

SQA Corporate Plan 2019-22



Welcome

Welcome to SQA's Corporate Plan for 2019–22.

SQA remains committed to playing its part in enabling the people and businesses of Scotland to realise their potential and to achieve their ambitions. In this fast changing, connected world, both a first-class qualifications system and the associated expert services are essential to the success of Scotland's economy and our society. Such a system gives learners of all ages and all backgrounds a platform to showcase their knowledge and skills, and gives employers the workforce they need to thrive.

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

SQA is committed to successfully delivering for the people and businesses of Scotland. Our people are passionate about what we do, and the benefits our qualifications and services bring to individuals, society, and the economy.

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

SQA has many strengths, and we use these to deliver our objectives and meet our responsibilities as an active and responsible public service in Scotland.

SQA is proud to sit at the heart of the Scottish education and training system. We have an international 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 a range of educational, development and regulatory requirements. We also ensure our qualifications, systems and services adapt to change and innovations, 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 take, deliver and benefit from our qualifications and services, and also of the contribution we make to our local communities, through corporate parenting, volunteering, charity work, and environmental initiatives.



SQA's operational context

SQA is Scotland's national awarding and accreditation body — an executive non-departmental public body that reports to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament.

Government and legislative drivers

SQA's remit and function is outlined in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. This is the primary legislation that provides SQA with a statutory basis for our operational activity. Our role is also shaped by a number of other pieces of legislation.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 places a number of responsibilities on SQA. This legislation encourages public bodies to think carefully about how their work affects young people, and strengthens the rights of young people in Scotland. SQA embraces these responsibilities, notably through our status as a Corporate Parent. SQA remains a committed and passionate Corporate Parent; we work closely with care-experienced young people through our relationships with Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways.

Other legislation also influences how SQA operates, for example we are subject to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. We also have a range of responsibilities in relation to personal data. SQA carried out a successful organisation-wide project to ensure a seamless transition from compliance under the previous legislation to compliance under the new 2018 legislation which implemented the European Union General Data Protection Regulations into UK law.

There are a number of Scottish Government drivers that influence our strategy. Firstly, SQA is guided by the National Performance Framework. The revised framework, published in June 2018, was used as an opportunity to reflect on SQA's strategy, choices and priorities. Appendix 1 shows SQA strategic goals mapped to the new framework. SQA is very clear: we share the priorities of the Scottish Government and see a clear line of sight between our goals, the wider, national priorities, and the United Nations Development Goals, as incorporated into the national framework.

In the sphere of education and skills, SQA's work is heavily influenced by the Curriculum for Excellence. The latest phase of this programme, the Revisions to National Qualifications, continues. The changes made to the earlier stages — in particular, changes to the structure of National 5 qualifications — have now fed through the system and have been successfully implemented. This provides a blueprint for the remaining work on Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications.

The National Framework for Scottish Education also continues to drive SQA's work. It is also informed by STEM education and training strategy, the Digital Learning and Teaching strategy, and the Education Governance: Next Steps review. SQA continues to have in place effective processes to ensure we consult with a wide range of stakeholders and accurately capture their feedback and requirements.

Alongside our work with schools, SQA continues to work closely with colleges and training providers. We are proud of the role our vocational qualifications play in ensuring the people of Scotland have access to the skills that employers need, thus helping to enable individuals and employers to reach their potential.

SQA works closely with Skills Development Scotland, and our qualifications form the backbone of Modern Apprenticeships right across the economy. They also form a key component of the Developing the Young Workforce's Foundation Apprenticeships, which SQA also certifies.

SQA aims to be a leading public body. To ensure we live up to that ambition SQA also supports a number of policy initiatives that are common across the public sector. These include being a responsible employer — following the Fair Work Framework and being a Living Wage employer — and supporting Scotland's internationalisation.

Other drivers

Alongside these government and legislative factors, there are a large number of other trends and contexts that influence what we do.

SQA operates successfully outside of Scotland, helping to ensure Scotland is well represented in the increasingly globalised world of skills and education. SQA plays a key part in facilitating transnational education: through the delivery of qualifications such as the Advanced Certificates and Diplomas; by our network of centres across the world; and through our commitment to helping people succeed, wherever they are from. This activity is good for SQA, and good for Scotland, as it allows us to learn and bring home new ways of working and thinking.

