Qualifications Scotland
Teisteanasan Alba

Children's Rights at the Heart of Everything We Do:

UNCRC report 2026

We are committed to using plain language. If you have any suggestions on how we can improve, let us know at editor@qualifications.gov.scot.

Foreword from our Chief Executive Officer

Every child and young person has the right to an education that helps them learn, develop and achieve their potential. At Qualifications Scotland, we recognise that the decisions we make about qualifications and assessments can have a lasting impact on young people's lives. That is why children’s rights must be at the heart of everything we do.

Our new Corporate Plan strengthens this commitment by putting learners at the centre of our work. It sets out our ambition to listen to children and young people, as well as their parents and carers and work in partnership with educators and stakeholders to make decisions that improve learning experiences and outcomes for learners across Scotland.

Taking a children’s rights-based approach means making sure that children and young people are heard and their views are taken seriously when decisions affect them. Over the past year, we have continued to improve the ways learners can share their experiences and opinions, and we have worked closely with schools, colleges and training providers to better understand what matters to them most.

What children and young people tell us is helping to shape the way we develop qualifications and assessments, both now and in the future. Our new Learner Interest Committee and Learner Charter will create new opportunities for learners to influence our work and help ensure their voices continue to influence change.

This report highlights the progress we have made in embedding children's rights across our organisation. I am proud of the commitment shown by colleagues across Qualifications Scotland to champion children's rights and to continually learn, reflect and improve how we work.

By continuing to listen, learn and work together, we will build a qualifications system that is fair, inclusive and responsive to the rights, needs, views and ambitions of children and young people across Scotland.

Nick Page

Chief Executive Officer

Foreword from the Children’s Rights Steering Group

When people think about children’s rights, they often think about policies, legislation or impact assessments. Although these are all important, we believe rights are at their most meaningful when they become part of everyday conversations and decisions. They are reflected when a colleague asks how a change might affect learners, when a team seeks feedback from young people before making a decision, or when someone takes the time to make information clearer, more accessible and easier to understand.

Our role is to create the conditions for this to happen. We support colleagues across Qualifications Scotland by sharing knowledge, promoting good practice, encouraging the use of Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs), and helping teams consider rights from the earliest stages of their work.

Over the past year, we have seen growing evidence of this approach in practice. Across qualifications reform, learner engagement, equality work, communications, Corporate Parenting, Responsible Business and Learning for Sustainability, teams are increasingly recognising learners not simply as recipients of services, but as individuals whose rights, views and experiences should shape our decisions.

We have also strengthened our work with external partners, recognising that a rights-based approach depends on collaboration across the wider education and public sector. Together, we are promoting greater consistency in how rights are understood and applied, while extending this commitment to the way we support and create opportunities for young people in the workplace.

One of the most encouraging developments has been the growing emphasis on learner participation. Across the organisation, colleagues have created more opportunities for children and young people to share their views and, crucially, have used that feedback to inform future work. This is helping to build a culture where learners are listened to and where their experiences influence the decisions that affect them.

This report highlights many examples of colleagues putting children's rights into practice in meaningful ways. It reflects a collective effort across Qualifications Scotland and demonstrates that this is not the responsibility of one group or team — it is something we all contribute to.

As a Steering Group, we are proud to support this work. While there is still more to do, we are encouraged by the progress being made and by the commitment shown across the organisation to creating a qualifications system that is fair, inclusive, responsible, and shaped by the voices and experiences of children and young people.

Qualifications Scotland Children’s Rights Steering Group

Contents

Foreword from our Chief Executive Officer 1
Foreword from the Children's Rights Steering Group 2
About Qualifications Scotland 1
Our function as Scotland's awarding and qualifications body 1
Our accreditation function 1
About this report 2
The structure of this report 2
How have children and young people's voices influenced this report? 3
General measures of implementation 4
Our corporate plan 4
Our values 4
Our governance structure 5
Our new governance arrangements 5
Learner Interest Committee 6
Teacher and Practitioner Committee 8
Our decision-making 9
Our equality outcomes 9
Our customer service and complaints handling 9
Learning opportunities for staff 10
Children's rights in our workplace 10
UNCRC general principles 13
How we gather and use learners' views and support learners through partnership working 13
Best interests of the child in decision-making 19
Anti-racist education programme 21
Supporting deaf and visually impaired learners in assessments 22
School Partnership Team 23
Civil Rights and Freedoms 25
Gaelic language 25
Learning for sustainability 26
More about learning for sustainability 28
Reform of National Qualifications 28

Education, Leisure and Culture 31
Equality of access to qualifications and support 31
Assessment arrangements 31
Universal design 35
Supporting children’s wellbeing and development through responsible business practice 36
Helping learners get exam ready 37
Special protection measures 39
GDPR and data protection 40
Assessment arrangements 40
Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service 40
Artificial Intelligence 41
Corporate Parenting 43
What lessons have we learned? 45
What happens next? 46

About Qualifications Scotland

Our function as Scotland's awarding and qualifications body

Qualifications Scotland is a vital part of Scotland's national education and skills landscape. We operate across the senior phase in schools and the wider post-school learning and skills system, underpinned by the Education (Scotland) Act 2025. Our delivery environment is shaped by the bodies, frameworks and statutory duties that collectively define and oversee Scotland's qualifications system.

We deliver our statutory responsibilities to ensure that Scotland has a qualifications system that is credible, inclusive and future-ready. For Scotland to thrive, individuals must have equal access to qualifications that reflect national priorities and prepare them for learning, life and work.

Qualifications Scotland does not deliver learning experiences. Our role is to set standards, design and award qualifications, and assure their quality.

Our accreditation function

The Education (Scotland) Act 2025 sets out new arrangements for our accreditation function, to further strengthen its independence from the awarding function. This includes a Chief Accreditation Officer to lead this work, which is overseen by the Accreditation Committee. This independent committee reports to Ministers — its Convener has been appointed by Scottish Ministers.

Qualifications Scotland Accreditation has its own Corporate Plan. Qualifications Scotland Accreditation accredits and quality assures qualifications to ensure their integrity, consistency and value.

About this report

This report fulfils Qualifications Scotland's statutory duty under Section 18 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 (the UNCRC Act 2024). It sets out what we've done, and what we plan to do, to better protect and promote children's rights in our work. It also explains how we'll make sure, as far as possible, that what we do is in line with the requirements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

The report provides a transparent account of the progress we have made in embedding children's rights across our organisation, the lessons we have learned, and our priorities for continued improvement. It explains how we are considering children's rights in the development and delivery of our policies, services and decision-making, and how we are strengthening awareness, participation and accountability in line with the aims of the Act.

Putting children and young people at the heart of education means ensuring that their rights, views, and wellbeing, inform the decisions that affect them. Qualifications Scotland enables learners to achieve their potential by recognising their knowledge, skills and achievements, supporting them as they progress in learning, employment and life. Through our qualifications and assessment work, we support thousands of learners each year and are committed to ensuring that children's rights are embedded across our functions and services.

The structure of this report

We've structured this report using the cluster approach, in line with Scottish Government guidance on reporting under the UNCRC Act 2024. The cluster approach is an internationally recognised framework for implementing, monitoring, and reporting on children's rights.

The Scottish Government groups the 54 articles of the UNCRC into eight themed clusters, enabling related rights to be considered together. In each cluster, we describe the actions we have taken, evidence of progress, the impact of our work where available, and our priorities for further improvement.

The clusters most relevant to Qualifications Scotland's functions are:

- General Measures of Implementation
- General Principles
- Civil Rights and Freedoms
- Education, Leisure and Culture
- Special Protection Measures

The remaining clusters — Definition of the Child, Family Environment and Alternative Care, Basic Health and Welfare, and Optional Protocols (where applicable) — are less directly

relevant to our functions. Where appropriate, we address them in the sections we've listed above. Because some evidence and activities relate to more than one cluster, we've presented information under a single cluster for clarity and to avoid duplication.

Throughout this report, we've used practice examples to illustrate our work in action, providing practical examples of how we are embedding children's rights and making a difference for children and young people.

How have children and young people's voices influenced this report?

Children's and young people's voices have played a significant role in shaping this report. We've gathered a wealth of evidence that reflects the views, experiences and priorities of children and young people. This has informed the assessment of progress we give in the report, and helped identify areas for further development and future action.

The report draws on findings from research studies, consultation and engagement activities, learner participation processes, and feedback collected through our work with partners. We've also undertaken direct engagement with learners and with those who advocate on their behalf, including practitioners, families, carers and representative organisations. The insights we've gathered through these conversations have been incorporated throughout the report, ensuring that children's and young people's lived experiences, perspectives and aspirations are reflected in both our analysis and recommendations.

By listening to and acting on their feedback, we aim to ensure that 'what happens next' reflects what children and young people need, value and expect from us.

Article 1 of the UNCRC defines a child as anyone under 18, unless a country's law sets adulthood earlier. In Scotland, people may be seen as adults at different ages in different situations. However, for the UNCRC and UNCRC Act 2024, a child is anyone under the age of 18.

