SQA

2020-23 Corporate Plan

Contents

A message from the Chair

Welcome to SQA's Corporate Plan for 2020–23. SQA remains committed to helping everyone in Scotland to realise their potential and to achieve their ambitions.

SQA holds a unique position in Scotland's education and training system, and we are acutely aware of our responsibility to uphold both the accessibility and the credibility of Scotland's qualifications system. SQA's qualifications and associated expert services help individuals to progress and develop in their own lives and careers, and also support employers in enabling their workforce to meet current and future demands.

This plan is ambitious and forward-looking, not just for our organisation, but also for Scotland, and I can assure you that every member of staff at SQA, no matter what role they play, is fully committed to delivering it. I commend it to you.

David Middleton CBE
SQA Chair

Introduction by the Chief Executive

SQA is Scotland's national awarding and accreditation body. It is an executive non-departmental public body that reports to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament. Our remit and function is outlined in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996.

SQA is proud to be at the heart of the Scottish education and training system. We have a reputation for providing a wide range of high-quality, flexible and internationally-recognised qualifications. We provide a number of expert services that enable organisations to meet their educational, development and regulatory requirements. We also ensure our qualifications, systems and services adapt to change and innovation, while providing value for money — ultimately improving the prospects of future generations, not just of young people in schools and colleges, but of adult learners, and society in general.

SQA is built on the strength and commitment of our people, who are enthusiastic about what we do and the public service we provide. We are proud of the difference we make to those who benefit from our qualifications and services (both those who take and those who deliver them), and also of the contribution we make to our local communities, through corporate parenting, volunteering, charity work, and our environmental initiatives.

We currently have 947 staff working in our offices in central Glasgow and Dalkeith, Midlothian. Naturally, as our relationships are key to our success, every day SQA staff are engaging with schools, colleges and training providers, and talking to candidates and parents, playing an active role in helping everyone understand what SQA can do for them.

SQA can't develop and deliver qualifications on its own; we also need to work with experienced teachers, lecturers and other subject experts. SQA employs around 15,000 such appointees each year. They work on everything from devising qualifications, creating assessments, and marking, to quality assurance visits and exam invigilation. SQA's appointees are vital in ensuring that our education and training systems work effectively.

We value our relationships with the centres that deliver our qualifications, including schools, colleges and training providers. Through them, SQA affects the lives of thousands of candidates each year, giving them opportunities and the chance to succeed — whatever that means for them. This, in turn, has a positive effect on their families and on society.

SQA also has an impact on the Scottish economy. A qualification attests to a person's ability; it says they have demonstrated particular knowledge and skills. This gives employers confidence that the people they employ can be a success. SQA plays a key role: as the provider of the vast majority of qualifications delivered by schools and colleges, and the largest supplier of vocational qualifications, it is SQA that enables this confidence and success in the world of work.

Our track record of success in Scotland allows us to share what we can do with people outside of Scotland. We provide qualifications in England and Wales, and in a number of regions around the world. This activity allows SQA to generate income which offsets our draw on the public purse, supports the Scottish Government's international agenda, and allows us to share good practice.

This plan sets out the context in which we operate, our strategic direction, and how we will monitor our performance against our targets.

As I write, we face the challenges of COVID-19. With the closure of education and training centres and disruption to assessment, this will undoubtedly have an enormous impact on the year ahead. We will develop specific plans to meet this challenge and, however the future unfolds, everyone at SQA is committed to delivering for learners. We will do so aligned with our values of being trusted, enabling and progressive.

Fiona Robertson
SQA Chief Executive

Who we are

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

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

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

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

Our purpose, mission, vision, outcomes and values

SQA'S PURPOSE

We are proud of our unique role in the education and skills system. Our work supports learners at all levels, in many different types of centre, and impacts universities, employers and the wider economy.

In delivering the strategic priorities outlined in this plan, SQA will work in partnership with our customers and stakeholders, in Scotland and elsewhere.

