EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE
THE SENIOR PHASE OF SCHOOL: HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE PURSUE THE RIGHT PATHWAY FOR THEM
SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

1. Introduction
As Scotland’s national awarding and accreditation body, SQA is proud to be at the heart of the education and skills system in Scotland, and is committed to work with partners to help young people realise their potential and achieve their ambitions.

More than ever, qualifications are essential to learners’ successful journeys through education and training into further study and employment. They support learners’ personal development enabling them to be successful in life and make their contributions to Scottish society and the economy.

SQA is acutely aware of its responsibility to uphold the accessibility, value and the credibility of Scotland’s qualifications system. Our vocational qualifications must also meet the current and future needs of the economy. The qualifications must be relevant and by building on prior learning, provide meaningful pathways for progression. This is of equal importance whether they are delivered in schools, colleges, in training suites or in businesses, and whether they are focused on academic or vocational development. This is a key priority for SQA and underpins key public policy areas, such as widening participation, narrowing the attainment gap, the Developing the Young Workforce and Youth Employment strategies, and the Enterprise and Skills review and Apprenticeship programmes.

SQA holds a unique position in Scotland’s education and training system, working in partnership with a broad spectrum of schools, local authorities, colleges, training providers, employers, and parents/carers, as well as professional, industry and national bodies, such as Skills Development Scotland, Education Scotland, Colleges Scotland, and the Scottish Funding Council. We are focused on being a ‘listening organisation’ and very much value our partnerships with others in the Scottish education and training system.

We all have the common goal of delivering a first-class education and training experience for Scotland’s learners. We believe proudly in that goal and are committed to working with our partners to achieve it.

2. Senior Phase Vocational Pathways
SQA has developed and continues to develop, an extensive range of relevant qualifications to support the Developing the Young Workforce and Youth Employment strategies taking into account national and regional economic needs. These are designed in partnership with industry experts to ensure learners gain the skills and experience needed in the workplace and are being increasingly undertaken by young people as they follow different pathways that suit them.

These include Awards which provide a range of initial vocational qualifications and develop soft skills in areas such as leadership, employability, enterprise and volunteering, which will help people to thrive in today’s world.

Appendix 1 provides information on the extensive range of SQA vocational qualifications that is available to young people. These can be delivered by schools, colleges, training organisations,
and employers — either individually or together in a partnership — to offer their learners either a unique qualification or one that forms part of a programme, such as a Foundation or Modern Apprenticeship.

The flexible nature of Curriculum for Excellence gives schools the opportunity to offer a wide range of options to learners to study a different mix of awards and qualifications, to fit with their future aspirations and strengths, and at the most appropriate time for them during their senior phase (S4-S6).

Our team of regional managers, who each work with the schools, local authorities, colleges, training providers, employers, trade and industry bodies, in their allocated area of the country, are actively involved in each of the Developing the Young Workforce regional groups and assist partners in selecting the right type of qualifications to meet regional needs.

Over the last five years we have seen an increasing trend in attainment of our vocational qualifications and awards provision across the country.

In designing the new qualifications the key aim was to help schools better prepare young people to thrive in this fast-changing world and to give them the confidence to use their skills and knowledge to tackle new things. All SQA qualifications are designed to allow good progression into different pathways.

3. Preparing Young People for the World of Work

There are many inspiring examples of how implementing the recommendations of the Developing the Young Workforce can build lasting and successful relationships between schools, colleges and employers. To ensure learners progress into positive destinations, the skills and knowledge that they need to develop in education have to be matched with the hard and soft skills that employers require.

SQA continues to provide a wide range of vocational qualifications to meet local industry requirements. SVQs, drawn up by people from industry, commerce, and education, are often the key component of Modern and Foundation Apprenticeships, and provide direct access into employment. SQA works with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) on the development of Apprenticeships, which combines skills and knowledge specific to an industry sector, and soft skills with work experience and learning.

SQA and SDS have a strong partnership and work successfully together on a number of initiatives that provide opportunities to enable young people to prepare for the world of work. These include:

- Certificate of Work Readiness which is designed for young people who are ready for their first experience of work, but need some guided support. Developed in partnership with business, this includes an employer-assessed work experience placement, providing a meaningful qualification and a credible standard that employers trust. It is available through colleges and training providers working in partnership with employers

- Foundation Apprenticeship frameworks at SCQF level 6. These are a blend of academic and vocational learning, providing learners in S5 and S6 work-based learning opportunities, over two years, with elements contributing to a Modern Apprenticeship
Scoping ‘pre-apprenticeship’ awards at SCQF levels 4 and 5

Graduate Apprenticeships which include Higher National Diploma units at SCQF level 8

SQA and Education Scotland have collaborated on the development of Work Placement units at SCQF levels 3 to 6, which provide learners with the opportunity to review their abilities and career aspirations whilst planning and carrying out a work placement.

SQA recognises that life and work experience is changing — with developments in communications, artificial intelligence, automation and the ‘fourth industrial revolution’. The pace of change in jobs means that employers do and will increasingly value skills of learning to learn, resilience, adaptability, collaboration, creativity, enterprise, and problem solving — alongside role-specific skills and knowledge.