General measures of implementation

This cluster is about how well Qualifications Scotland puts children's rights into everyday practice. It focuses on ensuring that children's rights are embedded across our governance, policies, decision-making and organisational culture. This includes having clear leadership and accountability for children's rights; considering children's rights in the development and delivery of qualifications; assessments and services; training our staff; and involving children and young people in decisions that affect them.

The cluster also covers how we monitor and evaluate our progress, use evidence and data to improve outcomes for children and young people, and report transparently on our performance. It includes ensuring, as far as possible, that our functions are compatible with the UNCRC requirements, that governance arrangements support continuous improvement, and that children and young people have access to appropriate information and routes to raise concerns where relevant.

- **Relevant UNCRC Articles: Article 4** (Implementation of children's rights), **Article 42** (Knowledge of children's rights) and **Article 44(6)** (Making reports on the implementation of the UNCRC widely available).

Our corporate plan

Our Corporate Plan provides the strategic framework for embedding children's rights across our organisation. It sets out what we will deliver over the next three years to realise our ambition to be a different and world-leading qualifications body, delivering qualifications that enable every learner to fulfil their potential. Shaped through engagement and feedback, the plan helps ensure that the needs, experiences and rights of learners and stakeholders are reflected in our priorities, decision-making and delivery.

The Corporate Plan also supports effective governance and accountability by setting clear priorities, identifying responsibilities and establishing mechanisms for monitoring progress. Together with this Children's Rights Report and our wider governance arrangements, it demonstrates how we are working to secure better or further effect of children's rights and to ensure, so far as possible, that our functions are compatible with the UNCRC requirements.

Our values

Qualifications Scotland’s new values — open, collaborative and forward-thinking — define who we are and the high standards that we expect.

Being open reflects our commitment to transparency, equality, and learner voice. It means listening to children and young people, clearly explaining decisions, and ensuring learners understand how qualifications, assessments and our support systems work. This supports

children’s rights by making young people feel respected, informed, and included in decisions affecting their education.

Being collaborative connects to our approach of working with schools, colleges, training providers, families and carers, and communities to improve learning experiences and outcomes. Collaboration ensures that children and young people have opportunities to contribute to shaping services, and that support is tailored to their individual needs.

Being forward-thinking links to our focus on continuous improvement, digital innovation, and accessible learning and assessment methods. Using technology responsibly can help remove barriers, improve inclusion, and create fairer opportunities for all learners while protecting children’s rights, wellbeing, and privacy.

Together, these values support Qualifications Scotland’s wider aim of creating an inclusive, fair, and learner-centred education system where children and young people are empowered, respected, and able to achieve their full potential.

Our governance structure

Strong governance is essential to ensuring that children’s rights are understood, considered and embedded across Qualifications Scotland.

Our Corporate Leadership Team plays a key role in ensuring that children’s rights are recognised as an organisational priority by providing oversight and scrutiny of our Corporate Plan. Through this approach, shared priorities and cross-cutting themes have been identified, with children’s rights recognised as a key theme and the lessons learned and next steps identified in this report will inform delivery planning.

Our established Children’s Rights Steering Group includes representatives from across the organisation. It’s a forum for discussion, for sharing best practice and co-ordinating communications relating to children’s rights. It also promotes and advocates increased understanding of children’s rights.

Our new governance arrangements

Our new governance arrangements relate strongly to children’s rights because they aim to place learners and young people at the centre of decision-making, participation, fairness, and education reform.

Learner Interest Committee

Our new Learner Interest Committee is one of the most significant ways we're embedding children's participation in our governance structures, ensuring learners have a direct route to influence organisational decision-making.

It gives learners a voice so they can share their opinions about qualifications, exams, coursework, and assessment, and helps decision makers understand how changes might affect them.

Our recruitment approach for the establishment of the new committee demonstrates how we are embedding children's rights at its core.

Practice example: recruiting members for our new Learner Interest Committee

The change we wanted to see

We wanted a new committee made up entirely of learners, at the heart of our governance structure. Although the Education (Scotland) Act 2025 stipulated that some members had to be adults, most members were to be children and young people.

What we did

On our first day as Qualifications Scotland began — 2 February 2026 — we launched a recruitment campaign and invited applications from learners across schools and colleges in Scotland. This generated over 120 applications.

We selected around half of the committee members at random. We then filled the remaining places to ensure the committee reflected a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and perspectives.

This resulted in a Learner Interest Committee made up of children and young people with diverse experiences and perspectives from across Scotland.

What we learned

By removing barriers from the application process and selecting members by lot, we learned that building a diverse committee is not about choosing the people who already appear to have the right skills or confidence. Instead, it is about creating opportunities for all members to develop their skills and contribute.

This was an important change in how we think about involving children and young people. It reinforced our commitment to making participation more inclusive and ensuring that every member has the support they need to take part confidently.

The relevant UNCRC articles

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Non-Discrimination
- Article 12 – Children have the right to be heard and have their views taken seriously.
- Article 13 – Children have the right to express their views.
- Article 2 – Every child should have an equal opportunity to participate.
- Article 28 – Every child has the right to education.
- Article 29 – Education should help every child reach their full potential.
- Article 44 – Knowledge of rights

Our next steps

The committee's first ever meeting was on Saturday 13 June 2026.

From this first meeting we began the process of helping to build the capacity of all members of the committee and explored how we might be able to formalise this process of development and learning – potentially, even, as a certificated qualification.

We will work with the committee and colleagues to ensure its advice is heard and responded to by the organisation.

It is likely that we will need to supplement membership over time and we are committed to the application process we used. We want to keep the barriers to participation as low as we can and retain our emphasis on capacity building.

The Learner Committee will meet four times a year.

‘The Learner Interest Committee is the first of its kind in Scotland: established by statute and led by learners. With members drawn from schools, colleges, and vocational routes, the Committee will help to ensure the design and delivery of qualifications are fundamentally shaped by lived experience. In its first year, our focus will include qualifications reform and the co-design of our Learner Charter, to define the standards learners can expect and how Qualifications Scotland will be accountable.’

Co-convener, Ewan Carmichael

Teacher and Practitioner Committee

Our Teacher and Practitioner Committee will draw on the expertise of educators who work in teaching and the delivery of learning. Its role is to ensure that Qualifications Scotland benefits from professional insight and practical experience, reflecting the day-to-day realities of classrooms, training environments and assessment practice.

By bringing this perspective into decision-making, the committee supports our commitment to children’s rights by ensuring that education policies and practices are informed by the experiences of those working directly with learners. This helps us better understand the diverse needs of children and young people, including those who require additional support, and strengthens our focus on fairness, inclusion and equity.

Educators’ knowledge of what works best for learners helps inform improvements to teaching assessment and qualifications. This contributes to a more effective and inclusive education system where children and young people are supported to participate, achieve and reach their full potential.

We’ll work with our Learner Committee and our Teacher and Practitioner Committee to create two charters setting out clearly what learners and practitioners can expect from us.

Our decision-making

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) help us check whether a policy or decision could affect different groups unfairly, including children (through the protected characteristic of age). They're also a way to look for opportunities to improve outcomes and create positive impacts for children and young people and their learning. This includes treating children fairly, acting in their best interests, and listening to their views.

Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) go even further. These assessments help ensure that policies are more inclusive, that barriers are identified and reduced, and that children and young people are treated fairly. They also make sure learners have opportunities to be heard and that their needs met.

We go further than our legal obligations, too, by treating care experience as a protected characteristic. We do this because of the impact that experience of care can have on young people's education and life opportunities.

Our equality outcomes

Qualifications Scotland's Equality Outcomes 2025–29 link to children's rights by making education fairer and more inclusive for all learners. They aim to ensure that children are not discriminated against and that everyone has equal access to learning and assessments.

The outcomes also focus on giving extra support to those who may face disadvantages, such as learners with a disability or care-experienced young people.

In addition, they try to improve fairness in how exams and results are handled and make sure learners' needs are considered in decision-making. The outcomes also look inward at our organisation's knowledge and understanding to strengthen equality and children's rights and highlight the importance of a diverse workforce that better reflects the learners we serve.

Our customer service and complaints handling

Our Customer Service Team is the first point of contact for all our customers. This service supports children's rights by helping ensure that young people can access clear information, advice, and support when they need it. By acting as a first point of contact and guiding enquiries to the right place, the team helps children and young people receive timely help and reduces barriers to getting information about their results and next steps. The team's focus on customer feedback and service improvement helps identify ways to make services more accessible and responsive for children and young people.

The Candidate Advice Line is especially important, as it supports learners by helping them understand their qualifications and feel informed during what can be a stressful time.

Complaints handling supports children's rights by giving children and young people a clear way to speak up when something goes wrong and having their concerns taken seriously. We follow the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman's child-friendly complaints handling principles to make the process easier to understand and use. This helps ensure that children's views are listened to, responded to clearly, and dealt with in a timely way. It also means the organisation learns from complaints so services can be improved in the future. Overall, this supports children's rights by helping make sure young people are heard, treated fairly, and able to influence improvements in the services that affect them.

Learning opportunities for staff

Children's rights training helps our people understand how to put children's rights into practice in their everyday work.