In doing so, we will demonstrate that we truly understand and live up to our purpose **to help people fulfil their full potential.**

SQA'S MISSION

SQA provides credible recognition of skills and knowledge through qualifications to support choice and progression in life and work

SQA'S VISION

Quality-assured qualifications provide opportunities to people, supporting progression in the labour market and a sustainable and successful economy

OUR OUTCOMES

To help us deliver on our purpose and mission, we have identified the following outcomes. These will be our strategic priorities for the period 2020–23.

- We provide a credible qualifications system

- We are flexible in meeting customer needs

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

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

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

SQA'S VALUES

We will continue to live up to our purpose, mission and vision by putting our values into practice.

Trusted

We are open and transparent in our communication and decision making

Progressive

We challenge the status quo and embrace new ideas and ways of working

Enabling

We set and uphold high standards of behaviour in line with our values

National policy context

National Performance Framework

In June 2018, the Scottish Government published a revised National Performance Framework (NPF). This sets out the purpose of Government and its strategic priorities.

For SQA, the NPF is the key guide to ensuring that our strategic priorities are aligned to those of Government, in particular:

ECONOMY

— We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy

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

EDUCATION

— We are well-educated, skilled and able to contribute to society

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

FAIR WORK AND BUSINESS

— We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone

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

INTERNATIONAL

— We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally

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

Appendix 1 shows this alignment.

National policy context

Policy and strategy landscape

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

More specifically, SQA plays a key part in many of Scotland's education and skills strategies and policies, from wide-ranging programmes such as Curriculum for Excellence, Developing the Young Workforce and Universities Scotland's Vision for higher education in 2030, to more specific initiatives such as implementing the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. We also have our Gaelic Language Plan 2015–20, in line with the National Gaelic Language Plan, which we will be revising and renewing for 2020–25. We are also to the fore in nationwide initiatives on skills development. For example, SQA will play its part in implementation of the Future Skills Action Plan, where this requires work to adapt qualifications and develop new ones. Previously, we joined a project group for the 15 to 24 Learner Journey Review. Relevant education and skills policies are listed in Appendix 2, section B.

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

How SQA is regulated

SQA itself is a regulator and also meets the standards required by a number of other regulators.

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

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

How SQA supports the Scottish policy landscape

SQA actively engages with the Scottish Government's Learning Directorate and other key stakeholders to influence education and skills policy. This includes through membership of the Curriculum and Assessment Board and Scottish Education Council.

In terms of delivery, SQA was a key partner in the delivery of Curriculum for Excellence and led on the implementation of the Scottish Government's Revision of National Qualifications programme.

Equality and corporate parenting

The public sector equality duty requires SQA to review policies and activities in order to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics.