SQA is also always mindful of the need for employers of all types to access a skilled and diverse workforce; individuals with the right skills, knowledge and capabilities are engines for sustainable economic growth. This is good for both the individual and for the wider economy, so we work hard to ensure our qualifications and services support these positive outcomes.

We know we operate in a rapidly changing world — and know that SQA must keep pace with these changes. This influences the work we have prioritised in our multi-strand Change Programme, for example our focus on the future of assessment, and in our ongoing investment in an enabling technology platform that will allow us to change and grow with the needs of our stakeholders.



Who we are

SQA's values

Three values — to be trusted, enabling, and progressive — are central to how SQA works with and listens to its learners, customers, stakeholders and partners, and both the wider public and people within the organisation itself.

We seek to be trusted by everyone we interact with: the candidate receiving results, the teacher requesting guidance, and the employer helping to review a qualification. Our customers trust us to get it right for them, and by building on this positive experience, we seek to be trusted to deliver by our partners.

The qualifications, services, expertise, support and experience we provide enable the people who rely on us to succeed. This means individuals reach their potential, companies succeed, and communities are enabled to work towards sustainable and inclusive growth.

Our commitment to being progressive can be seen in our approach to developing our qualifications, and in our development of the SQA website based on research into how users interact with it. We apply this way of thinking to our assessment practice and use of technology, and to the new relationships we build. SQA aims to be quicker, smarter and more flexible, while retaining the rigour which must underpin a quality education and skills system.



SQA's purpose and activities

SQA is the national accreditation and awarding body in Scotland. The Education (Scotland) Act 1996 sets out SQA's functions and the governance arrangements to oversee SQA's distinct accreditation, regulatory and awarding functions. SQA is sponsored by the Scottish Government's Learning Directorate.

In its accreditation role, SQA accredits vocational qualifications that are offered across Scotland, including Scottish Vocational Qualifications, and approves and regulates awarding bodies that wish to award them.

SQA is the statutory awarding body for qualifications in Scotland. Its duties are to develop, validate, quality assure and award a national framework of qualifications for Scotland. In addition, SQA has a statutory duty as the regulator for National Qualifications in Scotland.

As an awarding body, SQA works with schools, colleges, universities, industry, and government, to provide high-quality, flexible and relevant qualifications throughout lifelong learning. It strives to ensure that its qualifications are inclusive and accessible to all, that they recognise the achievements of learners, and that they provide clear pathways to further learning or employment.



Qualifications

Qualifications serve a range of important purposes in validating learning for individuals and for employers:

- They support the standards of achievement required by the economy, businesses, and society.
- They show the achievements of the individual.
- They provide a record of an individual's progression as they develop through life, allowing them to build on their prior learning.

To achieve this, SQA qualifications:

- reflect the appropriate level of learning, and capture all aspects of the required skills
- are flexible enough to suit different learning styles and different employers' needs
- provide units of learning that are relevant, valued, and can be used to benefit the individual, society and business
- allow for progression through lifelong learning, as the needs of individuals, society and businesses change
- are of a quality and standard that ensures that value and credibility is maintained over time

There are SQA qualifications for everyone:

- students in schools and colleges, whoever they are
- trainees and apprentices, wherever they work and study
- people who already have qualifications, and those who don't
- people who are in employment, and those who aren't
- people at the start of their education journey, and those mid-career

SQA qualifications cover a broad range of skills and knowledge, from Languages (including British Sign Language), Mathematics, History, and Science, to Accounting, Early Years Childcare, and Customer Service. In addition, SQA develops Customised Awards that are tailored to the requirements of particular employers, and provides English Language qualifications for learners with English as an additional language.

Almost all young people in Scotland gain SQA qualifications in secondary school or in colleges. Increasingly, SQA also provides qualifications from junior to professional levels in the workplace. SQA ensures that all qualifications are developed and maintained to the same rigorous high standards, and that they all make valuable and unique contributions to Scotland's Skills Strategy.

Accreditation

SQA Accreditation has a statutory remit under Scottish legislation to accredit and quality assure qualifications in Scotland, thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers, and Scottish Government. It does this by independently approving and regulating awarding bodies operating in Scotland and accrediting their qualifications, which include Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), Regulatory and Licensing Qualifications, and other competence-based qualifications. SQA Accreditation has a statutory remit to accredit any type of qualification other than university degrees.