Training was developed and delivered online for all staff when the UNCRC Act 2024 came into being and is available for all staff. It covered:

- General overview of the UNCRC
- Deeper dive into the UNCRC Act 2024
- Context around decision-making and CRWIA
- Equality and non-discrimination
- Child-friendly complaints
- Role of Children and Young Peoples Commissioner

An intranet resource centre has been developed, including links to the Scottish Government Children's Rights e-learning and the Children's Parliament e-learning hub.

Consideration of 'children's rights in budgeting' was incorporated into our operational plan guidance. A 'Making Better Financial Decisions' briefing note was developed to support this and published for all staff. Discussions were also held around incorporating children's rights and budgeting considerations into the finance internal academy modules that will be developed for line managers.

Who Cares? Scotland delivered Corporate Parenting training to members of our senior leadership team in February 2025, raising awareness of the special responsibilities we have to care-experienced people and the vital role our senior leadership team (SLT) play in supporting us to meet our legislative obligations.

Children's rights in our workplace

We support our young employees, especially those under 18 who are protected by the UNCRC (Scotland) Act 2024. The Act helps ensure that young people are safe at work, treated fairly, have access to learning and development opportunities, and can share their views on decisions

that affect them. We are committed to providing a supportive environment that helps young employees grow, develop their skills, and progress in their careers.

We further support young employees through our Young Talent Forum, which provides colleagues aged 16–28 with a platform to share their views, influence change, and contribute to the development of the young workforce. The forum encourages networking, collaboration, and career development opportunities, including engagement with senior leaders. This commitment is reflected in our Gold Investors in Young People accreditation, which recognises our efforts to create positive opportunities and pathways for young people and support them to achieve their full potential.

Practice example: our Young Talent Strategy

The change we wanted to see

We wanted to increase the recruitment, retention and representation of 16- to 24-year-olds in our workforce by improving appointment rates for younger applicants, expanding apprenticeship and early-career opportunities, and promoting Qualifications Scotland as an employer of choice for young people.

What we did

We launched the Young Talent Strategy to attract, recruit, develop and retain young people aged 28 and under to secure the skills, experience and talent needed for organisational growth.

In partnership with Investors in Young people and in alignment with the Fair Work Framework, the Young Talent Strategy had a series of commitments for the organisation to work towards that would shape the experience of young colleagues into one of aspiration, enjoyment and growth.

The difference it made

Since the implementation of the Young Talent Strategy, our young talent population has become a valued voice and brought an insightful perspective to the organisation on areas such as digital skillsets, ways of working and ideas for better development and career growth. We have:

- Established a Young Talent Forum
- Achieved Gold Investors in Young People accreditation
- Established a Career Development Young Talent Mentoring programme
- Reinstated the Modern Apprenticeship Programme with over 1300 applicants in the last 2 years
- Increased membership of the Young Talent Forum year on year

- Welcomed 13 new Modern Apprentices
- Carried out a skills matrix activity to identify existing and required skills
- Facilitated several Personal Development Conversations to help young talent own their development path
- Delivered intergenerational education to line managers and influencers of young talent
- In addition to this we are now delighted to launch our new Managing Young Talent module as part of the Line Manager Digital Learning Library.

What we learned

Our young talent programmes not only provide an opportunity for young people to earn while they learn, but they also give us an opportunity to understand the experience of young learners, and grow skillsets needed for the future of the business. As an organisation with a significant impact on young people's career ambitions, we can also give something back to the young workforce to support their potential and invest in young people as a valuable talent pool.

The relevant UNCRC articles

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Non-discrimination
- Article 3 – Best Interests of the Child
- Article 12 – Right to be heard
- Article 28 – Right to education.

Our next steps

The strategy has been designed to improve the working environment for young colleagues creating more opportunities for development and career growth, and platforms for their voices to be heard and ideas and opinions acted upon. This will help to ensure Qualifications Scotland has the skills, knowledge and experience for future success.

> Being a young person at Qualifications Scotland sounds intimidating coming from school and going into the big bad world. But it's the most rewarding thing I have ever felt, I have been included in so many things I never thought I would be able to do. Everyone here has helped me with my confidence, the way I look at life and work. Qualifications Scotland isn't just about the exams it's about the people behind them and I'm thankful I got to work with them as they are so helpful and caring not just when you're ill but your mental wellbeing.
>
> Matthew Topley 17-year-old Modern Apprentice

UNCRC general principles

This cluster focuses on the four general principles that underpin the UNCRC, and should guide all decisions and actions affecting children and young people. It explores how children and young people are valued, included and supported through our policies, services and engagement activities. It considers how we promote wellbeing, create inclusive opportunities for participation, and identify and remove barriers to learning, achievement and engagement. Through these approaches, we aim to ensure that all learners are treated fairly, feel safe and respected, and are supported to fulfil their potential.

Relevant UNCRC Articles:

- **Article 2** (Non-discrimination)
- **Article 3** (Best interests of the child)
- **Article 6** (Life, survival and development)
- **Article 12** (Respect for the views of the child)

How we gather and use learners' views and support learners through partnership working

We place engagement at the centre of our work. This is part of our commitment to children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), including the right to be heard, to be involved in decisions, and to be treated fairly.

We use a range of ways to gather and act on learner views. Our new School Partnership Team works directly with schools and the wider education community to build relationships and create opportunities for learners to share their experiences in school-based activities.

The Learner and Parent Engagement Team works across Scotland to speak with learners, parents, and carers through visits, workshops, focus groups, co-design sessions, surveys, and interviews. This helps us understand experiences and improve qualifications, assessment, and services. They also work with organisations such as the Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot, sparqs, Connect, the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Assembly of Parents and Carers.

To make sure participation is meaningful and accessible, our work is guided by a participation framework and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland's 7 Golden Rules for Participation. We also support staff across the organisation to use feedback when developing policies and services.

Our 'Your Voice' partnership panels (established in November 2024) give learners, educators, parents, and carers regular opportunities to share feedback on qualifications and assessment. This helps shape decisions and future developments.

Alongside this, we work in partnership with national organisations and networks to strengthen children's rights in practice. We are represented on the Scottish Government's Embedding Children's Rights in Public Services Peer Network, and have recently begun work with Skills Development Scotland through informal mentoring to strengthen children's rights approaches across our organisations.

We chair the Equality and Key Partnership Group, where we work with stakeholders to improve accessibility, fairness, and inclusion within qualifications and assessment.

We also work with organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways to understand the experiences of care-experienced young people. This helps ensure their rights are recognised and supported in education. Through the Corporate Parenting Collaboration Group, we share learning and good practice with other Corporate Parents.

Our anti-racism work is supported through partnerships with organisations and networks including Education Scotland, the University of Glasgow, the University of Stirling, and Show Racism the Red Card. This helps us address barriers and improve equality in education and the workplace.

Together, these approaches ensure that children and young people's views are not only heard but used to improve practice and support their rights in education.

As part of our commitment to promoting equality, inclusion and children's rights, Qualifications Scotland partnered with Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC) Scotland to support the Creative Competition. The initiative provided children and young people across Scotland with an opportunity to express their views on racism, diversity and inclusion through a range of creative formats. By encouraging participation and celebrating young people's ideas on a national stage, the partnership helped amplify learner voice while supporting anti-racism education and awareness across Scotland.

Practice example: Amplifying young voices through anti-racism

The change we wanted to see

We wanted to give children and young people meaningful opportunities to share their views on racism, promote inclusion, and engage with children's rights through creative learning.

What we did

This is why we partnered with Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC) Scotland to deliver the Creative Competition, inviting learners from Primary 1 to college to imagine *A World Without Racism*. We promoted the competition through our education networks, supported the judging

of over 2,700 entries, and helped organise a national awards ceremony at Hampden Park. SRtRC also delivered anti-racism training for our staff.

The difference it made

More than 2,700 learners took part, using art, writing, music and digital media to express their views. The project provided a national platform for young voices and celebrated their contributions through a high-profile awards event attended by 150 finalists.

What we learned

Creative activities can be a powerful way to engage children and young people in important social issues. Strong partnerships and established education networks help ensure opportunities are accessible and inclusive.

The relevant UNCRC articles

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Non-discrimination
- Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child
- Article 13 – Freedom of expression
- Article 29 – Goals of education

Our next steps

- Continue working with partners to promote anti-racism education.
- Create further opportunities for children and young people to share their views.
- Build on learning from the competition to strengthen future engagement activities.

> ‘A world without racism — what a wonderful thing to imagine. And who better people to imagine it than the young people of Scotland ... At Qualifications Scotland, we're proud to stand alongside these remarkable young people.’
>
> **Nick Page, Chief Executive Officer, Qualifications Scotland**

Practice example: How feedback is shaping change at Qualifications Scotland

The change we wanted to see

- We wanted learners, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and employers to have meaningful opportunities to influence our work.

- We think decisions about qualifications and assessment should be informed by the experiences of those closest to learning and teaching.
- Children and young people can then see that their views make a difference, which increases trust, transparency and participation.
- Qualifications Scotland then becomes a more responsive, collaborative and rights-respecting organisation.