SQA sets out its action plan in its Equality Mainstreaming Report and plays an active part in public sector equality forums and networks. This work is overseen by an equality steering group that ensures that progress towards equalities objectives is maintained and co-ordinated. SQA also benefits from a number of staff network groups that are aimed at advancing equality in the SQA workplace.
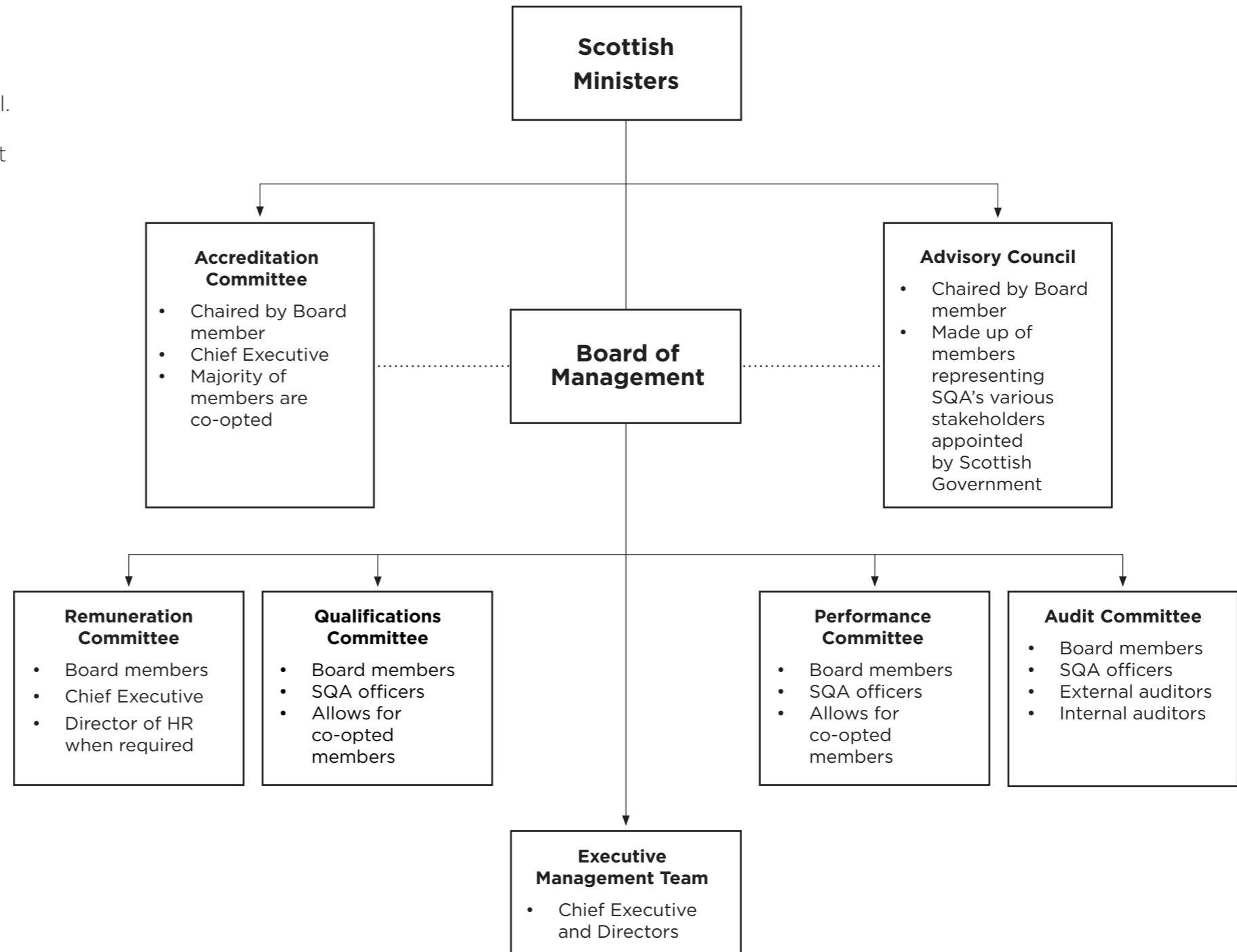
We use a similar approach to ensuring SQA remains an active and committed corporate parent; a steering group supports a wide range of activies — including an annual exam results day celebration for care-experienced young people.

Our governance

SQA's role

SQA's purpose is to help people fulfil their potential. We do this by providing them with credible recognition of their skills and knowledge to support their choices in life and work.

Our Board is appointed by and accountable to Scottish Ministers. Our governance structure is set out to the right:

Scottish Ministers

Board of Management

Accreditation Committee
- Chaired by Board member
- Chief Executive
- Majority of members are co-opted

Advisory Council
- Chaired by Board member
- Made up of members representing SQA's various stakeholders appointed by Scottish Government

Remuneration Committee
- Board members
- Chief Executive
- Director of HR when required

Qualifications Committee
- Board members
- SQA officers
- Allows for co-opted members

Performance Committee
- Board members
- SQA officers
- Allows for co-opted members

Audit Committee
- Board members
- SQA officers
- External auditors
- Internal auditors

Executive Management Team
- Chief Executive and Directors

Our outcomes in detail

We provide a credible qualifications system

What this means

SQA's mission is to provide qualifications which give credible recognition of people's skills and knowledge, and so support their choices and progression in life and work.

This means that SQA must develop a range of qualifications to support individuals at different stages in their education, training and work. These qualifications must also fulfil the current and future needs of the Scottish economy.

Maintaining clear standards of assessment is vital to the credibility of SQA's qualifications and to public confidence in the system. Key to this credibility is the good design and delivery of assessment. Other crucial aspects include robust approaches to quality assurance, data management, and support for centres and certification.

