



Responsible Business Annual Review 2024



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Introduction

2025 is set to be a pivotal year for Scotland's education sector and for SQA colleagues, marking the replacement of the organisation with Qualifications Scotland. It is fitting, therefore, that we reflect on the many ways in which our dedicated colleagues have gone above and beyond in their responsibilities over the course of the organisation's final year as SQA and give credence to the countless initiatives that we will bring with us into the new organisation.

In this Responsible Business Annual Review, we will outline the various ways in which SQA has supported, served and nurtured its employees, stakeholders, customers, and communities. Additionally, we will acknowledge SQA's environmental impact and our contributions towards a greener society.

Our responsibilities can be divided into three main sections:

- Our people
- Our customers and communities
- Our environment

Our Responsible Business vision

SQA strives to make a meaningful difference to the individuals and communities it serves. We achieve this by fostering a shared understanding of what it means to be an organisation that delivers on our promises and maintains a positive impact on our customers, the environment, and the people in it. Our vision is to be a trusted, positive and inspirational organisation to work for and with, while promoting equality and ensuring that every person feels significant and valued.

Our Responsible Business strategy



Business in the Community Scotland



SQA is a member of Business in the Community Scotland (BITC), which believes that the prosperity of both business and society is inextricably linked.

BITC assists businesses in prioritising the creation of healthy communities and a sustainable environment within their strategies. It encourages the use of the [BITC Responsible Business Map](#) to guide their progress towards these goals while ensuring long-term financial value. BITC addresses critical societal issues and drives change in workplaces and communities by harnessing the ambitions of businesses to create a fairer society through various programmes, events, and research.

'SQA are a time-honoured member of Business in the Community and consistently demonstrate commitment to furthering the Responsible Business agenda. They prioritise meaningful and impactful development of their employees through volunteering programmes. Most notably having joined our newly established Social Mobility Working Group, which aims to address social mobility through business collaboration in Scotland. We are excited to keep working with SQA as an ally to the Responsible Business movement.'

— Louisa Macdonell, BITC Scotland Director

Our people

At SQA, our Responsible Business mission is centred on nurturing the diverse talents of our colleagues, empowering them to realise their potential and achieve their ambitions while ensuring they are treated with dignity and respect. We recognise that individuals perform best when they feel their best; therefore, the mental and physical health of our staff is a top priority. In this section, we will discuss how SQA supports its employees in achieving an optimal work-life balance, outline our wellbeing initiatives, and highlight the contributions our colleagues make to broader societal causes.

We help our people flourish

Our colleagues are our most valuable resource. We acknowledge their humanity and hard work, recognising that they have obligations, concerns, and interests beyond their roles at SQA. Alongside our Human Resources (HR) procedures and policies, we provide a variety of programmes, initiatives, and employee benefits that transform SQA from merely a workplace into a thriving community.

SQA provides its colleagues with a considerable range of benefits, including:

Discounts via the SQA Lifestyles website — 58% of colleagues spent £626.9k via the website in 2024, and saved £32.8k!

A well-established Employee Assistance programme available to all colleagues.

In-house flu vaccinations given to 200 colleagues in 2024.

Financial Wellbeing Workshops were attended by 137 colleagues in 2024.

All colleagues make use of our flexible hybrid working arrangements.

Investing in good mental health

As a responsible employer, SQA has taken significant steps to identify and signpost support for the health, wellbeing, and safety of all our employees. As part of our commitment to the Fair Work Framework, we encourage colleagues to invest in their own mental health through a series of measures outlined in this section.

'The wellbeing strategy is part of our commitment to colleagues. Our strategy offers a broad range of help for social, financial, physical and psychological wellbeing. We will continue to support its development and implementation so that all colleagues feel they have the support they need.'

— Executive Management Team

Wellbeing

SQA was awarded 'We Invest in Wellbeing' accreditation



We encouraged colleagues to participate in the 'We Invest in Wellbeing' accreditation process. We are pleased to announce that **we have been awarded the standard accreditation by Investors in People.**

Achieving accreditation means that we've got all the right principles in place, and have developed a good wellbeing strategy that is supported by all of you. We are excited about what's to come!

We will work with Investors in People to create plans to develop a culture of continual health and wellbeing improvement.