The challenge we face is to ensure that future qualifications and assessments align closely to new industries and others that are changing ever more quickly. They also need to reflect the skills, knowledge and qualities that employers and employees need, allow for highly flexible delivery methods, and make effective use of new and emerging technologies. In addition, they need to provide learners with representations of their capabilities which are recognised as having currency and credibility.

Young people have a very significant stake in how qualifications and assessment need to change to reflect our future society and economy. SQA has been working closely with Young Scot to capture the views of young people on the future of assessment, in addition to engaging with employers and educationalists.

We have also launched a piece of work to consider how best to reshape our Higher National Certificates and Diplomas for the future, to ensure these qualifications prepare young people for entry into the workforce or to progress into university. This work involves engagement with students, college staff, employers and other key stakeholders. College Development Network and Colleges Scotland are important partners in this work.

4. Communications and Engagement

SQA plays an important role in supporting Foundation Apprenticeships and the wider Developing the Young Workforce policy. In these areas, we work closely with SDS, and the Scottish Funding Council, and we are members of their joint Skills Committee.

Collaborating with Colleges Scotland, SQA continuously refreshes and develops the national portfolio of qualifications, ensuring that Scotland’s skills and knowledge-based qualifications remain world-class. Similarly, with College Development Network, we support its innovation and professional development focus in the college sector.

We also work with the Scottish Training Federation, and value the strong relationships that we have with training providers across Scotland; we are proud of our role as the provider of the majority of Scotland’s vocational and technical qualifications.

To support schools in their delivery of the senior phase, we work closely with partners, including Education Scotland, Scottish Government and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland. We also engage closely with professional associations — School Leaders Scotland, the Scottish Council for Independent Schools, the Educational Institute of Scotland, Scottish
Secondary Teachers’ Association, and the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers. We also maintain a close working relationship with industry and professional bodies, colleges, and national parent bodies — the National Parent Forum of Scotland and Connect. This level of engagement ensures that the work SQA does in this area is appropriate and is aligned with the work of other partners.

Our website — www.sqa.org.uk — is a significant part of how we communicate with all our stakeholders. We work with users to ensure the information they need is easily found on our website. We user-test our pages extensively with teachers, lecturers, training providers, employers and learners, using their feedback to inform improvements.

We have a range of written and video case studies illustrating how together, schools, colleges, employers and national bodies, are successfully bringing the Developing the Young Workforce to life, for the benefit of all young people. Our MySector section of the website lists our qualifications by industry sector.

Stakeholders can receive information on latest developments through our MyAlerts service, which offers over 13,000 subscribers updates at a frequency of their choosing. Our weekly Centre News is accessed more than 25,000 times a week, by approximately 3,500 subscribers, including SQA co-ordinators, and gives updates on operational and development news, complemented by subject-specific blogs written by our qualifications managers. We regularly ask for — and act upon — reader feedback so that we can improve further both the content and the format.

Our staff maintain direct contact with schools, colleges, employers and training providers and subject specialists across Scotland, as well as key industry and professional bodies. Our qualifications managers, regional managers, and liaison managers — many of whom are former teachers or lecturers — visit schools and colleges regularly providing them with support as requested. The feedback we receive through these many mechanisms help us to make improvements to our qualifications, services and communications.

The primary role of SQA’s Advisory Council is to consider and advise SQA on the needs and views of our stakeholders in relation to our activities and helps us to develop, maintain and deliver our portfolio. This is a key forum where detailed discussion can take place around SQA’s current and planned activities.

SQA takes its responsibility as a public body extremely seriously. As an organisation we are a National Corporate Parent and have fully committed to doing our very best in this role. Our work has been recognised through an Investors in Young People Silver Award. We support young people with our Pathway Apprenticeship Scheme, and offer work experience for S4 learners as well as internships. This commitment also extends to individual members of staff who give of their own time to share their experiences in life and work and mentor young people in schools in writing CVs, and with interview skills.

5. Summary

SQA welcomes the opportunity to discuss these points further with the Committee. We remain committed to providing qualifications and awards that enable the people and businesses of Scotland to develop the skills that they need to thrive in the future, whichever path they choose to take.
## Appendix 1