What we did

We created more opportunities for children and young people, educators, parents, carers and other stakeholders to influence our work. We listened to their experiences through school visits, workshops, consultations, surveys, webinars and stakeholder events.

- Over 1,200 learners and over 2,500 educators responded to surveys on proposed changes to assessments.
- Nick Page, Chief Executive of Qualifications Scotland, visited 40 schools across Scotland, and heard from over 100 learners and several hundred teachers and leaders.
- More than 840 schools, colleges, local authorities, employers and training providers are supported by a team of Regional Managers who work alongside our schools, colleges and training providers.
- More than 550 parents and carers registered for support webinars.
- Our Learner and Parent team facilitated workshops with 140 learners.

The difference it made

Our new School Partnership Team has been established and is now working with schools to build closer relationships with the classroom. Stakeholder feedback has already shaped decisions on qualification reform, exam timetable scheduling, and English set texts. You can read more about this in our first Qualifications Scotland Engagement report.

What we learned

From this, we learned that when engagement is open and easy to access, more children and young people, and those who advocate for them, take part and provide useful feedback that improves decision-making. Meaningful change happens when we listen early, involve people throughout the process, and act on what we hear. This builds trust and helps ensure qualifications better reflect the needs and experiences of learners across Scotland.

The relevant UNCRC articles

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Non-discrimination

- Article 3 – Best interests of the child
- Article 6 – Right to life, survival and development
- Article 12 – Right to be heard
- Article 13 – Freedom of expression
- Article 28 – Right to education
- Article 29 – Goals of education

Our next steps

The new Interest Committees will give learners and those closest to learning and teaching a direct voice in shaping qualifications. Their views will feed into senior leaders and Board decisions. The first meetings have already taken place, with representatives from schools, colleges, training providers and learners.

We will also develop a Teacher and Practitioner Charter and a Learner Charter with teachers, practitioners and learners, including those with additional support needs and Care Experienced young people.

We will continue to visit centres and hold workshops throughout the year to make sure this work is based on the real experiences of learners and educators across Scotland.

We will continue to engage with the Children and Young People Commissioner's Young Advisor Group around the creation of a national model for children's participation in education reform in Scotland.

Practice example: Corporate Parenting teacher resource

The change we wanted to see

We wanted to improve educational experiences and outcomes for care-experienced children and young people by providing Scotland's teachers with insight into the lives of care-experienced learners and the important role teachers play as corporate parents,

What we did

In partnership with Who Cares? Scotland, we supported the creation of A Guide for Scotland's Teachers on Care Experience and Corporate Parenting

We developed a communications plan to promote the teacher resource to secondary schools across Scotland as part of our commitments during Care Experience Week 2024. In March 2025, we printed hard copies and distributed these to every secondary school in Scotland.

The difference it made

All learners need positive and stable relationships with adults who believe in their skills, strengths and talents. It is important that teachers understand the specific barriers that care-experienced learners face, and how their role as a Corporate Parent can mitigate against these barriers. With the right support at the right time, care-experienced learners can thrive in education and achieve their potential.

What we learned

By helping teachers and school staff better understand the barriers that care-experienced learners may face, the resource encourages earlier support, which helps reduce stigma and creates learning environments where children and young people feel valued and supported.

The resource also strengthens understanding of corporate parenting responsibilities, helping practitioners put these into practice and provide consistent, equitable support for care-experienced learners.

Relevant UNCRC articles

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Non-discrimination
- Article 3 – Best interests of the child
- Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child
- Article 28 – Right to education
- Article 29 – Aims of education

Our next steps

As we develop our new Corporate Parenting Plan, we will explore further opportunities to work with partners and care-experienced children and young people to uphold and strengthen children's rights in practice.

Inclusive and Plain Language

Using inclusive and plain language is essential in supporting children's rights by ensuring that information is accessible, understandable, and respectful to all children. Clear communication enables children to understand their rights, express their views, and participate in decisions that affect them. Using inclusive language also promotes equality, diversity, and a sense of belonging, helping to ensure that every child feels valued and represented regardless of their background or individual needs. We've created a communications toolkit to support this practice.

Best interests of the child in decision-making

Carrying out Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) helps us make sure the **best interests of children** are considered when we are making decisions. These assessments help us understand how changes may affect children and young people, reduce the risk of negative impacts, and improve outcomes. This supports children's rights, wellbeing, and fair access to education and opportunities.

Practice example: Equality of Access to Qualifications policy

The change we wanted to see

We wanted to ensure the Equality of Access to Qualifications policy continued to be effective in removing barriers and promoting fair access for all learners. By reviewing its impact on children and young people, we aimed to strengthen the policy so it better supports equality, inclusion and children's rights in practice, ensuring all learners can access qualifications fairly and achieve their potential.

What we did

Historically, the policy focused on the needs of disabled learners and those with additional support needs, but we took a conscious approach to ensure the policy reflected the diverse needs of our learner population, including those based on their care experience, gender, race and religion or belief.

After a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) identified barriers and negative impacts, we updated the Equality of Access to Qualifications policy to improve fairness and inclusion for learners from all equality groups, with recognition of children's rights.

The difference it made

We strengthened our commitment to equality of access to qualifications by making the policy more inclusive and explicitly recognising the needs of a wider range of learners from equality groups. This included clearer consideration of barriers affecting groups such as care-experienced children, disabled learners, and those affected by religious observance or racism.

We published the Equality of Access to Qualifications policy alongside several other policies, on our website for the first time in October 2024. We recognised the importance of being transparent in our decision-making processes with our external stakeholders, including children, and publication of the policy was one of the first steps in demonstrating our organisational commitment to the corporate values of Brave and Open.

By linking these barriers directly to children's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, we improved how the organisation embeds a rights-based approach in policy development and decision-making

What we learned

In doing this, we learned that barriers to access can affect all parts of the qualification process, not just assessment. The CRWIA helped us clearly evidence this. We also learned that documenting this work and sharing it at governance level improves awareness and helps embed equality and children's rights more consistently across the organisation.

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- **Article 2** – Non-discrimination
- **Article 3** – Best interests of the child
- **Article 12** – Respect for children's views
- **Article 17** – Access to information from the media
- **Article 23** – Rights of disabled children
- **Article 28** – Right to education
- **Article 29** – Aims of education
- **Article 30** – Children from minority or indigenous groups

Our next steps

We will use the CRWIA findings to improve how we consider equality and children's rights across the whole process of developing and awarding qualifications. We will continue to embed

this in policies and decision-making and monitor the impact of changes to make sure all learners have fair and equal access to qualifications.

We also recognise that policy documents are often set out in a format that's not accessible to children and young people, even after checking that the language we used was plain English. At the next review, we'll think more about creating an accessible version for children to empower them with information about how we consider their needs and any potential barriers that they may experience in accessing our qualifications.

Anti-racist education programme

This work supports children's rights by helping to create a fairer and more inclusive education system where all children and young people are respected and treated equally, regardless of their race or background. It links closely to these UNCRC articles:

- **Article 2:** every child has the right to be protected from discrimination.
- **Article 28:** every child has the right to education.
- **Article 29:** education should help children develop respect for human rights, equality, and different cultures.
- **Article 30:** every child and the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

By improving staff understanding of racism and inclusion, the organisation is helping ensure that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic children and young people experience a more equal, respectful, and supportive education environment.

Staff wanted further support and training to help make our qualifications, services and workplace fairer and more inclusive.

To address this, we introduced several learning opportunities, including online resources, talks from experts, workshops on racial literacy, longer anti-racist training programmes, and training provided by external education partners. These sessions helped staff learn how racism and discrimination can appear in education and workplaces, and how to challenge bias and unfair practices.

The training was especially aimed at leaders and staff who influence policy, communications, and qualification development, so they could help create positive change across the organisation.

History, Geography and Classical Studies course specifications have undergone language changes to reflect modern understanding of enslavement, colonialism, race and culture. The new language recognises power dynamics and encourages the study of various perspectives. To achieve this, Policy, Analysis and Standards (PAS), Equalities, and Qualifications

Development staff responsible for social subjects engaged with members of the Anti-Racist Education Programme Curricular Reform Sub-Group.

The Migration and Empire Teaching in Scottish Schools (METISS) project supported by Stirling University and funded by the Scottish Government completed teacher learning sessions in March 2025. Participating History teachers have taken part in a series of reading groups and a weekend residential where academics from Australia, New Zealand and Canada delivered lectures. The teachers created a number of lesson plans to complement the language updates in National 5 and Higher History qualifications.

Alongside Education Scotland, we were invited to participate to ensure the decolonised, anti-racist approach to the learning aligns with the curriculum, qualifications and assessment. The decolonised resources together with the language changes made to History course specifications are, at the time this report is being written, with designers for completion

The Urdu Subgroup is another branch of this work which brings together colleagues from across the sector to future-proof our Urdu qualifications. There are several Urdu teachers approaching retirement and no clear pathways into teaching this language going forward. The challenge is systemic and the subgroup is looking for ways to resolve this issue together.