Wellbeing support at SQA

We introduced wellbeing rooms providing colleagues with a space to take a break from the main office environment. These rooms offer a quiet area for meditation, prayer, contemplation, reading, colouring, or simply relaxing. Our team of experienced mental health first aiders are readily available to support our colleagues if required.



MACtastic

SQA's Make a Change (MAC) Group brings vibrancy and dynamism to our health and wellbeing ethos. Volunteers from the MAC Group meet regularly to create and implement engaging, innovative, and informative health and wellbeing activities and initiatives, which colleagues look forward to each year, which are eagerly anticipated by colleagues from one year to the next.



Our 2024 campaigns included:

- Food and Mood sessions to support mental health awareness
- A walking challenge to encourage fitness and activity
- Flu vaccines available to all colleagues
- A Christmas advent calendar, with each window offering a health and wellbeing tip to assist colleagues during the festive season

Food and Mood programme

130 colleagues attended a six-week 'Food and Mood' programme which aimed to promote healthy diet and nutrition, with an emphasis on how good gut bacteria can improve mental health.

Walking challenge

In just one month, 128 SQA colleagues walked an incredible 45.9 million steps, equating to 225 thousand miles!

Working towards greater equality

Equality, diversity, inclusion and wellbeing calendar



We developed an equality, diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing calendar which raises awareness of global events throughout the year, from World Hijab Day to Ramadan. Acknowledging these events cultivates a sense of belonging and engagement among our colleagues, while also providing a framework for hosting equality, diversity, inclusion, and wellbeing activities. The calendar has enhanced collaboration not only within our internal networks but also across our entire workforce.



Colleague-led networks

ACE♥ network

ACE♥ stands for ‘appreciate culture and ethnicity’, and the network exists to provide support for our Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues, acknowledging key annual dates such as Race Equality Week, Black History Month, South Asian Heritage Month, Chinese New Year and Eid al-Adha, among others.



We encourage colleagues, regardless of their race or ethnicity, to participate in and support the network to work together towards achieving our aims and objectives.

The ACE Network hosted a private screening of the film ‘Arise Firebird: Transcending Workplace Trauma’. The film tells the stories of three professional women of colour who were forced out of the corporate world due to sexism and racism, and how they rebuilt their lives and careers on their own terms. This sparked a discussion about what SQA is doing to advance race equality and mental health.

‘...we do not want our Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues to feel discomfort in silence in the workplace. We want our siblings of colour and allies to be able to talk about things in a safe space. We want to make sure that we are supporting each other and recognise that we all have a role to play in making our organisation a safe space. We all have a role to play in helping our Black, Asian and minority ethnic colleagues to feel they are working in an inclusive and diverse environment.’

— Michelle Cuninghame, the current Chair of the [Appreciate Culture and Ethnicity \(ACE\) Network](#)

British anti-racism movement — staff event

Romain Muhammad, the founder and CEO of Diversify — an agency dedicated to empowering marginalised communities in the professional world — joined our ACE Network to host a staff information session which explored the intricate relationship between local and global struggles against racism and colonialism, offering insights into the complexities of race, identity, and resistance on a global scale, and its relevance to Scotland.

Disability Network

The Disability Network aims to promote and enhance disability equality within SQA, positioning our organisation as an inclusive employer of choice that welcomes, embraces, and celebrates the contributions of a diverse workforce. In 2024, the Disability Network organised a range of events to commemorate Deaf Awareness Week and Disability History Month (14 November–20 December 2024), as well as events to raise awareness of Cerebral Palsy, neurodivergence and autism.

Humanising neurodiversity at work

In recognition of Neurodiversity Celebration Week (18–24 March 2024), the Disability Network, Women's Network, and ACE Network invited keynote speaker, Samantha Hiew (Medical Science PhD), to present **'Humanising Neurodiversity at Work'** to SQA colleagues. Sam has worked with over 80 FTSE companies to promote neuroinclusion. During the session, Samantha recommended ways in which SQA colleagues' can support neurodivergent colleagues and leverage the strengths of a neurodiverse workforce.



SQA Women's Network

The Women's Network offers support and guidance to colleagues who identify as female at every stage of their lives and careers. Through open meetings and events, they create opportunities for networking, enabling women to give and receive support, as well as to influence SQA policy development in areas of equality and inclusion.

On International Women's Day 2024, Victoria McIver was awarded the Women of the Year Award following a vote by her colleagues.

One colleague described Victoria as: 'someone who will always support her colleagues by taking the tough calls, or dealing with the angry customers'.



