotland
- Scotland's Career Strategy — Skills Development Scotland
- Scottish Government response to the UK Government apprenticeship levy
- An Empowered System
- The national model of professional learning
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: education and training strategy
- Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education
- Transforming Scotland into a maths positive nation: final report of the Making Maths Count group
- Cyber Resilience: learning and skills action plan 2018-20
- Review of Personal and Social Education
- LGBTI Inclusive Education Recommendations
- Expansion of Funded Early Learning and Childcare
- Anti-Racism in Education Programme

### C. Statutory requirements for public bodies

- Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
- Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014
- Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011
- Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002
- Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Equality Act 2010
- Scottish Public Finance Manual
- The Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005
- The Islands (Scotland) Act (2018)
- Accessibility Regulations 2018 (PSBAR)



# Appendix 3

## Scottish Government's 11 National Outcomes



Diagram sourced from Scottish Government

# Appendix 3

## UN Sustainable Development Goals

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



[Diagram sourced from United Nations](#)

## **Appendix 3**

# **UN Sustainable Development Goals aligned to SQA Outcomes**

**We provide a credible qualifications system:**

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17

**We are flexible in meeting user and customer needs:**

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17

**We have a sustainable business operating model that is appropriately funded in order to deliver our remit now and in the future:**

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17

**We are a thriving organisation, with quality jobs and a fair work environment for all our people:**

4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17

**We are trusted, respected and valued by our customers, stakeholders and partners:**

4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 16, 17