In English, focus groups with learners took place in October 2024 to discuss diversifying Scottish set texts. The full refreshed new set text list has now been published and includes more writers of colour, female writers, LGBTQ+ writers, and authors from a wide range of backgrounds. This was the first-ever inclusion of learners' views in the Scottish set texts consultation process.

Colleagues are exploring policy change around access requirements to our secure website to enable peripatetic teachers (who are not linked to a registered centre) of the deaf, Gypsy Traveller communities and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) learners to access live assessment materials.

Qualifications Development colleagues responsible for English qualifications, PAS Equalities and the Scottish Government are in talks about partnering with Penguin Books UK to launch a Scottish version of Lit in Colour to support our curriculum and qualifications. The aim of the project is to support schools in the UK to make the teaching and learning of English literature more inclusive. This includes commissioning research to better understand barriers and possible solutions, as well as providing practical support including book donations, free teaching resources and more.

Supporting deaf and visually impaired learners in assessments

A working group led by our PAS Equalities Team reviewed the current support available for learners who use sign language in assessments. The group, consisting of Qualified Teachers of

Deaf children and young people (QToDs) and Qualifications Scotland colleagues, identified areas where improvements were needed to make sure guidance was accurate, accessible, and up to date.

The Using Sign in Assessments: centre guide was updated to help centres better support learners who use sign language in external assessments such as exams. We have also been invited to work with the Scottish Sensory Centre to develop workshops for new and experienced QToDs and Qualified Teachers of children and young people with a Visual Impairment (QTVIs).

Colleagues in our PAS Equalities and Marketing & Communications Teams are also working closely with QToDs in our working group to identify how we better meet the needs of deaf children and young people through our communications and assessments. This project is still currently in the early stages, and we hope to provide an update on progress in our next UNCRC report (in 2027).

All the work mentioned above supports children's rights by helping to ensure that learners who are deaf or visually impaired can access education and assessments fairly and in ways that meet their communication and learning needs.

School Partnership Team

Our School Partnership Team is improving the way we work with teachers and placing learners at the centre of decision-making. The team is led by a seconded head teacher and includes other seconded teachers who bring direct classroom experience to the work. Our Understanding Standards and Liaison Team also contribute their professional expertise to support consistent assessment practice, strengthen understanding of standards, and ensure that feedback from schools is acted on to improve qualifications and learning.

The team supports children's rights by ensuring that learners' voices are included in our decision-making. This helps uphold the right to be heard, and the right to education by improving the quality, relevance, and responsiveness of learning through regular engagement with schools. By working with diverse communities and co-designing approaches with teachers, the team promotes inclusion, fairness, and equal opportunities for all learners, helping ensure that education reflects their needs and experiences.

Practice example: Raising awareness of learners' and practitioners' experiences inside the organisation

The change we wanted to see

We wanted to ensure that the experiences of teachers (and the learners in their classrooms) were represented directly within the organisation.

What we did

We launched the Voices from the Classroom programme, bringing education professionals into the organisation to share their experiences and insights directly with staff through a series of workshops and Q&A sessions. We heard from teachers and school leaders on topics including learner empowerment, identifying learner needs (including those that are less visible), and the practical challenges of implementing qualification reform.

We also introduced Qualification Engagement Practitioners, seconded from schools, to strengthen ongoing engagement with the sector and support more effective, in-person collaboration across different school contexts.

The difference it made

This work is helping to ensure that future engagement and qualification development is informed by the experience of practitioners across the education system. It has helped us improve our understanding of what is happening in schools, which helps us make better decisions that reflect learners' needs.

What we learned

By doing this, we've learned that hearing directly from teachers helps us better understand what is happening in classrooms and the challenges learners face. We've taken these experiences into account when developing the School Partnership Team's delivery plan, which will be evaluated at the end of our first year.

Relevant UNCRC articles

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

Article 2 – Non-discrimination

Article 3 – Best interests of the child

Article 12 – Respect for children's views

Article 23 – Rights of disabled children

Article 28 – Right to education

Article 29 – Aims of education

Our next steps

We continue to plan and deliver Voices from the Classroom sessions to ensure that our team and the wider organisation take learners and practitioner views into account throughout our work.

Civil Rights and Freedoms

This cluster considers the ways in which we respect and promote children's and young people's civil rights and freedoms as we deliver our functions. This includes supporting learners' rights to express their views and receive information; respect their privacy and personal information; and recognise their rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and association.

The cluster also explores how learners are given meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their learning, qualifications and assessment, and how participation is designed to be safe, inclusive and accessible. It considers the measures we take to protect learners' rights while ensuring they are treated with dignity, respect and fairness in all aspects of our work.

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- **Article 7** (Name and nationality)
- **Article 8** (Preservation of identity)
- **Article 13** (Freedom of expression)
- **Article 14** (Freedom of thought, conscience and religion)
- **Article 15** (Freedom of association and peaceful assembly)
- **Article 16** (Right to privacy)
- **Article 17** (Access to information)

Gaelic language

Our work in and for Gaelic language supports children's rights by helping children in Scotland access their right to culture, identity, and education. Under the UNCRC, children have the right to use their own language, practice their culture, and be supported in their identity.

Promoting Gaelic in schools, such as through Gaelic-medium education, helps children learn in their own or a community language, which supports confidence, inclusion, and equality. It also helps protect and develop Scotland's cultural heritage while ensuring Gaelic-speaking children are not disadvantaged in education.

We continue to raise the status and profile of Gaelic and create practical opportunities for its use. We are proud to provide a range of Gaelic qualifications suitable for everyone from

learners to fluent speakers, that not only develop language skills, but also incorporate musical, cultural, historical and vocational elements.

We will also continue to offer our Gaelic services to our employees and the public. This will ensure that where Gaelic services are made available by us, Gaelic users will be made aware of their existence and be actively encouraged to use them.

Learning for sustainability

Learning for Sustainability (LfS) links closely to children's rights because it helps children understand how to care for the environment, society, and their own wellbeing. It gives them opportunities to take part in decisions, express their views, and learn about global issues such as climate change and social justice. It helps make education more relevant, inclusive, and focused on preparing young people for the future.

Scotland's LfS Action Plan presents a vital opportunity for fulfilling children's rights. One of its actions is for Qualifications Scotland to embed LfS into new and existing qualifications.

LfS is a core component of all NextGen: Higher National (HN) qualifications.

LfS is an approach that helps learners to question, analyse and think critically while working with others. Embedding LfS in NextGen: HN qualifications will help to prepare learners for the increasing demand for skills, jobs, and careers, as Scotland transitions to a greener and net-zero economy.

The expectation is that all NextGen: HN learners will exit their studies with:

- a general understanding of sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)
- a good grounding in subject-specific sustainability
- the confidence to apply the knowledge, skills, and values developed through their learning in the next stage of their lives.

Practice example: Embedding Learning for Sustainability into new and existing courses

The change we wanted to see

Learning for Sustainability (LfS) is an entitlement for all learners in Curriculum for Excellence. It builds learners' capacity to deal with the interconnected social, economic and environmental sustainability challenges we face. We wanted to ensure that LfS was implemented by piloting a new approach to embed it as a core component of all NextGen: HN qualifications.

What we did

The pilot programme brought colleagues and practitioners from centres across subject areas. Working collaboratively with internal and external stakeholders, we quickly found that experiences of LfS varied greatly between the subject design teams — some hadn't even heard about LfS; others were already embedding it into practice as part of their subject.

We engaged directly with learners too, to identify their level of knowledge and understanding of LfS and how best to meet their needs.

Across these sessions, we adapted our approach to enable practitioners and design teams to work out how best to implement this in practice — confident practitioners to help our learners was key to success.

The difference it made

The NextGen HN design principles now have an established mandatory LfS learning outcome. This enables our learners to exit their studies with:

- a general understanding of sustainability and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)
- a good grounding in subject-specific sustainability
- the confidence to apply the knowledge, skills, and values developed through their learning in the next stage of their lives.

It also helps to prepare learners for the increasing demand for skills, jobs, and careers, as Scotland transitions to a greener and net-zero economy.

What we learned

We learned that listening to and supporting practitioners who are going through the process of embedding LfS helps us better understand what is happening in practice. This improves how — as part of education reform — we will design and deliver National Courses that have LfS embedded as a core component.

Relevant UNCRC articles

- Article 3 – Best interests of the child
- Article 12 – Respect for children's views
- Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child
- Article 28 – Right to education
- Article 29 – Goals of education

Our next steps

We will continue to work with colleagues and stakeholders to be a role model in shaping, influencing, and making a real impact in embedding LfS into assessment and qualification frameworks as part of educational reform.

More about learning for sustainability

LfS and learner voices

LfS is a whole-setting approach that embraces global citizenship, sustainable development, and outdoor learning, and one that includes transformational learning on such issues as social justice, rights, climate change, nature, biodiversity loss, and equality. Our role here is pivotal — practitioners and learners need to be able understand the impact of people's choices socially, economically, culturally and ecologically on the wider world and to change behaviour.

LfS aligns with children's rights because it helps children understand how to care for the environment, society, and their own wellbeing. It gives them opportunities to take part in decisions, express their views, and learn about these global issues to make education more relevant, inclusive, and focused on preparing them for the future and a fast-changing world.