Our Rainbow Network

The Rainbow Network is SQA's LGBTQIA+ colleague network, comprising LGBTQIA+ individuals and allies. Its purpose is to ensure that the views and concerns of SQA's LGBTQIA+ community are represented and considered, while also providing advocacy and support for all LGBTQIA+ colleagues. The network plays a crucial role in fostering a workplace that embraces LGBTQIA+ diversity and inclusion.

We were especially proud to have the network's efforts recognised by being finalists for two Herald Awards:

The Rainbow Network was shortlisted for 'Diversity Campaign of the Year' for their Rainbow Query project — an anonymous question-and-answer service designed to address barriers to discussing LGBTQIA+ topics and to promote inclusive practices.

Meanwhile, our Rainbow Network Chair, Sarah Krasewitz, was shortlisted for the Herald's 'Diversity Hero of the Year Award'. As well as having a full-time role in SQA, Sarah has been instrumental in raising awareness and understanding of LGBTQIA+ issues and advancing equality throughout SQA and beyond.

In 2024, the Rainbow Network hosted a Drag Brunch themed 'intersectionality', to break down barriers and strengthen connections among team members. It was an opportunity to celebrate the tapestry of identities that make up our organisation.





Our new community networks



Our Young Talent Network

SQA's Young Talent Network serves to give colleagues aged 16–28 a platform where they will be heard, recognised and supported to influence change and ensure SQA fulfils its commitment to developing the young workforce.

We held a Young Talent Network panel event which gave members of the Young Talent Network an opportunity to chat openly with our senior leaders and ask questions that will help them to channel their own career aspirations.

The Young Talent Network Manifesto opposite demonstrates the three strands of the Network's aims:



Men's Shed

The Men's Shed serves to encourage male colleagues to share their thoughts, experiences, and challenges in a supportive environment, while also enabling the organisation to contribute to men's physical and mental wellbeing.

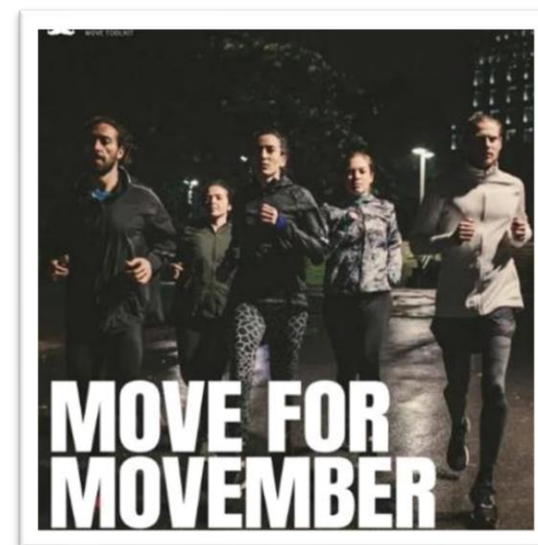
Over the years, 'Movember' has been a hugely successful event in our organisation, with many colleagues proudly sporting moustaches in support of men's health, uniting us in raising awareness of critical issues such as prostate cancer, testicular cancer, and men's mental health.

Celebrating the success of Movember and introducing Move-ember

In 2024, The Men's Shed elevated Movember with a new twist: 'Move-ember'. While growing a moustache has long been a powerful symbol of support, this year we shifted our focus to emphasising physical activity and mental wellbeing.

Carers Network

The Carers Network was launched in June 2023 to support SQA colleagues who are also carers by providing them with information and resources to help them to balance their responsibilities. Since its inception, the network has contributed to drafting a Carers Policy that outlines colleagues' rights, available support, as well as guidance for managers. Additionally, the network has established a Carers Hub which has enhanced the visibility of carers in SQA and raised awareness of their challenges and needs.



Our corporate charities

You Are My Sunshine (YAMS)

The charity, You Are My Sunshine (YAMS), has been the SQA corporate charity since 2019, and we are delighted to announce that SQA colleagues have raised **£21,090.54** for the charity over the past five years.

This support has enabled YAMS to train more counsellors and expand the range of sessions and services they offer, significantly benefiting individuals in our community who struggle with poor mental health.



New charity partner revealed

SQA is proud to announce that the Marie Trust will be our new corporate charity.