### SQA vocational qualifications supporting the Developing the Young Workforce strategy

SQA has a number of vocational qualifications and awards that give learners the opportunity to undertake work-based learning or work-related learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocational qualification</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>SCQF levels</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awards</strong></td>
<td>Small, flexible qualifications that can be taken through the senior phase providing certification of learning and skills in a wide range of contexts. Awards are available for broad or specialist purposes. They provide learners with opportunities to acquire skills, recognise achievement and promote confidence through independent thinking and positive attitudes. They help learners to develop and recognise soft skills, aiding progression into further education, higher education, training or employment. They are usually practice-based qualifications which help learners to succeed in today’s world. <strong>Examples:</strong> Internet Safety; Volunteering Skills; Customer Service; Modern Languages for Life &amp; Work.</td>
<td>1-12</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills for Work courses</strong></td>
<td>National Courses that can be taken through the senior phase, designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific vocational area, as well as an understanding of: the workplace, skills and attitudes for employability, Core Skills, and other transferable skills. Skills for Work courses focus on generic employability skills needed for success in the workplace. The courses offer learners opportunities to learn these skills through a variety of practical experiences, often at their local college, training provider or a local employer, that are linked to vocational areas. <strong>Examples:</strong> Retailing; Laboratory Science; Creative Industries; Food and Drink Manufacturing Industry; Travel &amp; Tourism.</td>
<td>3-6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Certificates</strong></td>
<td>Larger vocational qualifications, which can be taken through the senior phase, that are designed to provide learners with the skills and knowledge (including Core Skills and other transferable skills) that employers expect in the industry. They also provide progression opportunities to higher level qualifications and are linked to National Occupational Standards and are delivered within the broad context of an occupational area. <strong>Examples:</strong> Early Education &amp; Childcare; Media; Legal Services; Civil Engineering; Fashion Design &amp; Manufacture; Hospitality.</td>
<td>2-6</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>National Progression Awards</strong></td>
<td>Small flexible group awards that can be taken through the senior phase, cover a defined set of skills/knowledge in a vocational area. They are designed for learners in work or those preparing to enter or return to work and can be used as part of the ongoing skills development and allow progression within an occupation. They can also be used to gain the required skills/knowledge to enter employment in a particular occupational area. They are linked to National Occupational Standards or other professional/trade standards and can be delivered in school/college or the workplace. <strong>Examples:</strong> Financial Services; Creative &amp; Digital Media: Technologies, Processes &amp;</td>
<td>2-6</td>
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| **Foundation Apprenticeships** | These are a Skills Development Scotland (SDS) initiative, providing new, work-based learning opportunities for S5 and S6 learners. It enables them to complete elements of a Modern Apprenticeship while still at school. 

Learners work towards a Foundation Apprenticeship alongside their other subjects — their National 5s and Highers — and spend part of the school week at college or with a local employer. They will work towards industry-recognised qualifications while developing skills and experience in the workplace. 

Foundation Apprenticeships are linked to growth sectors of the Scottish economy, so young people are getting industry experience that will help them kick-start a successful career in their chosen field. Currently, colleges are delivering Foundation Apprenticeships in partnership with schools and employers. 

**Examples:** Business Skills; Engineering; Food & Drink Technologies; Information Technology: Software Development. |
| **Higher National (HN) Certificates (HNC) and Higher National Diplomas (HND)** | Advanced level vocational qualifications designed to provide learners with the practical skills and theoretical knowledge that employers expect. They also provide articulation to degree programmes, often with advanced entry into the second or third year. 

Some HNDs exempt learners from taking all or part of the professional examinations needed to gain membership of the associated professional body. They are usually related to National Occupational Standards or other professional or sectoral standards. 

As part of the senior phase of secondary schooling, some school-college partnerships have emerged — including in some instances with employer involvement and work based learning/experience — which offer HNCs during S5 and S6, including alongside Highers. 

**Examples:** Hospitality Management; Computing; Engineering; Forestry; Supply Chain Management; Food Science & Technology. |
| **HN Units** | Most of SQA’s HN Units will lend themselves to vocational application, including work-based or work-related learning in specific vocational or professional contexts, as well as in the senior phase of school. 

Additionally, there are a range of HN Units specifically designed to help facilitate work experience or the application of vocational or professional skills. These include, for example: work placement; management leadership at work; work supervision practice. |
| **Core Skills Units and Workplace Core Skills Units** | Employers have identified five Core Skills that are most likely to be needed in a learning and working environment in today’s world — Communication; Numeracy; Information and Communication Technology; Problem Solving; Working with Others. 

Workplace Assessed Core Skills Units allow candidates to be assessed in the workplace against the Core Skills standards. 

Workplace Core Skills form an integral part of Modern Apprenticeships but can also be taken in the senior phase of school. |
| **National Units** | Many of SQA’s National Units will lend themselves to vocational application, including work-based or work-related learning in specific vocational contexts, and can be taken in |
Additionally, there are a range of National Units specifically designed to help facilitate work experience or the application of vocational skills development, and these include, for example: Work Experience; Work Shadowing; Dealing with Work Situations; Personal Development: Self and Work; Modern Languages for Work.

**Professional Development Awards (PDAs)**

Designed for those already in a career or vocation who wish to extend or broaden their higher level skills base, often after completing a degree or vocational qualification relevant to their area of interest. The awards are designed to assess and certificate progression in a defined set of specialist occupational skills, and are based on National Occupational Standards or other professional or sectoral standards.

PDAs can be delivered in an education institution or the workplace and can be used as part of ongoing professional development. They allow progression within an occupation or can help learners develop knowledge and skills to enable a move to another occupation. They are therefore useful vehicles for *en*skilling, *up*skilling and *res*killing.

**Examples:** Analysing Resilience; Software Development; Care Services Management; Dental Nursing; Renewable Energy Systems; Supporting Employment Practice; Domestic conveyancing; Digital Imaging.