Learners' voice is strong and clear regarding having access to LfS in their everyday learning opportunities and their eco-anxiety is strongly expressed in a range of UK-wide research and surveys. In tandem, business and employers need learners entering a greener employment market to be ready for change, able to adapt, flexible, future-facing, active and open to experience, collaborative, multidisciplinary, enquiry-based and problem solving. LfS provides the foundation for preparing learners to live and work in a more sustainable and just world.

LfS and educational reform

Many externally-commissioned reports and reviews (OECD, Muir, Withers, Hayward and others) have outlined the social, economic and environmental crises that learners face now and in the future. The work of NQ and HNVQ Policy Teams on educational reform, including the review of National Courses and product types, will provide excellent opportunities for LfS to be embedded across all subject areas and types of products. The rebalancing of assessment strategy, methods and specifications, will also provide crucial opportunities to embed LfS.

Reform of National Qualifications

To support recommendations from the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment in Scotland, the Scottish Government asked us to work on some aspects of Senior Phase qualifications:

- Work towards extending the range of approved assessment methods which could be used in Senior Phase, including digital assessment.
- Explore models of how graded National Courses such as National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher could be organised into modules.
- Set out a longer-term programme of work to rebalance assessment methods across all National Courses, which will align with Curriculum Improvement Cycle activity where possible.

In June 2025, the Scottish Government published a timeline and supporting narrative, giving a high-level outline of the reform programme for Senior Phase qualifications. This was the result of intensive work and planning between our National Qualifications (NQ) Policy Team and colleagues from across the organisation.

These changes to National Courses link to children's rights because they aim to make assessment fairer, more flexible, and more accessible for all learners in Scotland.

Under the UNCRC, children have the right to education and to be treated fairly. By widening assessment methods (including digital options), exploring modular courses, and improving the way learning is assessed, more young people can show what they know in different ways that suit their needs.

This supports equality and inclusion, helping ensure that no learner is disadvantaged by a single method of assessment. It also links to the right to have the best interests of the child considered and to have equal opportunities to succeed in education.

Practice example: National Qualifications rebalancing assessment in practical subjects

The change we wanted to see

We want to work continually to improve assessment approaches that uphold children's and young people's rights by ensuring our qualifications are fair, inclusive and accurately reflect young people's achievements.

What we did

We asked practitioners whether we should remove the question papers from some practical courses.

This gave us the evidence base we needed to introduce new approaches to assessing knowledge and understanding in Practical Cake Craft, Practical Metalworking and Practical Woodworking. These courses have a strong focus on developing practical skills and contain a

small amount of theory-based content, which can be effectively assessed through other approaches.

In March 2025, we removed question papers from National 5 Practical Cake Craft, Practical Metalworking and Practical Woodworking courses from session 2025–26 onwards. This decision will improve the validity of the course assessments, while being mindful of the workload associated with an increase in internal assessment.

The decision reflects children's rights by valuing learner voice, supporting fair and accessible education, using the experience of both teaching practitioners who are advocating on behalf of children and young people themselves who access our qualifications, and ensuring assessment methods are appropriate to allow children and young people to demonstrate their skills in ways appropriate to the course content.

The difference it made

In March 2025, we removed question papers from National 5 Practical Cake Craft, Practical Metalworking and Practical Woodworking courses. This would take effect from session 2025–26 onwards. These courses have a strong focus on developing practical skills and contain a small amount of theory-based content that can be assessed effectively through other approaches.

What we learned

This reinforced that practitioners and learners must be at the heart of our decision-making around course content and appropriate assessment measures to allow learners to demonstrate their skills and knowledge.

Relevant UNCRC articles

This relates to these UNCRC articles:

- Article 2 – Non-discrimination
- Article 12 – Respect for the views
- Article 28 – Right to education
- Article 29 – Goals of education

Our next steps

We will continue to engage with stakeholders and learners as we rebalance assessment.

Education, Leisure and Culture

This cluster focuses on children's and young people's rights to education, and to take part in leisure, cultural, and wider learning activities under the UNCRC. It considers how these rights support learning, development, and wellbeing.

As it affects our work, it focuses on how qualifications and assessments support the right to education by providing fair and accessible opportunities for all learners. It also considers how we help ensure different learning pathways are available so learners can achieve and progress in ways that suit their needs.

The cluster also explores how inclusion, support, and equality are promoted so that all learners can take part fully in education and achieve their potential.

Equality of access to qualifications and support

We support children's rights by making sure all learners have equal opportunity to access and succeed in qualifications. Through our Equality Review of Qualifications process, we monitor our qualifications (National Courses and Higher National and Vocational Qualifications (HNVQs)) to identify places where we might be able to improve our inclusive practice for the future, particularly for people with protected characteristics. This helps protect the rights of all children and young people to be treated fairly and without discrimination.

When qualifications are reviewed or updated, we consider equality impacts and use feedback to improve fairness and inclusion. This ensures that children and young people's rights are considered at every stage of qualification design, development, review, assessment and quality assurance. There's more information about our Equality Review of Qualifications process on our website.

Our Equality of Access to Qualifications policy supports this approach by embedding fairness, inclusion, and respect for children's human rights in all aspects of our work. For example, changes to improve accessibility in Physical Education have helped more disabled learners to take part and achieve their potential.

We are currently reviewing our National Courses to remove exams where other approaches to assessment provide a better balance of the key principles. We have already removed the exams in some subjects for 2026 and replaced them with other assessment approaches. We are also reviewing and seeking feedback from stakeholders on other subjects.

Assessment arrangements

Assessment arrangements support disabled learners and those with additional needs to access our qualifications and assessments. Assessment arrangements provide these learners with an

equal opportunity to show what they know and can do, without compromising the integrity of the assessment.

Support can include (but is not limited to) extra time, breaks, a reader, a scribe, use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), or sitting the exam in a different room. The type of support given depends on the individual learner's needs and how they usually access learning and teaching in class.

Schools, colleges and training providers decide what support is needed, based on evidence of a learner's identified difficulty. Learners do not need a formal diagnosis, but the support must be appropriate and fair.

Assessment arrangements support disabled children's human rights because they help make education fair and inclusive. They support the right to education under the UNCRC by making sure all learners have an equal chance to succeed. They also ensure children and young people are not disadvantaged because of things outside their control, helping protect their right to fairness, inclusion, and equal opportunities in learning and assessment where possible.

Practice example: Assessment Arrangements in external assessments — understanding the experiences of centres, local authorities, parent, carers and learners

The change we wanted to see

We wanted to ensure that the assessment arrangements (AA) process is fit for purpose, sustainable and inclusive, and that it meets the needs of disabled learners and those with additional support needs (ASN).

What we did

We carried out a mixed-method research project to review the AA process. This involved an online survey for learners, parents, carers and education staff, as well as interviews and focus groups.

We used the findings to understand how the AA process works in practice and identify areas for improvement. This led to updates in guidance for learners, including better signposting to support services such as Reach and Enquire, and highlighted key areas for further work, including reviewing difficulty codes on the AA request system our centres use, and exploring Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Assessment (UDA) approaches.

We also shared the research findings with partners such as Scottish Government and Education Scotland, and began working with Education Scotland on ASN training for learning support teachers to help improve learners' experience of assessment arrangements.

What difference did it make?

While there has been a growing body of research exploring access arrangements in England & Wales, there had been very little Scottish research. Our AA project was the first of its kind in exploring AAs in the Scottish context, and its implications for our qualifications. This provided us with key insights necessary for long term improvements to AAs.

By consulting directly with learners, we were able to ensure that their voices, perspectives and experiences can frame ongoing improvements to the AA process.

As a result of the project, we have already been able to make small, incremental improvements for disabled learners and those with ASN, including improved documentation for all learners, parents and carers, and centres delivering our qualifications. This included recognising a child's capacity to make their own decisions about the assessment arrangements they are provided with, with parents and carers taking a supportive and guiding role in the

child's decisions. It has also highlighted specific areas for longer-term changes and provided the evidence base required to justify exploring alternative approaches, such as UDL and UDA.

What we learned

The AA research project showed the importance of using lived experience to inform decision-making. By listening directly to learners, parents, carers and staff, we gained a clearer understanding of how the AA process works in practice for all involved.

This helped us make targeted improvements based on real experiences and identify areas for further research. It also strengthened our commitment to a learner-centred, children's rights approach to assessment arrangements.

Relevant UNCRC articles

- **Article 2** – Non-Discrimination
- **Article 5** – parental guidance and a child's evolving capacities
- **Article 12** – Respect for the views of the child
- **Article 23** – Children with a disability
- **Article 28** – Right to education
- **Article 29** – Goals of education

Our next steps

We will continue to monitor and review the AA process over time, with the view to improving this so it better supports disabled learners and those with ASN. This includes updating guidance to keep it clear and accessible, improving our AA request system and difficulty codes, making it easier for centres to use. Our ambition with the AA system is to also enable learners to access their own AA data, which would also streamline how they provide consent to these, in the future.