Based in Glasgow, the Marie Trust has been addressing the complex and often challenging needs of individuals affected by homelessness, poverty, and social exclusion since 2009.

The charity aims to prevent and alleviate homelessness, offering a holistic, trauma-informed approach for those who often face challenging and traumatic life experiences. Marie Trust recognise that people need more than a roof over their heads to feel safe and secure. Their services include crisis intervention, counselling, education, volunteering opportunities and a healthy living café.

Fundraising so far...

Frightfully fun festivities

A testament to team 'spirit', the Spooky Bake Sale in October — with its tables laden with Halloween-themed treats, all eagerly devoured by colleagues dressed in their best costumes — raised a spook-tastic **£289** for our corporate charity, the Marie Trust! Volunteers from the charity, weighed down with sweet treats of their own, joined in on the fun to make the occasion a fun-filled networking opportunity.



The Marie Trust Tree

The Marie Trust Tree campaign transformed Christmas trees into symbols for human connection (#MoreThanATree). The campaign demonstrated that a simple tree can play a significant role during what is often one of the loneliest times of the year.

For our 2024 Christmas campaign, we invited businesses and individuals to 'pledge their Christmas tree' to our corporate charity, the Marie Trust (#IPledgeMyTree). Participants were encouraged to write a message of support to a homeless person at Christmas, tag the tree, and make a donation at the same time. Colleagues pledged their own Christmas trees, too, and some asked their family, friends, guests and visitors to join in.



Results from the campaign

- Over £2,220 was raised — a significant amount for this small charity.
- The Trust secured a pledge from a chain of dental practices based on the strength of the idea before the campaign even launched.
- Internal awareness of the Trust and its causes has increased, leading other SQA colleagues to offer their time as volunteers with the Marie Trust.

Comms for Christmas

The Marie Trust sought our assistance with their communications. Given that colleagues in SQA are allocated [21 hours of volunteering time \(per year\)](#), it was only fitting to utilise this time effectively to support the Marie Trust.

With no budget and only a few hours available, colleagues from our Communications Directorate:

- developed a three-point plan to establish basic communication structures and processes for the Marie Trust, which can be expanded upon using the best-performing messages and posts to inform future campaigns
- reviewed the accessibility of their website
- introduced best practice processes and toolkits to help improve the Marie Trust's social media security and output
- designed a Christmas campaign to help the Marie Trust to fundraise while also building a relationship between the charity and SQA
- empowered the team with a scheduling tool, templates and content strategy

Some colleagues contributed their knowledge from previous jobs and roles, while others sought new experiences to enhance their skills development.

With only a handful of volunteering hours and SQA staff gifting their expertise, we designed and delivered a simple yet effective campaign that raised not only much-needed funds, but widespread awareness and support. We established a sustainable approach and laid the groundwork for 2025.

Our other charitable endeavours

- We are a [Carer Positive employer](#)
- We are a [Disability Confident Leader](#)
- We are [Stonewall Diversity Champion](#)
- We support the [Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme](#)



Young Talent Strategy



Investors in Young People accreditation

We are delighted to acknowledge that SQA has been awarded the **Investors in Young People (IYYP) Gold Status** by Investors in People.

SQA has held IYYP status since 2015, progressing to Gold on the previous framework in 2021 and achieving 'Gold' on their new, more comprehensive framework in 2024.



How we achieved 'Gold' status?

In 2022, SQA launched the Young Talent Strategy — a plan to attract, recruit, develop, and retain young people in the organisation. To date, this strategy has enabled us to:

- Increase our recruitment of young people and enhance the diversity of our young workforce through initiatives such as Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Apprenticeships, and [Career Ready](#).
- Develop more young talent into senior roles, fostering the growth of future leaders, successors, and influencers.
- Invest in our young talent population through the Young Talent Mentoring programme.

These initiatives, and more, helped us to meet the strict criteria for Gold status.



'Through the Young Talent Strategy, we are proud to have helped a significant number of young people gain sustainable employment, experience the world of work, and grow their career with SQA.'

This IIYP accreditation demonstrates SQA's continuing support and investment in young people to help us shape the organisation for the future.'

— Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive Officer

Our customers and communities

‘Giving something back’ encapsulates what it means to be a responsible business at SQA. Throughout 2024, we strengthened existing relationships and forged new ones. SQA remains committed to building and enhancing connections with our customers and local communities. We have recognised and rewarded ambition, promoted equality, improved employment opportunities for young people, and actively supported local charities.