It is accountable to an Accreditation Committee, which is a statutory committee established by the Education (Scotland) Act 1996.

What we will do

Long-term factors

As a responsible public body, SQA carries out its function in a way which is sustainable; we need to continue to deliver for the people of Scotland over the long term.

A number of factors have been identified as critical to SQA's longer-term success. Our work begins to prepare us to meet the challenges and accept the opportunities on the road ahead.

Firstly, SQA must ensure its reputation is upheld and maintained. SQA sits at the heart of a complex educational ecosystem — one Scotland should be proud of. But we recognise this system works most effectively when there are high levels of trust. Given this, the need to communicate effectively, develop the right qualifications and supporting operations, and listen to all our stakeholders — including young people — is a vital part of our future.

SQA must also play a key role in ensuring Scotland is well-educated, skilled and able to contribute to society. Educational attainment matters — but it can only be properly measured if the underlying qualifications and certifications are expertly managed to ensure standards are maintained across different qualifications and across time. Therefore, SQA recognises the long-term need for standards, and a commitment to quality assurance and fairness remains at the heart of our approach to delivering qualifications.

We also know that the long-term economic prospects of any nation depend on a workforce with the right skills. SQA can play its part in helping business develop and grow, supporting innovation and attracting inward investment, by ensuring we support and meet Scotland's current and future skills needs. We will continue to ensure our portfolio of qualifications meets these needs, and we will continue to ensure that the voice of employers is heard in the education and skills system.

Through all our activity, SQA understands that we must continue to play our part as a leading public body. This means leading in progressing the Fair Work Framework, Equality Strategy, and Corporate Parenting, and supporting apprenticeships with our own recruitment strategy. But we must also ensure we remain ever mindful of the need to fulfil our statutory functions efficiently. SQA will continue to look for ways to drive value for money and seek to invest in technologies that will provide a platform for the future.



Strategic Goals for 2019–22

1	Develop and deliver high-quality qualifications, products and services for the benefit of a broad range of learners and of Scotland.
2	Provide leadership and expertise in a range of areas including assessment, qualification development and quality enhancement.
3	Support the Scottish Government's internationalisation agenda to maximise the benefits of international engagement and co-operation.
4	Ensure communication and engagement between SQA and our learners, customers and stakeholders is appropriate, clear and timely, and tailored to their needs.
5	Deliver high-quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive services to our customers.
6	Ensure the culture of our workplace embodies the values of Scotland's Fair Work Framework through its five pillars — effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect — to support the wellbeing of our staff and their commitment to the success of SQA.
7	Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body and key player in the skills, training and education landscape.
8	Continue to pursue a longer-term business model that would enable SQA to reduce its dependency on the public purse, and invest in and improve the education and skills system.
9	Independently accredit, quality assure and regulate approved awarding bodies and qualifications thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers and the Scottish Government.

How we will do it

In delivering on our aims we will ensure that, as an executive non-departmental public body, we adhere to the required standards of governance and public accountability. We will also strive to deliver value for money through continuous improvement of our performance, balancing cost and quality. Thus SQA will play its part in achieving sustainable development for Scotland: our own improvement work will help us to further support learners to develop the knowledge and skills required to succeed in the labour market, and help us to support employers by ensuring we provide them with the supply of skilled staff they require, both today and in the future.

Efficiency, effectiveness and economy

SQA is committed to ensuring that arrangements are in place that will lead to an economical, efficient and effective use of the organisation's resources. The efficiency agenda forms part of SQA's annual planning and budgeting process, and efficiency savings that are measurable and sustainable are identified, budgeted, and monitored throughout the financial year. SQA does this through the work of the Benefits Realisation Group, a cross-organisational group that captures and monitors benefits from our activities and ensures they are delivered.

Customer engagement and feedback

SQA has a deep commitment to continuing to engage with all of our customers and stakeholders. We aspire to improve and develop how we do this, and to become more responsive to feedback. We are therefore working hard to develop new approaches to customer communications and to being better able to incorporate feedback into our decision-making processes. We have, of course, a statutory duty to ensure that what we do meets the needs of the people of Scotland — and we want to do this in collaboration with our customers and stakeholders.