We will also continue to review the range and application of assessment arrangements in National Courses, and explore further how Universal Design for Learning and Assessment (UDL and UDA) can be embedded to improve accessibility from the outset, in line with a more inclusive, learner-centred approach.

Learners' voices on assessment arrangements

> 'I think the learner should have more knowledge of what is going on, because personally I ended up missing out on some arrangements during some exams due to the fact the school hadn't cleared up with me what was needed. So having more involvement with the actual learner would be better.'

> 'Despite having signed the agreement for concessions, on two occasions this was not honoured until a heated discussion with senior staff members, and evidence the

concessions had already been agreed to. On multiple occasions I felt blamed for the mistakes and errors of the school in not getting it right for me as a disabled person.'

'The usual accommodations given are easy to request, but when asking for something specific, the school has been unaccommodating, and the support has not been given.'

'[On assessment arrangements] They can be helpful and unhelpful at the same time; some things were easy to get support with, but some others would have been easy to do and no support was given due to not enough effort being put in to provide that specific thing.'

Universal design

Universal Design for Learning UDL is a framework for designing teaching and learning, in a way that is accessible to all learners from the outset by recognising that learners have diverse needs that should be accommodated. While the UDL framework itself includes assessments, it focuses more on instruction and learning environments. Universal Design for Assessment (UDA) focuses specifically on adopting UDL principles for assessments. UDA involves assessments being intentionally designed to maximise accessibility, enabling all learners to demonstrate their knowledge and skills regardless of their personal characteristics.

Universal design supports the right to education in a fair and inclusive way by removing barriers and offering different ways for learners to learn, understand, and show what they know. It helps ensure all children and young people in Scotland can access learning, take part fully, and achieve their potential, no matter their needs or abilities.

We are in the final stages of initial desk-based research centred around whether, and how, UDL and UDA could be embedded within our qualifications and assessments. The project examines the key principles of universal design and the construction of universally designed assessment processes, underpinned by supporting evidence and best practice. As part of this, we are taking a comparative perspective through examining approaches to UDL and UDA taken across various international jurisdictions and assessing what we can learn from them. Doing so helps to facilitate a deeper and fuller understanding of the steps that we could take to implement UDL and UDA. As part of the project, we have also put together subject-specific case studies.

Insights from the desk-based research will be integrated within further research carried out with learners, educators, and other stakeholders, particularly in terms of assessment methods and rebalancing assessment. This, in turn, will feed into the longer-term co-design project under Qualifications and Assessment Reform.

We'll provide more information on our progress with this project in the next report.

Supporting children's wellbeing and development through responsible business practice

We aim to make a positive difference by supporting fairness, inclusion, and wellbeing for children, young people, families, and communities. Through our Responsible Business Strategy and community activities, our staff are encouraged to give back and support local communities in ways that promote participation and equality.

We also focus on wellbeing as part of a rights-based approach. Our wellbeing strategy supports staff through mental health resources, wellbeing activities, and support networks. This helps create a safe, respectful, and supportive environment, which in turn supports better outcomes for learners and helps uphold and protect children's rights.

Practice example: Paired Reading Programme for young people aged five to eight helping them with literacy.

The change we wanted to see

An improvement in reading skills for young people age five to eight.

What we did

We are proud to support Chapter One's Online Reading Volunteers Programme, pairing our volunteers with children aged five to eight from communities facing disadvantage across Scotland and the wider UK. The online programme supports the children to read for 30 minutes per week.

What difference did it make?

Since September 2025, thanks to our volunteers, we have achieved:

- **103 hours** of reading support delivered
- **254 reading sessions** completed
- **14 children** supported
- **13 volunteer readers** making it all possible

What we learned

Giving 30 minutes per week of your volunteering time can make a huge difference to a young person's confidence to read aloud, getting 1–1 support that they may not get at home. By the end of the academic session the young person can read freely with little or no support, making a huge difference to their learning.

Relevant UNCRC articles

- Article 2 – Non-Discrimination
- Article 12 – Respect for the views of the child
- Article 28 – Right to Education
- Article 29 – Goals of education

Our next steps

2026 is the Scottish Government National Year of Reading and we have doubled our volunteers to start in September 2026. We have 30 colleagues devoting 30 mins of their time per week. We can now support double the amount of young people with their literacy skills.

> ‘I found the whole paired reading experience very fulfilling. Listening to their journey from the start of the year until now, their confidence and reading ability has come on leaps and bounds. A mixture of reading and online word games allowed us to have a great rapport with each other. Meeting them in person for the first time at the school annual event was a highlight and we got on just as well in person as we did on calls. I couldn't recommend this volunteering opportunity enough to anyone interested’.
>
> Caroline Douglas, Volunteer for Paired Reading

Helping learners get exam ready

Qualifications Scotland also has a role in supporting the welfare of learners by ensuring that qualification and assessment systems are designed and delivered in ways that consider learner wellbeing, including the potential impacts of assessment pressure. While we do not provide direct support, we can influence wellbeing through fair, balanced, and proportionate assessment approaches, and by promoting inclusive assessment arrangements that reduce unnecessary stress.

Practice example: Get Exam Ready Campaign

The change we wanted to see

We wanted all learners to have easy access to clear, accurate and accessible information and support in the lead-up to exams. This would help learners feel informed, prepared and confident, while reducing barriers and inequalities in accessing exam preparation support.

We wanted to create a fairer and more inclusive qualifications system that supports every learner to achieve their full potential and upholds their rights to information and education.

What we did

We delivered a national Get Exam Ready campaign to give learners clear, accessible and timely information and support before their exams.

The campaign promoted a dedicated learner hub with study materials, past papers, exam information, revision advice, wellbeing support and guidance on results. We also developed and shared the Your Exams booklet, providing practical information on exam rules, procedures and exam-day preparation.

To reach as many learners as possible, we delivered a multi-channel communications campaign across social media, digital advertising, radio and stakeholder networks, with resources for schools and colleges to share locally. We also provided information for parents, carers, teachers and lecturers, recognising the important role they play in supporting learners.

Together, these activities helped ensure learners had the information and support they needed to prepare for exams, supporting their right to access education and information in a fair and inclusive way.

What difference did it make?

The Get Exam Ready campaign improved learners' access to clear, reliable and accessible information about exams, helping them feel more informed, prepared and confident.

By providing a single source of guidance and support, the campaign reduced barriers to accessing information and promoted more equitable support for all learners, particularly those who may have less access to informal advice.

The campaign also supported children's rights by helping learners understand their options, access support and participate fully in their education.

What we learned

We learned that learners benefit from having a single, trusted source of clear and accessible information. Using a range of communication channels helps us reach more learners, while providing information at the right time improves its impact.

We also learned that presenting information in a clear and accessible way empowers learners to understand exam processes, access support and feel more confident. This supports a rights-based approach by helping learners participate fully in their education.

Relevant UNCRC articles

- **Article 2** – Non-discrimination

- **Article 3** – Best interests of the child
- **Article 12** – Respect for children's views
- **Article 17** – Access to information
- **Article 23** – Rights of disabled children
- **Article 28** – Right to education
- **Article 29** – Aims of education

Our next steps

We will continue to develop the learner hub, improving the accessibility and inclusivity of its content and strengthening links with wider learner support services. We will use learner feedback and campaign insights to improve future communications and expand targeted support for learners who face greater barriers. This will help ensure our work continues to uphold children's rights and promote fair and equitable access to information and education.

Special protection measures

This cluster focuses on how Qualifications Scotland supports children and young people who may require additional protection or tailored support to realise their rights. This includes learners with disabilities or additional support needs (Article 23), care-experienced learners (Article 20), learners from minority ethnic communities or those who speak other languages (Article 30), and others who may face barriers to participating in education and assessment.

It considers how our policies, systems and processes promote fairness, inclusion and accessibility in qualifications and assessment. This includes providing appropriate assessment arrangements, making reasonable adjustments, and removing barriers so that all learners have an equitable opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and achievements.

The cluster also explores how we work with partners to identify and respond to the needs of vulnerable learners, ensuring that children's rights are respected and protected throughout the assessment and certification process, and that learners can access qualifications on an equal basis with their peers.

Relevant UNCRC Articles: This cluster brings together a range of UNCRC articles relating to children and young people who require additional protection. The articles most relevant to Qualifications Scotland's work include **Article 20** (Care-experienced learners), **Article 23** (Children with disabilities), **Article 30** (Children from minority or Indigenous groups).

GDPR and data protection

We handle personal information about children and young people, including details linked to entries, assessments, results, and any support needs. This is done in line with UK GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Information is only collected and used when it is needed to deliver qualifications, such as managing entries, arranging assessments, supporting learners, and issuing results. Schools, colleges, and training providers are expected to keep information accurate and secure, and to share it only with staff who need it for assessment purposes.

Learners have rights under data protection law, including the right to access their personal data and understand how it is used.

These processes help protect learners' privacy and make sure personal information is handled safely and responsibly while allowing qualifications to be delivered properly.