Corporate Parenting

We published SQA’s [Corporate Parenting Plan 2023–26](#) in January 2024. This Plan has been shaped through our work with SQA’s Corporate Parenting Steering Group and [Who Cares? Scotland](#), ensuring that we understand and address the needs of individuals with experience of care. We also considered extensive research, evidence, and the recommendations from [The Promise: Scotland’s Independent Care Review](#).



Celebrating success

Care-experienced young people were among the tens of thousands of school learners in Scotland who received their SQA results in August.

As a proud corporate parent, we celebrated the achievements of these young individuals with a collaborative [congratulatory video](#). The video featured messages from SQA's Chief Executive Officer, Fiona Robertson; the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Jenny Gilruth; and representatives from both Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways.



National Care Day 2024

On February 2024's [National Care Day](#), we were pleased to promote our new [Corporate Parenting Plan 2023–26](#) and launch our Celebrating Success survey. It was also a pleasure to attend Who Cares? Scotland's [Carelidh 2024](#) and meet [Fatima Whitbread](#).



A Guide for Scotland's teachers on care experience and corporate parenting

In partnership with Who Cares? Scotland, we developed a teacher resource in the form of a booklet aimed at providing insight into the lives of care-experienced learners and the crucial role teachers play as Corporate Parents.

This teacher resource was distributed to every secondary school across Scotland as part of our commitments during Care Experience Week 2024.

Who Cares? Scotland's Corporate Parenting Awards 2024

SQA was shortlisted for the Creating Transformation award at Who Cares? Scotland's inaugural Corporate Parenting Awards in August 2024. We were thrilled to attend the event and learn about the remarkable progress Corporate Parents have made over the past decade and the positive impact this has had on care-experienced individuals. Read more about positive Corporate Parenting practice, and about those nominated for an award in [Who Cares? Scotland's Awards Brochure](#).



Who Cares? Scotland's Gala for Love 2024

We were delighted to sponsor and host a table at Who Cares? Scotland's Gala for Love event.

Anna Davis, SQA Board member, remarked, 'It was a privilege to represent SQA at the Who Cares? Scotland Gala for Love. It's inspiring to witness the love and support offered to individuals who have experienced being in care. The feeling of love and belonging is priceless.'

Everyone needs a strong and supportive lifelong scaffold around them. As a corporate parent, we recognise that we play a crucial role in the support system for care-experienced individuals throughout their lives.

Both events offered us valuable opportunities to learn from others and forge connections that have deepened our dedication and commitment to our role as Corporate Parents, especially as Scotland works to Keep the Promise.



SQA wins 'Gold' at the 2024 Marketing Society Awards

The Marketing Society Star Awards set the benchmark for marketing excellence across the UK, celebrating and recognising best practices within the industry. In June 2024, colleagues from our Communications Directorate enjoyed a tremendously successful evening at the Awards, winning the Gold award in the Digital Strategy Category for [our Learner Campaign](#): *'How SQA helped learners get exam ready'*.

The campaign showcased SQA's commitment to connecting with our learners by creating tailored content to support them during their exams.

At the Awards ceremony, held at the O2 Academy in Edinburgh, we celebrated our success with friends from the education community who contributed to the campaign's achievements, including the National Parent Forum and Young Scot.



Celebrating 21 years of excellence: The Advanced Diploma in China

SQA's Advanced Diploma programme has been a beacon of educational excellence in China for over two decades. To nurture its growth and maintain high standards, SQA collaborates closely with our Chinese partners, the Chinese Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange (CSCSE).

After a hiatus since 2019, the team reconnected with partners at the Study Abroad Forum and the Chinese International Exhibition and Tour (CIEET) — an annual student recruitment fair attended by international universities and educational organisations. Additionally, we hosted a conference for Deans from approved centres. The Dean's Conference provided a platform for sharing best practices, fostering collaboration, and shaping the future of the Advanced Diploma programme.

Such events unite leaders in international education.

'It was wonderful to connect with so many of our long-standing delivering centres on this visit — to meet with the staff and students and to hear the success stories and positive destinations of many of the SQA graduates. All of the work we are doing in China supports the Scot Gov international education strategy of exporting qualifications to support Scotland's economic growth, and of promoting Scotland as a study destination to the Chinese Advanced Diploma graduates.'

