

04 October 2024

Convener
Education, Children and Young People Committee

Contact: Fiona Robertson

Dear Convener

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee last week. You requested further information regarding the involvement of teachers in developing, awarding, and revising school qualifications. I am pleased to provide the following details, to assist the Committee in its considerations of the Education (Scotland) Bill.

First of all, many of my colleagues have direct teaching and lecturing experience, particularly within the Qualifications Development (QD) Directorate. This includes the most recent appointment of a new interim Director of Qualifications Development, Donna Stewart, who was previously a Principal Teacher of Physics and Depute Headteacher.

This extensive first-hand knowledge of learning and teaching ensures that the development of qualifications, including National Courses, is grounded in practical classroom experience. Specific subject specialists develop and review qualifications, assessment materials and supporting resources, engaging with practitioners to do so. We also have Qualification Support Teams for both HN/VQ and National Qualifications. Teachers and lecturers are at the heart of these Teams and monitor, evaluate and communicate issues arising from delivery, assessment and verification.

Many thousands of teachers are also at the heart of our Awarding each year, joining SQA to mark and grade. They play crucial roles in our assessment processes, including designing and setting assessments including examination papers, marking papers and contributing to the setting of grade boundaries for National Courses. Our appointees also deliver Understanding Standards events to thousands of practitioners each year.

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Roles include:

- **Assessment Development:** Appointees collaborate with SQA to design examination materials and coursework assignments, ensuring assessments are fair and reflective of classroom learning.
- **Marking and Moderation:** to maintain consistency and reliability in the awarding of qualifications across Scotland.
- **Quality Assurance and Verification.**
- **Standard Setting:** to establish grade boundaries aligned with national standards.

Hundreds of teachers also contribute to our annual evaluation of Awarding, ensuring our approach, and any changes to our approach, are informed by the direct experience. This is in addition to our ongoing educator research panel activities, including a recent detailed consultation with teachers regarding their experience of the use of Artificial Intelligence by learners and within schools.

Our Liaison Team work daily with SQA Coordinators - experienced teachers and leaders within schools. They serve as key contacts between SQA and schools, to ensure effective delivery of qualifications and insights and feedback that help inform what we do.

Our annual programme of centre visits to schools and colleges across Scotland allows us to listen to practitioners and learners directly. For the last four years, the National Qualifications Strategic Group has met frequently, including weekly during the pandemic, to provide advice on the approach to awarding, with representation from across the education and skills system. We also meet with all the professional associations and subject associations on a regular basis.

The SQA Board, Qualifications Committee, Advisory Council and Transition Board include members who are current or former teachers and/or school and college leaders. Their collective expertise ensures that the perspectives of teachers are integral to our strategic direction and policy development.

Finally, practitioner involvement is carefully considered along with feedback from universities, colleges, Training Providers, learners and their representative groups, parents, carers, and a wide range of partners within the education and skills community. This ensures a holistic and comprehensive approach to qualifications development that supports teachers and ensures the broadest range of progression pathways for learners.

This work does not stand still. We will shortly commence the process to second a headteacher to SQA as we transition to Qualifications Scotland. This will include work to enhance our approach to engagement with schools and with teachers. I also highlighted during the evidence session last week that advice has been commissioned on the establishment of a schools unit. We will consider further innovative approaches that engage teachers from across Scotland, as we consider our work to review our National Qualifications, including the balance of assessment following the publication of the Scottish Government's response to the Hayward Review. Our

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Prospectus for Change, developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders including teachers and teacher association, will be published shortly and will say more.

I want to ensure that we are re-setting our relationships with teachers, aligned with the provisions in the Education (Scotland) Bill to build a culture of genuine engagement and collaboration with the profession.

In the meantime, I hope that that this overview clarifies the significant involvement of teachers - both within our permanent staff and among the thousands of appointees who join SQA each year - in the development, awarding, and revision of school qualifications. The contribution and involvement of the teaching community is essential to our work, and I am very grateful for everything that they do, for SQA and Scotland's learners.

Please let me know if the Committee requires any further information at this stage.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Robertson
SQA Chief Executive and Scotland's Chief Examining Officer