

MSPs Approve Major Shake-Up of Scottish Education with SQA to Be Replaced

In a landmark decision, Members of the Scottish Parliament have voted to scrap the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), ushering in a new era for the nation's education system. The move, passed under the Education (Scotland) Bill, will see the creation of a new national body, Qualifications Scotland, tasked with overseeing school qualifications and modernising the approach to assessment. This long-anticipated reform aims to better reflect the needs of learners and restore confidence in how Scotland's young people are examined and evaluated.

The legislation also establishes a new role, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland, to lead an independent education inspectorate. Both changes are part of a broader effort to respond to years of criticism directed at the SQA and the current inspections system, which many felt had become overly focused on exams and rigid procedures. The reforms follow recommendations from independent reviews, including those led by the OECD and Professor Ken Muir, which called for a more balanced and learner-centred education system.

Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth welcomed the bill's passing, describing it as a chance to "drive improvement across the education system." She emphasised that this is not a simple rebranding but a fundamental change in how qualifications are designed and delivered. The new authority will be required to work closely with both learners and teachers, ensuring their voices are embedded in decision-making through official charters and representative committees.

While the transition is expected to be fully in place by autumn 2025, the current SQA will continue managing qualifications in the interim. In response to the bill, the SQA acknowledged the significance of the change and pledged to maintain high standards during the handover.

Despite the overall support, some MSPs have expressed concerns about how leadership roles in the new organisations will be filled, with calls for a more transparent recruitment process. Nonetheless, the bill marks a defining moment for Scottish education. If implemented successfully, the reforms promise a more inclusive, flexible, and forward-thinking system, one that puts the learner at the heart of how success is defined and measured.