— Gillian Hepburn, Head of International

Supporting our communities

Our colleagues are allocated 21 hours each year to dedicate to giving back to their communities. In 2024, colleagues devoted almost 800 hours to volunteering in the community — sharing their skills while building valuable relationships. Here are just a few of the incredible ways in which colleagues have shown support over the past year...

Midlothian Awards



2024 marked the 40th anniversary of Volunteers' Week — a time to celebrate the invaluable contributions that millions of volunteers make to society every day across the country. To honour this occasion, SQA sponsored the 'Equality and Diversity Award' at the Midlothian Volunteer Awards, which took place in June at Newbattle Abbey College.

It was a pleasure for us to present Paddy Carstairs from the Newtongrange Community Garden with the 'Equality and Diversity Award'. Paddy's attention to and general love

for the community garden, as well as his litter picking efforts and other voluntary work, made him a deserving winner of this award. Paddy is described as always upbeat, and incredible at interacting with all the volunteers. He deserved to be credited for all his work, and for how gracefully and modestly he does it.

'The evening is always an inspiring showcase of the variety of volunteering which takes place across Midlothian. These individuals go above and beyond to make a difference in their communities and to their organisations. It's a delight to witness them being acknowledged for their contributions and commitment. They exemplify the true spirit of volunteering, and I hope their passion and commitment will inspire others for years to come.'

— Laura Gemmell, SQA



Contract Operations picked up their spades to transform hospital gardens

26 colleagues from SQA's Contract Operations Team used their volunteering hours to combat the overgrown gardens at the Gartnavel Royal Hospital in Glasgow.

Over the course of the day, the rotting raised flower bed was dismantled, and the soil was recycled, ready for some summer planting. Meanwhile hoes, spades and forks tackled overgrown areas and weeds.

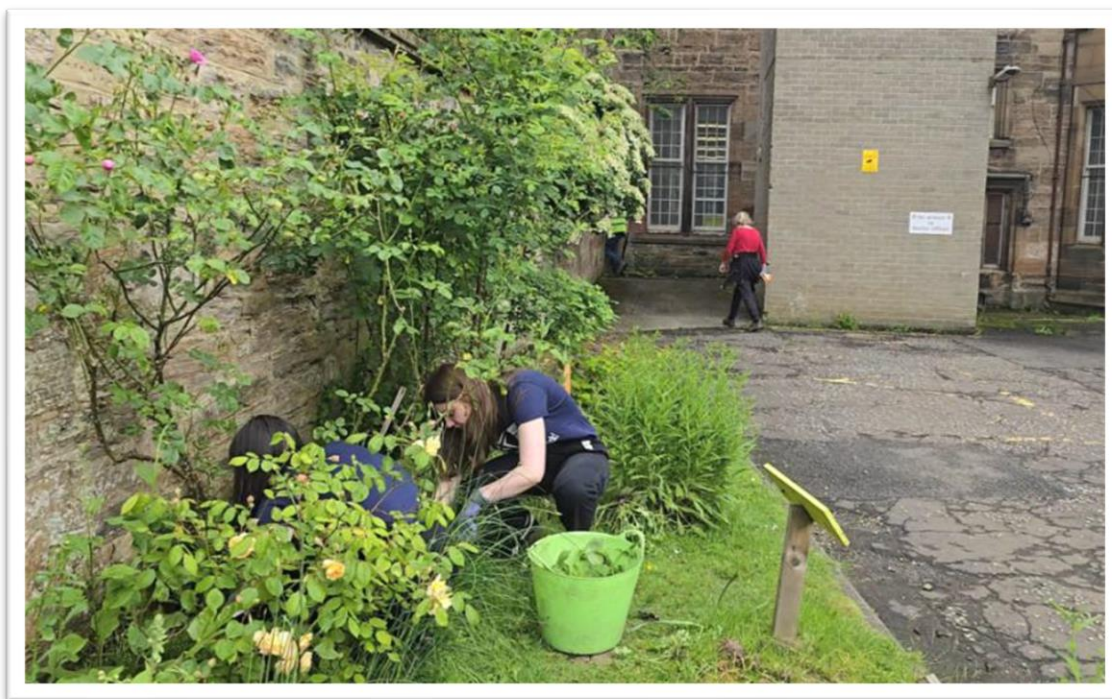
'The Volunteering Day was something that we had been planning on doing for some time and Laura Gemmell from the Responsible Business Team made it so easy to arrange — even with a group of 20+ to keep happy!...With working from home now an option for many, it was great to have so many of us together in one place to maintain and build relationships within the team!'

