

Accelerating change: Qualifications Scotland Business Plan

The arrival of Qualifications Scotland represents a reset: a reset for our qualifications system, a reset for Scotland and, most importantly, a reset for learners, teachers and lecturers.

It marks a significant increase in pace on a journey of change that has been underway since the publication of the Prospectus for Change.

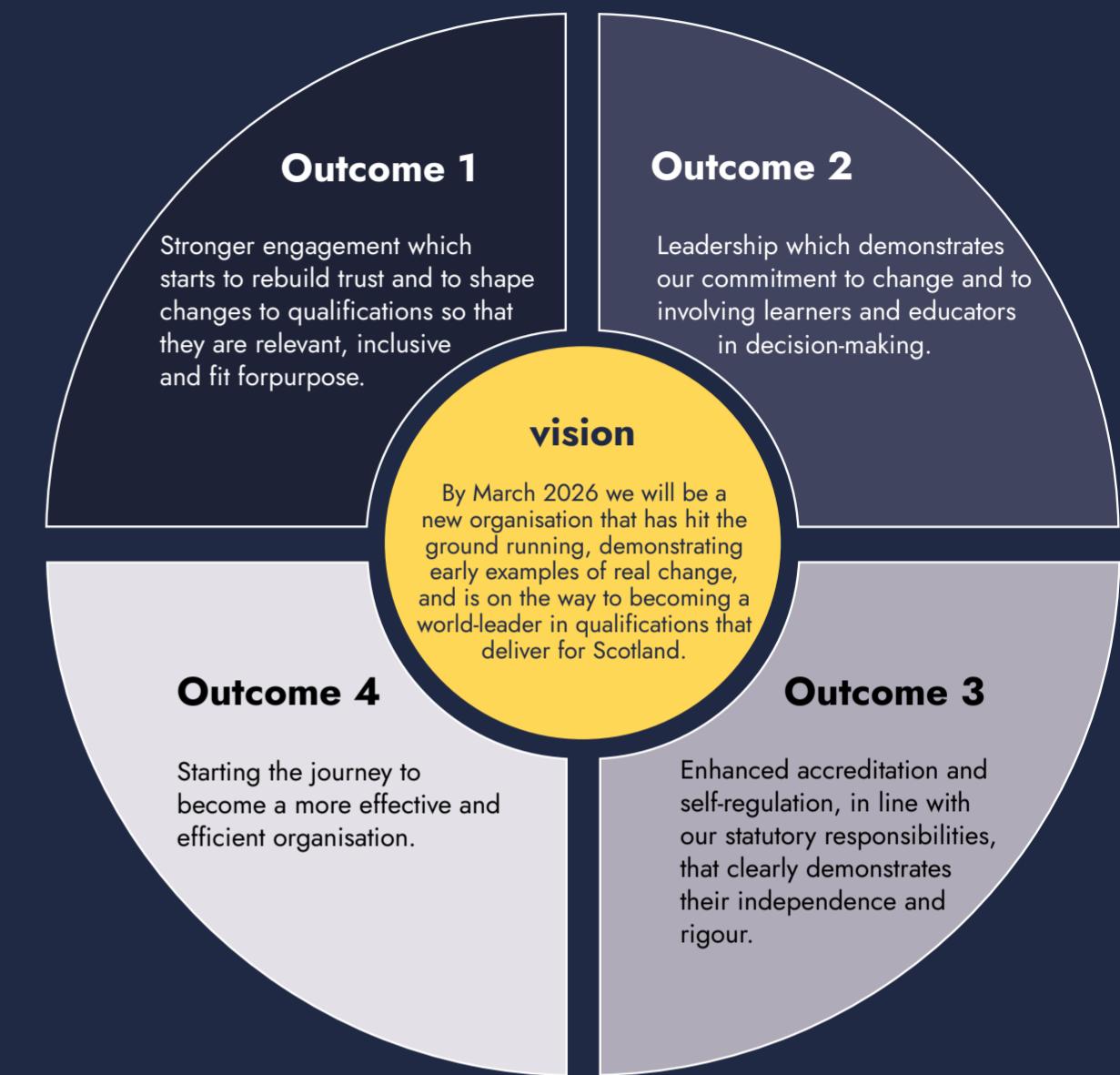
Building on those foundations, and on the Education (Scotland) Act 2025, Qualifications Scotland has the opportunity to accelerate change and to power long-term success, while continuing to deliver for today's learners.

Our aim is clear: to give every learner the opportunity to fulfil their potential and to deliver for Scotland by making a positive social and economic impact.

We will achieve that by being an organisation that is open, collaborative and forward-thinking, and that puts learners' and educators' voices at the heart of decision-making.