SQA plays a pivotal role in the Scottish education and skills system. It fulfils its role by working closely with other stakeholders in the system, including the Scottish Government, Skills Development Scotland and Education Scotland, other public bodies, delivering centres, employers, parents/carers and, of course, learners.

SQA takes the same approach to delivering credible qualifications when we operate outside of Scotland. Wherever SQA is active, we ensure we play our part in delivering credible qualifications — taking what we already know to new markets and bringing back to Scotland any good practice we discover there.

We are flexible in meeting customer needs

What this means

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

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

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

Our outcomes in detail

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

What this means

As a public body, SQA has a duty to the people of Scotland to use its resources sensibly and carefully, in ways that deliver best value. SQA must therefore deploy its resources as effectively as possible and must always be alert to opportunities for improving efficiency and reducing costs.

SQA must organise itself to maximise the impact of its resources to ensure that we both deliver today and improve our delivery for tomorrow. Building resilience is therefore vital to ensure we face the future with confidence. Investing wisely in our people, technology and processes is fundamental to ensuring we have a sustainable future.

SQA knows that dialogue with the Scottish Government is a vital part of this, and that we must continue to make the case for the resources we need both for ongoing operations and in order to facilitate change.

SQA also looks for appropriate opportunities to draw on its core capabilities to generate income from commercial activity. SQA must therefore also be competitive, opportunity-focused, and have a proportionate appetite for risk.

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

What this means

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

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

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

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Our outcomes in detail

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

What this means

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

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

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

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

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

How we will deliver our priorities

The outcomes outlined in this plan are devised with a three-year horizon in mind. Therefore we have undertaken an exercise across SQA to determine the series of specific deliverables we have committed to prioritising.

These are outlined in the SQA's Priorities document that accompanies this plan.

There are priorities for both SQA's awarding and accreditation functions. Although our overall purpose, mission, vision, values and outcomes are shared, the specific activities each function has prioritised reflect their distinct but complementary roles.

Each deliverable will be supported by one or more key indicators. These indicators will be reviewed regularly by SQA's Executive Management Team. This will allow us to monitor performance as we move towards our outcomes, taking us from where we are today to where we aim to be in the future.

Our progress will be overseen by SQA's Performance Committee, a subcommittee of the SQA Board of Management.

2020–21 income and expenditure budget

	£m
Qualifications Entry Income	42.6
Other Operating Income	9.1
Total Operating Income	**51.7**
Staff	41.6
Appointees	24.5
Property Costs	3.3
Other Operating Costs	22.1
Programme Grant Expenditure	1.0
Depreciation	3.8
Total Resource Expenditure	**96.3**
Net Resource Expenditure	**44.6**
Capital Expenditure	4.2
Total Net Expenditure	**48.8**

Total Net Expenditure Funded By:

Resource Grant in Aid per Scottish Budget	20.6
Additional Resource Grant Funding[1]	15.9
Programme Grant Funding[2]	1.0
Property Related Grant in Aid	3.3
Non-Cash Resource Grant (Depreciation)	3.8
Capital Grant in Aid	4.2
TOTAL SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT FUNDING	**48.8**

1. Scottish Government recognises that SQA will require further Grant in Aid to meet operational and Programme Grant costs that are beyond those covered within the published Scottish Budget. The additional Grant in Aid requirement will be agreed with Scottish Government and our spending plans developed in line with available resources.

2. Programme Grant Funding is funding received from the Scottish Government to fund the Accreditation function. Previous programme grant relating to RNQ has been included within the Grant in Aid figures reflecting a transfer to business as usual.