— Gary Stewart, Head of Contract Operations



There is no official investment, monetary nor time, in the green spaces at Gartnavel Hospital for a variety of reasons, and the upkeep of them relies on volunteers.

Gardening and gardens have come to the rescue of many people, providing an opportunity to pause, breathe and connect. The gardens are enjoyed by patients, visitors and staff.



The day following volunteering, one of Gartnavel's patients visited the garden area and was delighted to see what had been done:

'Being able to access the gardens helps me manage my anxiety and lifts my mood. I didn't know the gardens were being worked on, and it was a lovely surprise when I came in today to see the gardens looking as good as they now do.'

'It really makes me feel better, and to know people care enough to keep the gardens and growing beds looking good for us means a lot.'

Supporting our learners

Employability workshops

SQA colleagues volunteered to assist fourth-year students at Lourdes Secondary School with an employability skills workshop. This workshop aimed to introduce learners to the core skills that employers look for in potential employees. Our volunteers provided interview tips and facilitated mock interviews, encouraging the learners to identify their own skills and experiences.



Chapter One — paired reading

SQA volunteers embarked on a journey to support young children in primary schools to develop their reading skills through our volunteering scheme.

With 40% of disadvantaged children leaving primary school unable to read to the expected standard, and the percentage of children who say they enjoy reading for pleasure at its lowest level since 2005, the support provided [by Chapter One](#) volunteers is crucial.

The dedication of our SQA volunteers to the [Chapter One programme](#) has transformed the lives of disadvantaged children, enabling them to cultivate the essential reading skills they need to succeed.

‘When I started volunteering for Chapter One, I was nervous and doubted my ability to help a young primary school child with their reading. When you hear a shy voice become confident, words coming together to form a sentence and then a story it is truly amazing. They say this programme will help transform the lives of children, but in my eyes it will also transform the life of the volunteer’.

— Tracey Curran, SQA volunteer

Work experience

Our work experience programme has been digitalised, whereby young people can choose online modules in areas such as marketing, finance, and facilities. As well as completing the online modules, participants can come into an SQA office to gain hands-on experience in the areas they have studied, while also interacting with colleagues who can share their expertise.

Our first hybrid work experience pupil, Amelie, joined us at our office in Lowden for three days, and two days at school completing our virtual work placement modules online.



Our 2024 Career Ready Interns

[SQA's Young Talent Strategy](#) outlines our ambition to attract, recruit, develop, and retain young talent, ensuring the organisation secures the knowledge, skills, and experience needed for future growth.

As part of this strategy, SQA is committed to developing the broader young workforce in Scotland, helping them acquire new skills and gain exposure to the world of work. A vital aspect of this initiative is our collaboration with agencies such as **Career Ready**, ensuring that all young people have access to skills development and training, enabling them to realise their potential and achieve their career ambitions.

We have continued our partnership with Career Ready by providing paid internships for five school pupils from Edinburgh and Glasgow within the HR Employee Development Programme Team at SQA. During their time with us, they learned about the organisation and contributed to activities focused on young talent.



MCR Mentoring Programme



MCR Pathways's aim is to help young people unlock their potential, no matter their circumstances. Their vision is for all young people to experience equality of education outcomes, career opportunities and life chances. At SQA, we support them through the mentoring program, allowing colleagues to use their 21 hours of volunteering time to mentor a young person. Currently, we have 16 volunteers participating in the programme.

Jillian McKenzie, MCR Mentor, said:

'My favourite part about being a mentor is seeing the smile on my mentee's face each week when she walks through the door of our safe place, and she knows she can discuss or tell me anything without being judged.'

The environment

We aim to minimise the environmental impact of our activities and enhance all colleagues' awareness of climate change issues. Our goal is to exceed the obligations outlined in the government's 25-year environmental plan, '[A Green Future](#)', as well as those set forth in the '[Public Bodies Climate Change Duties](#)'.

By continuously tracking, assessing, and reducing our consumption, waste, and CO₂ emissions, we have successfully reduced our 'carbon footprint' year on year. Additionally, we have discovered new and innovative ways to integrate sustainability into our daily operations.