Assessment arrangements

In 2025, 36,580 learners had at least one assessment arrangement in place, with 119,405 individual arrangements recorded for National course exams. This is an increase from 2024 when 104, 695 assessment arrangements were requested on behalf of 32, 030 disabled learners and those with additional support needs. This data reflects the continued increase in demand for support and the importance of making assessments accessible for all learners.

These arrangements helped ensure that disabled learners and those with additional support needs were provided with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills, while maintaining the integrity and standards of our qualifications and assessments.

Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) is a free service that supports learners who could not attend an exam or whose performance was affected by unexpected and serious personal circumstances on the day of the exam. It allows schools, colleges, and training providers to request consideration before results are issued, using other available evidence of the learner's ability.

The service helps make assessment fair and supports the right to education under the UNCRC. It ensures learners are not unfairly disadvantaged by things they cannot control and helps give everyone an equal chance to succeed.

It also reflects the principle of acting in the best interests of the child and supports equity in assessment, linking to wider aims within Scotland to protect and promote children's rights in education.

By considering exceptional circumstances, we aim to ensure that all learners have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their achievement.

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can support children's rights by improving access to education, information, and opportunities for participation. It can help personalise learning, provide additional support, and make resources more accessible, which can enhance inclusion and engagement for learners. However, AI must be used responsibly to ensure children are protected from potential risks, including exposure to harmful content, data privacy concerns, and bias within systems. Ethical and careful use of AI is essential to ensuring equality, safeguarding wellbeing, and preventing discrimination, while still empowering children and young people to take part in learning and decision-making.

We established two working groups to explore the responsible use of AI internally and across the qualifications system.

One group is considering how AI can be used safely and responsibly in organisational processes, including information security, decision-making, and ensuring equality, human rights and children's rights remain central to its use.

The other group has engaged with learners, practitioners and other awarding bodies to understand the impact of generative AI on assessments. This informed an update to our position on the use of AI in assessments in 2025, which continues to be kept under review to ensure qualifications remain fair, valid and inclusive.

We wanted to get the voice of children and young people and the wider education community, so we conducted extensive research.

Practice example: AI research

The change we wanted to see

We wanted to provide learners, educators and centres with clear, up-to-date guidance on the use of generative AI in assessments. As AI continues to evolve rapidly, our aim was to ensure its use supports fair, valid and inclusive assessment while protecting the integrity of qualifications and upholding learners' rights.

What we did

We engaged with learners to understand their views on generative AI and how they use it in education. The research showed a range of opinions and gave us valuable insight into how learners are using AI in different contexts.

We used this evidence to inform a CRWIA and review our policy on the use of generative AI in assessments.

As a result, we updated our position to make it clear that generative AI may only be used where it does not compromise the integrity of assessments or certification. This helps ensure the qualifications system remains fair, transparent and supports learners' rights.

What difference did it make?

By making our position on the use of generative AI clear, we helped learners and educators better understand what is and is not acceptable in assessments. This enables learners to make informed choices and reduces the risk of unintentional malpractice.

Clear guidance also supports a fair and transparent qualifications system, helping to uphold learners' rights by ensuring assessments are valid, consistent and equitable for everyone.

What we learned

We learned that learners have a wide range of views and experiences of using generative AI. Listening to their perspectives gave us valuable evidence to inform our decision-making.

We also learned that involving learners in policy development provides a stronger foundation for creating guidance that is clear, relevant and supports children's rights.

Relevant UNCRC articles

- Article 2 - Non-discrimination
- Article 3 - Best interests of the child
- Article 12 - Respect for the views of the child
- Article 17 - Access to information
- Article 28 - Right to education
- Article 29 - Aims of education
- Article 30 - Minority language, culture and religion

Our next steps

We will continue to regularly review and update our position on generative AI as technology and detection tools evolve.

We will also maintain ongoing engagement with learners to understand how they are using AI and how their views are changing.

This will ensure our guidance remains clear, relevant and fair, and continues to support a transparent and rights-based approach to assessment.

Corporate Parenting

Care-experienced children and young people may face additional barriers in education due to their personal circumstances, including changes in care placements, wellbeing needs, or disrupted learning. We recognise that these factors can affect access to learning, assessment, and achievement.

We work with schools, colleges, and partners to support care-experienced learners to take part in qualifications on a fair and equal basis. This includes encouraging appropriate support and reasonable adjustments where needed, as well as ensuring that assessment arrangements take account of individual circumstances.

Replacement certificates

The change we wanted to see

We wanted care-experienced learners to be able to access their qualification records easily and fairly, without financial or practical barriers.

We also wanted to remove obstacles that can disproportionately affect them and make sure the system is fair, inclusive and supports their rights.

What we did

We introduced a free replacement certificate service for care-experienced learners.

The service allows eligible learners — those currently in care or with a history of Care Experience, including foster, kinship, residential or looked-after at home—to request replacement certificates without charge.

We put in place a clear and accessible process, including a dedicated request form, guidance for applicants and a simple verification process. This helps ensure that care-experienced learners can access important qualification records needed for education, employment and training.

What difference did it make?

We removed financial barriers for care-experienced learners by providing free replacement certificates, ensuring they can access evidence of their qualifications without cost.

This improved access to education, employment and training opportunities, helping learners progress with confidence and independence.

The service also made the qualifications system fairer and more inclusive by addressing a specific disadvantage that affects care-experienced individuals. It strengthened our corporate parenting responsibilities by responding directly to additional barriers and acting in learners' best interests.

What we learned

We learned that targeted support is essential to achieve real equity, as standard services on their own may not remove the specific barriers faced by learners with Care Experience.

Relevant UNCRC articles

- Article 2 - Non-discrimination
- Article 3 - Best interests of the child
- Article 17 - Access to information
- Article 28 - Right to education
- Article 29 - Aims of education

Our next steps

We will raise awareness of the service among learners and partners and continue to ensure the application process remains clear, simple and accessible. We will monitor uptake and impact to confirm it is reaching those who need it. We will also explore whether similar approaches could support other groups facing barriers and strengthen links with wider corporate parenting and children's rights commitments.

What lessons have we learned?

Children and young people should be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect them
Children and young people are more engaged when their views are actively listened to, considered, and reflected in decision-making processes relating to learning, policies, qualifications, and school improvement.

Communication and decision-making should be transparent, accessible, and age-appropriate
Information should be presented in clear and understandable language, with decisions explained openly to help children and young people feel respected, valued, and informed.

Inclusive and equitable practice improves outcomes
Effective services recognise and respond to the diverse needs of learners. This may require tailored support, reasonable adjustments, and approaches that promote participation for all children and young people, including those with additional support needs, disabilities, and different cultural backgrounds.

Wellbeing, inclusion, and participation are closely linked to achievement
Children and young people are more likely to achieve positive outcomes when they feel safe, respected, supported, included, and able to participate in decisions affecting them.

Collaboration strengthens support, transitions, and outcomes
Schools, families, health services, employers, colleges, training providers, and community partners achieve better outcomes when they work together effectively. Collaborative approaches can improve learners' wellbeing, support successful transitions, and help children and young people progress to positive destinations in learning, training, employment, or wider achievement.

Digital approaches can enhance learning and participation
Technology can improve access to learning and services; however, privacy, safety, and equitable access must be carefully considered.

Children's rights should be embedded across all aspects of practice
Children's rights are most effective when they are integrated into leadership, policies, learning and teaching, and decision-making processes rather than treated as a separate initiative.

What happens next?

As we reflect on the progress we have made in embedding children's rights to date, we also see areas where we can make further improvements and advancements. These are our goals and commitments for the future of children's rights at Qualifications Scotland:

- We will continue to embed children's rights in all aspects of leadership, planning, policy development, resource-allocation, and decision-making to ensure that the rights, wellbeing, and best interests of children and young people are central to our practice.
- We will continue to create meaningful opportunities for children and young people to participate in decisions that affect them, ensuring their views are listened to, respected, and used to influence change.
- We will communicate in ways that are inclusive, accessible, and age appropriate, enabling children and young people to understand information, express their views, and empower them to exercise their rights.
- We will continue to promote equality, inclusion, accessibility, and non-discrimination across all qualifications and assessments by identifying and removing barriers to participation, ensuring appropriate support, and embedding anti-racist practice and corporate parenting principles so that all learners have fair and equitable opportunities to achieve and succeed.
- We will use evidence, data, research and learner feedback to drive continuous improvement.
- We will promote transparency and accountability by clearly explaining decisions, seeking feedback, and ensuring children and young people know how to raise concerns, access support, and have their rights upheld.
- We will work collaboratively with the wider education community — including families, carers, employers, colleges, training providers, schools and community partners — to improve outcomes, support successful transitions, and help children and young people achieve positive destinations.
- We will use digital approaches to enhance learning, participation, and access to services while protecting privacy, promoting safety, and addressing barriers to digital inclusion.
- We will continue to ensure that our young employees are safe at work, treated fairly, have access to learning and development opportunities, and can share their views on decisions that affect them.
- We will ensure accreditation processes are fair, consistent, and evidence-based, maintaining national standards while supporting high-quality qualifications that meet the needs of learners and progression pathways.

Please note that we have also produced a version of this report that is child- and young person-friendly. You can find it on our website.