As Qualifications Scotland starts work over the next few months, we will:

- move forward with qualifications reform, supported by the new School Partnership Team
- strengthen the organisation's leadership - with greater learner, educator and employee representation - and its accreditation and self-regulation functions
- begin a process of reviewing every area of the organisation to deliver improvement and change



Our purpose

Deliver the Education (Scotland) Act 2025 by designing, delivering and awarding qualifications that provide all learners with fair and equal opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Goals and outputs:

1 Move forward with qualifications reform, supported by the new School Partnership Team and by stronger engagement with learners and educators from all parts of the education and skills community

- Complete the set-up of the School Partnership Team, bringing in four teachers to support the seconded headteacher who leads the team
- Make it easier for anyone to have their voice heard in Qualifications Scotland
- Engage with learners, educators and stakeholders on next steps on rebalancing assessment and reviewing the qualifications portfolio

2 Implement new leadership arrangements and put learners and educators at the heart of decision-making

- Induct members to the new Qualifications Scotland Board, including practising teachers and lecturers
- Start the process of putting in place the new committees that will ensure learner, educator, employee and stakeholder voices shape the work of Qualifications Scotland, including new learner and educator charters
- Put in place a new executive leadership structure to support the new Chief Executive and Board

3 Put in place a strengthened accreditation function, reinforcing its independence, and strengthen self-regulation of National Qualifications (NQs) and Higher National (HN) qualifications to uphold their integrity and credibility

- Appoint a chief accreditation officer
- Put in place a new model for the provision of corporate services to the accreditation function
- Establish an independent Expert Group on Qualifications Standards to advise on the self-regulation of NQs and HN qualifications

4 Start a rolling programme of functional business reviews (FBRs) to deliver improvement and change

- Develop a framework for carrying out FBRs, involving trade unions and staff, and begin the roll-out of FBRs
- Develop a forward plan and methodology for continuous improvement
- Begin the training of internal 'change agents' who can support continuous improvement

Resource

Our grant-in-aid funding will resource this plan, with additional costs absorbed wherever possible through efficiencies and by making the best use of existing 2025-26 funding. We are also working with the Scottish Government to put in place a sustainable medium-term financial strategy, building the key foundations through the 2026-27 budget process.

Qualifications reform, school partnership team and engagement

Our qualifications are at the heart of what we do. The breadth of our offer, including vocational and technical qualifications, enables us to equip school, college and lifelong learners with the knowledge and skills to fulfil their potential, and is designed to meet the needs of employers, the economy and society.

Over the next few years, we will reform our qualifications offer to ensure it is fit for purpose in a modern, flourishing Scotland. Work is already underway and in the coming months we will accelerate this activity.

We will rebalance assessments in National Courses, exploring how to decrease reliance on high-stakes external exams and increase the use of internal and continuous assessments. We will also streamline and modernise our wider qualifications portfolio to clarify progression pathways. This work will form part of a wider programme of curriculum and assessment reform, in collaboration with Education Scotland and the Scottish Government.

Changes will be made in collaboration with learners and educators. The new School Partnership Team (formerly referred to as the Schools Unit) will play a vital role, building stronger relationships with schools and using innovative engagement methods to give everyone the opportunity to have their voice heard and to shape the future of qualifications.

Goal

Move forward with qualifications reform, supported by the new School Partnership Team and by stronger engagement with learners and educators from all parts of the education and skills community.

Outputs:



- Complete the set-up of the School Partnership Team, bringing in four teachers to support the seconded headteacher who leads the Team
- Make it easier for anyone to have their voice heard in Qualifications Scotland
- Engage with learners, educators and stakeholders on next steps on rebalancing assessment and reviewing the qualifications portfolio

Key tasks:



- Recruit teachers to School Partnership Team
- New single-entry point for engagement
- Announce next steps on qualifications reform

Outcome:



Stronger engagement that starts to rebuild trust and to shape changes to qualifications so that they are relevant, inclusive and fit for purpose.

Risk if not delivered:



There will be a delay in getting the School Partnership Team fully operational and providing it with the support it needs to engage widely and innovatively. This in turn will impact engagement around qualifications reform and risk trust in the process. In time, assessments and qualifications may not be relevant, inclusive and fit for purpose.

One of the key aspects of the Education (Scotland) Act 2025 was strengthened governance and leadership for Qualifications Scotland, putting the knowledge and experience of learners and educators at the heart of decision-making in the new body.

The Act stipulates that an expanded Board will have a minimum of five members that are practising teachers or lecturers, one member who has knowledge of the interests of learners, one who has knowledge of the interests of Qualifications Scotland staff and one who understands the needs of business.