Keep Porty tidy

Litter picking is an essential activity that benefits the environment, enhances community wellbeing, and embodies our Responsible Business ethos of '**Giving Something Back**'.

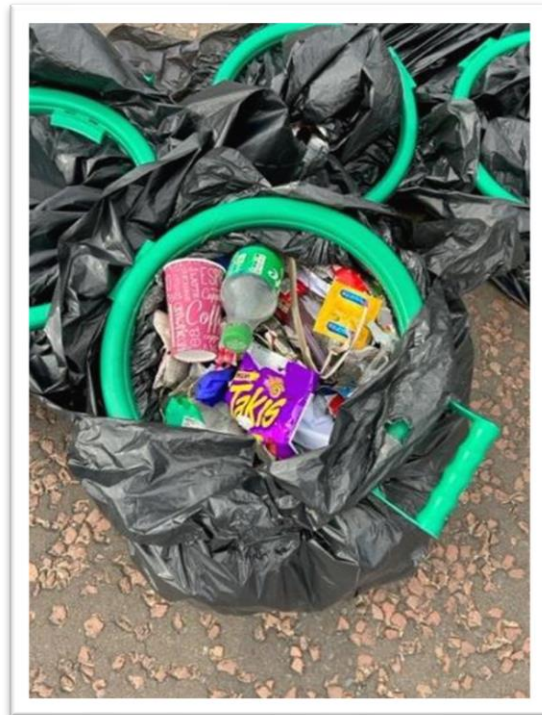
Volunteers play a crucial role in our environmental strategy by actively participating in conservation efforts, such as litter cleanups. Their contributions directly support our goals of protecting and improving the natural environment while reducing our overall environmental impact.

Additionally, volunteers are motivated not only by their concern for the environment but also by the personal benefits of outdoor activities. They gain opportunities to learn new skills, connect with others, and improve their health and wellbeing.

80% of all marine litter comes from land. With their litter-pickers at the ready, SQA colleagues scouted the sands of Portobello beach, aiming to prevent harmful litter from polluting the sea.



By participating in our litter-picking initiatives, we are actively contributing to a healthier, more sustainable environment for our community. This simple action can have far-reaching benefits, helping to create a more sustainable future for generations to come.



Strategy

To help us take the next steps and help with the Scottish Government target to reach [net zero emissions](#) by 2045, we have developed a new environmental [Strategy](#). Our [Environmental Strategy has three strands](#):

- Reporting and governance
 - we will report on SQA's environmental performance
 - we will regularly review our plans for climate change adaptation
 - colleagues can track our performance, ask questions and make suggestions
- Engagement and influence
 - we will communicate with colleagues to help them make informed decisions
 - colleagues can participate in activities and adopt sustainable practices at work and at home
- Continuous improvement
 - we will collaborate with other organisations and share good practice
 - training on sustainability will be provided for colleagues
 - colleagues can adapt processes to be more sustainable

SQA Environmental Strategy 2021 - 2024



Engagement & Influence

We will:

- Promote sustainable practices both at work and at home
- Provide accessible information resources for all colleagues
- Support relevant national and international campaigns and initiatives



Positively influence and engage with colleagues

SQA as an Environmentally Responsible Business

Reporting & Governance

We will:

- Measure and track our carbon emissions
- Report to internal and external stakeholders
- Maintain our environmental management system
- Maintain our Climate Change Adaptation Risk Assessment



Collect, collate, and publish sustainability data to ensure accurate, valuable reporting

Continuous improvement

We will:

- Identify sustainability improvement opportunities and provide a system for progression
- Monitor the environmental performance of our assets
- Build in sustainability considerations to decision making across all business processes



Maximise opportunities to reduce environmental impact across all operational activities

The Future of Scottish qualifications

As part of the Scottish Government's education reform programme, SQA will be replaced by a new qualifications body — Qualifications Scotland — in autumn 2025. It is important that colleagues help to create this new qualifications body.

Towards the end of 2024, colleagues participated in our Shaping Qualifications Scotland Together workshops, where they showcased invaluable enthusiasm and creativity, and provided honest feedback about the kind of new organisation they wanted to be part of.

The workshops were a resounding success, characterised by lively discussions, innovative ideas, and a shared sense of purpose. The energy from attendees highlighted the benefits of involving colleagues in shaping the direction for change and improvement.



Colleagues will continue to contribute directly to shaping the values, culture, and character of Qualifications Scotland.