Our people

SQA succeeds through the commitment and expertise of its staff. They are effective and dedicated. We recognise the best way to maintain this is through providing opportunities to enjoy fulfilling careers. We provide staff with a range of opportunities to develop their skills, both through our commitment to continuous professional and personal development and by supporting a range of volunteering opportunities.

We are committed to working co-operatively and collaboratively with our two recognised trade unions, Unite and Unison, through the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC). This ongoing relationship aims to develop and support our engagement with the Fair Work Framework's: five pillars – effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. SQA recognises the added value that constructive engagement with the recognised unions brings to all staff and the organisation as a whole. The JNCC also recently developed a framework for HR policy development and review which involves our trade union representatives and staff volunteers, to achieve further enhancement to staff engagement and employee voice.

Programme management

SQA continues to review projects based on the overall business priorities. This is achieved by having a single approval process and governance framework. Resource and budget management are subsequently allocated based on this approach. This ensures that resources are focused on the appropriate business projects. The governance of the programme of projects rests with the Executive Management Team.



Measuring and evidencing performance

The wider management team of Directors and Heads of Service meets on a quarterly basis to measure performance. A suite of key performance indicators is reviewed and discussed. These measures are also reported to, and considered by, SQA Board of Management.

Key performance indicators allow SQA to monitor the delivery of the strategic goals. These goals, in turn, demonstrate how SQA meets both government and legislative obligations, while also ensuring forward planning sufficient to meet the challenges of the future.

SQA continues to meet objectives and fulfil obligations. With a focus on the right goals and measures, we remain well positioned for a successful future.

Below are examples of the ways we measure performance:

Outcomes	Performance Indicators
Delivering the national examinations diet	Completion of deadlines driven by our examination timetable Completion of all preparatory work, including any major revisions, to an agreed schedule
Delivering HN and SVQ qualifications	Number of verification visits Decisions made by external verifiers Resolution of issues which emerge
Recognition as an employer	Investors in Young People (IYYP) Award Scottish Living Wage Employer accreditation Gold Healthy Working Lives Award Disability Confident Employment Scheme Fair Work Convention
Stakeholder engagement	SQA's profile (awareness) Credibility of SQA qualifications SQA's values
Financial performance	Performance against forecast expenditure
Compliance with legal obligations	Freedom of information (FOI) Data protection legislation Environmental impact Public sector equality duty

2019–20 income and expenditure budget

	£m
Qualifications Entry Income	43.1
Other Income	8.3
Grant Funding	14.3
Additional Grant Funding ¹	20.0
Programme Grant Funding ²	6.4
Total Income	92.1

Staff	36.8
Appointees	23.3
Other Operating Costs	25.5
Programme Grant Expenditure	6.5
Total Expenditure	92.1
Income and Expenditure Surplus (Deficit)	0

1. Scottish Government recognises that, as was the case for 2018-19, SQA will require further Grant in Aid to meet operational and Programme Grant costs that are beyond those covered within current SG budgets. The additional Grant in Aid requirement will be updated in line with scheduled reforecasting exercises.
2. Programme Grant Funding is funding received from bodies such as the Scottish Government to fund specific activity such as revisions to National Qualifications.

Mapping of goals to National Outcomes

SQA’s strategic goals are our nine corporate goals

1. Develop and deliver high-quality qualifications, products and services for the benefit of a broad range of learners and of Scotland.
2. Provide leadership and expertise in a range of areas including assessment, qualification development and quality enhancement.
3. Support the Scottish Government’s internationalisation agenda to maximise the benefits of international engagement and cooperation.
4. Ensure communication and engagement between SQA and our learners, customers and stakeholders is appropriate, clear and timely, and tailored to their needs.
5. Deliver high-quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive services to our customers.
6. Ensure the culture of our workplace embodies the values of Scotland’s Fair Work Framework through its five pillars — effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect — to support the wellbeing of our staff and their commitment to the success of SQA.
7. Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body and key player in the skills, training and education landscape.
8. Continue to pursue a longer-term business model that would enable SQA to reduce its dependency on the public purse, and invest in and improve the education and skills system.
9. Independently accredit, quality assure and regulate approved awarding bodies and qualifications thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers and the Scottish Government.

Scottish Government’s eleven National Outcomes





Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority

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