

# Cross-Party Group on Skills

Friday 19 April 2024 (0930-1030)

Minute

Present

MSPs

Stephen Kerr MSP  
Paul Sweeney MSP  
Beatrice Wishart MSP

Invited guests

Val Innes, Head of Next Generation Qualifications and Standards, SQA  
Shona Barrie, Director of Admissions, University of Stirling  
Stella McManus, Principal and Chief Executive, South Lanarkshire College.

Non-MSP Group Members

Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland  
Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland  
Claire Vekic, Colleges Scotland  
Kirsty Gemmell, CLD Standards Council  
Fiona Harper, Sectt  
Gordon Nelosn, Federation of Master Builders  
Robert Bruce, Enginuity  
Ashley McLean, Nesta  
Georgia Marks, UCAS  
Stuart McKenna, Scottish Training Federation  
Dr Yemi Omeihe, University of the West of Scotland  
Shona Matthews, Chartered Banker Institute  
Tanya Retter, Chartered Banker Institute  
Marissa Lippiatt, SCQF Partnership  
Fiona Garry, SCQF Partnership  
Jo Edkins, Nithcree Training Services  
Emma Slavin, Skills Development Scotland  
Claire Bannister, Universities Scotland  
Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland  
Lauren Wards, Universities Scotland  
Laruen Pennycook, CITB  
Kenneth Flemming, ECITB  
Sinead Griffin, Scottish Funding Council

Dr Liz Barron-Majerik MBE, Lantra Scotland  
George Brown, SQA  
Greg Cullen, ITC Training Academy  
Mark Roberts, CITB

## Apologies

Pam Gosal MSP  
Stephen Kerr MSP  
Clare Adamson MSP  
Gillian Martin MSP  
Steven Maclennan, CLD Standards Council  
Kirsty Conlon, Universities Scotland  
Pauline Ratcliffe, SCQF Partnership  
Donella Beaton, Robert Gordon University  
Keith Robson, The Open University  
Wendy Burton, STUC  
Marie Hendry, CDN

## Welcome

The group's Deputy Convener, Stephen Kerr MSP, opened the meeting.

## Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2023 were approved.

## Presentations

The topic for this meeting was Qualifications. Presentations were heard from:

- Val Innes, Head of Next Generation Qualifications and Standards, SQA
- Shona Barrie, Director of Admissions, University of Stirling
- Stella McManus, Principal and Chief Executive, South Lanarkshire College.

## Discussion

Val Innes from SQA provided an overview of the Next Generation Qualifications project. SQA has taken a collaborative and consultative approach. There has been one year of prototype qualifications with testing and refining throughout and ongoing feedback from deliverers and learners. It was noted that SQA are working with the 14 pilot centres, learners, training providers, and employers to ensure robust engagement and evaluation

She said that the design principles have been agreed and have been informed by a long period of consultation and feedback from centres. They include a move away from graded

units to iterative engagement, a new approach to external quality assurance, and links to the UN's sustainable goals.

The qualifications included in the pilot were chosen to reflect a wide variety of sectors and to make sure they work across the range of qualifications. She noted the emphasis is on SQA providing suites of qualifications rather than individual qualifications.

Val said the next steps will include validating all the pilot qualifications, starting with HNC/D Television followed by six months of engagement, and then rolling portfolio reviews to identify qualifications ready for development.

SCQF Partnership asked whether the new qualifications will include the new occupational standards and Val confirmed they would except Computing which is currently being updated.

Shona Barrie from the University of Stirling gave a presentation on how qualifications fit into the university admissions system. She said that although the qualifications landscape is quite complex, it is important that learners have a range of options. She said the admissions system is focused on contextualised admissions, not solely academic merit.

It was noted that there is a need for grades to be consistent across Scotland so that no learner is disadvantaged and that any new qualifications should prepare students for going on to university, as well as be recognised and trusted nationally and internationally.

Stephen Kerr MSP was interested in the widening access aspect and asked if there is additional support available for those from deprived backgrounds to go to university. Fiona said that additional support is available to all students across the piece as well as academic support and access to additional funding to, for example, care experienced students.

Stephen Kerr MSP also asked if the admissions interview was still important, and it was noted that for some subjects e.g. nursing it is requirement.

Stella McManus from South Lanarkshire College, provided the college perspective, noting that the sector is supportive of the reform of Scotland's qualifications and assessment system, and one which recognises a broader range of learners' achievements, skills and competencies. It was noted that Colleges are already placing less weight on an end of year examination and giving more emphasis to continued assessment, highlighting experiential and skills-based recognition.

She noted that although the Hayward Review focuses on schools, the range of qualifications colleges offer is much broader than national qualifications because of the focus on lifelong learning. She said this makes the landscape appear cluttered and that pathways are not always clear. She said that and qualifications need to better reflect industry needs and be at times shorter and sharper with the ability to change frameworks quicker.

Stuart McKenna noted that 75% of apprenticeships are delivered by private training providers.

Beatrice Wishart MSP was interested in community learning; Stella noted that school doesn't work for everyone and there needs to be a multi-agency approach to progression and pathways. She also stated that there is currently a review of Community Learning and Development underway.

## Close

With no other business to conduct, the meeting was brought to a close.