In addition, a new Strategic Advisory Council and new Interest Committees for learners and teaching practitioners are required by the Act. There will also be a new People Committee to give staff and trade unions a place in the new governance structure and to ensure Qualifications Scotland is a Fair Work employer. The existing Qualifications, Audit and Risk, and Accreditation Committees will continue.

The Qualifications Scotland executive leadership team will be responsible for day-to-day delivery of the decisions made by the Board and its committees. The new Chief Executive will ensure the executive structure is designed to best meet the ambitions of the new organisation, with any changes subject to normal consultation processes with trade unions and staff.

Goal

Implement new leadership arrangements and put learners and educators at the heart of decision-making.

Outputs:



- Induct members to the new Qualifications Scotland Board, including practising teachers and lecturers
- Start the process of putting in place the new committees that will ensure learner, educator, employee and stakeholder voices shape the work of Qualifications Scotland, including new learner and educator charters
- Put in place a new executive leadership structure to support the new Chief Executive and Board

Key tasks:



- Complete induction programme for new Board members
- Begin recruitment for committees (Learner, Teacher and Practitioner, People)
- Agree new executive leadership structure

Outcome:



Stronger leadership which demonstrates our commitment to change and to involving learners and educators in decision-making.

Risk if not delivered:



We will not have the new leadership arrangements in place (and be non-compliant with our statutory obligations under the Education (Scotland) Act 2025, thereby impacting strategic oversight, effective governance and effective delivery).

Accreditation and self-regulation

The Education (Scotland) Act 2025 keeps the accreditation function as part of the new qualifications body but makes clear that its independence from the awarding function must be further strengthened. The Act stipulates that there will be a chief accreditation officer and that ministers will directly appoint the Convenor of the Accreditation Committee.

Although not stipulated by the Act, Parliament made clear that work was also required to put in place internal arrangements that strengthened the independence of the accreditation function from the awarding function. To this end, a formal arrangement will be put in place whereby Qualifications Scotland Accreditation will 'buy' access to the organisation's corporate services such as IT, communications and HR.

The accreditation function has no remit in relation to National Qualifications (NQs) or Higher National (HN) qualifications. However, the Act separately strengthens the awarding function's self-regulation of these qualifications, including an Expert Group on Qualifications Standards and an independent review of self-regulation.

Goal

Put in place a strengthened accreditation function, reinforcing its independence, and strengthen self-regulation of National Qualifications and Higher National qualifications to uphold their integrity and credibility

Outputs:



- Appoint a chief accreditation officer
- Put in place a new model for the provision of corporate services to the accreditation function
- Establish an independent Expert Group on Qualifications Standards to advise on the self-regulation of NQs and HN qualifications

Key tasks:



- Map and calculate the costs of all Qualifications Scotland corporate services that will be accessed by the accreditation function
- Agree a new baseline cost for the accreditation function with Scottish Government
- Complete recruitment of chief accreditation officer
- Put in place Expert Group on Qualifications Standards

Outcome:



Enhanced accreditation and self-regulation, in line with our statutory responsibilities, that clearly demonstrates their independence and rigour.

Risk if not delivered:



We will not have the new accreditation and self-regulation arrangements in place (and be non-compliant with our statutory obligations), thereby impacting effective governance, strengthened operational delivery and stakeholder confidence.

Functional business reviews

Continuous improvement is at the core of any successful organisation. As a new organisation that must be significantly different from its predecessor, Qualifications Scotland has an even stronger imperative to ensure every part of the business is providing an efficient, effective and improving service in line with the requirements of the Education (Scotland) Act 2025.

Also, given the severe pressures on public sector finances and the need for every public body to reduce its costs (approximately 4% a year until 2031/32) we need to identify where we can make significant savings.

A clear, consistent and transparent process to review every part of Qualifications Scotland will a) ensure that we invest our limited resources in those areas that best deliver our purpose, vision, mission and values (and help inform optimum organisational structures) and b) ensure that we identify where there are opportunities for improvement and change.

Goal

Start a rolling programme of functional business reviews (FBRs) to deliver improvement and change.

Outputs:



- Develop a framework for carrying out FBRs, involving trade unions and staff, and begin the roll-out of FBRs
- Develop a forward plan and methodology for continuous improvement
- Begin the training of internal 'change agents' who can support continuous improvement

Key tasks:



- Agree FBR framework
- Put in place FBR Review Team and identify change agents
- Start first FBR

Outcome:



Starting the journey to become a more effective and efficient organisation.

Risk if not delivered:



The FBRs will not start and there will be a delay to the development and implementation of a continuous improvement methodology/roadmap, thereby limiting our ability to make Qualifications Scotland an effective and efficient organisation in line with the Act and with public sector reform.