Appendix 1

Scottish Government's eleven National Outcomes and SQA's four strategic priorities

ECONOMY

We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy

INTERNATIONAL

We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally

We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally

We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe

FAIR WORK AND BUSINESS

We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential

EDUCATION

We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society

We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone

We are healthy and active

We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment

We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely

We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

OUR PURPOSE
To focus on creating a more successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased wellbeing, and sustainable and inclusive economic growth

OUR VALUES
We are a society which treats all our people with kindness, dignity and compassion, respects the rule of law, and acts in an open and transparent way

Appendix 2

Government strategies and policies applicable to the work of SQA

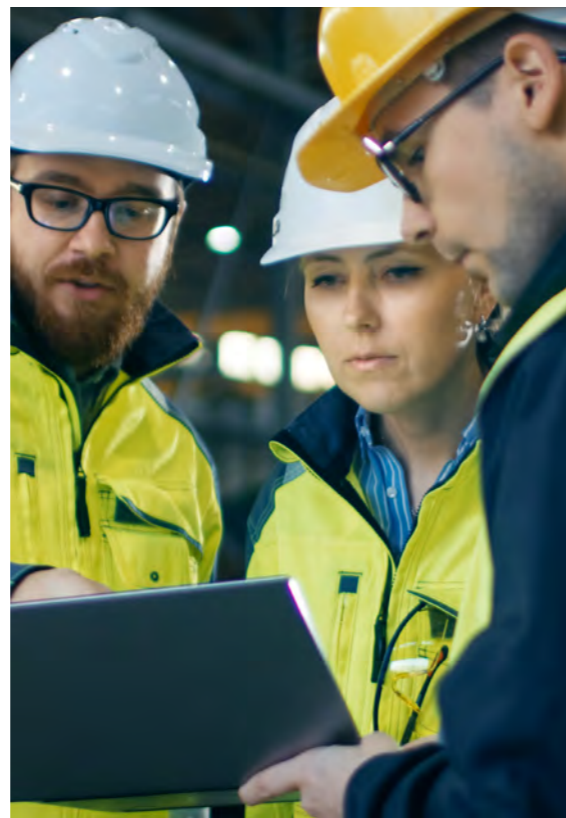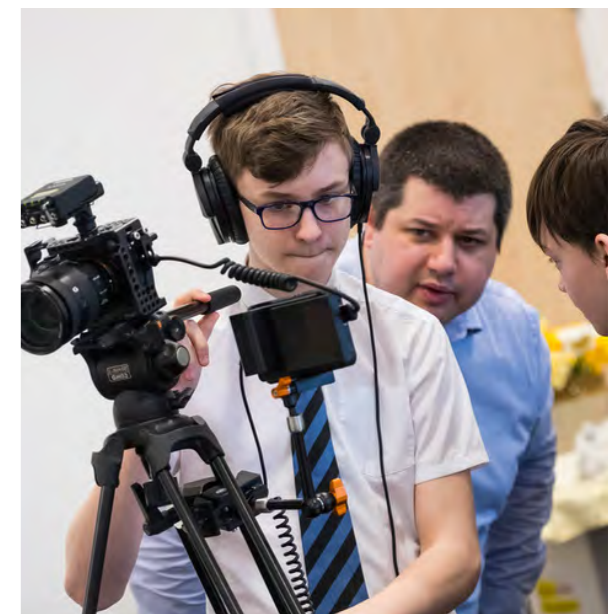### A. National strategies/policies

- National Performance Framework
- Protecting Scotland's Future: the Government's programme for Scotland 2019-2020
- Scotland's Economic Strategy
- Scotland's Labour Market Strategy
- Fair Work Action Plan
- A fairer Scotland for women: gender pay gap action plan
- Disability Employment Delivery Plan
- Progressing the human rights of children in Scotland 2018-21: Action Plan
- Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA): Guidance
- National Gaelic Language Plan 2018-2023

B. Education and skills strategies/policies

- National Improvement Framework (NIF)
- Curriculum for Excellence
- Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
- 15 to 24 learner journey review
- Enterprise and Skills Review
- Future Skills Action Plan
- Scottish Government response to the UK Government apprenticeship levy
- An Empowered System
- The national model of professional learning
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics: education and training strategy
- Statutory Guidance on Gaelic Education
- Transforming Scotland into a maths positive nation: final report of the Making Maths Count group
- Cyber Resilience: learning and skills action plan 2018–2020
- Review of Personal and Social Education
- LGBTI Inclusive Education Recommendations
- Learning for Sustainability Vision 2030+ report
- Expansion of Funded Early Learning and Childcare

C. Statutory requirements for public bodies

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