

Education (Scotland) Bill *August 2024*

<https://yourviews.parliament.scot/ecyp/education-scotland-bill-shorter/#factbank-3f73d3714efc4ed5b3eb4e063844a829>

The Royal Society of Biology responded to the Education, Children and Young People Committee's call for views on the Education (Scotland) Bill which establishes a new body called Qualifications Scotland to replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority and creates a separate education inspection agency. Its provisions largely replicate existing legislation and comes in response to reports and reviews including the [OECD review of curriculum or excellence](#), [Professor Muir's report "Putting Learners at the Centre. Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education"](#), and [Professor Hayward's report "It's Our Future - Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment"](#).

RSB has previously contributed to calls for views on the reports and reforms, including joint responses as part of the Learned Societies Group in Scotland, and letters to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. To inform this submission, RSB has drawn on these previous responses and policy positions, RSB's [Evolving 5-19 Biology: recommendations and framework for 5-19 biology curricula](#), and discussions with policymakers and other science organisations as part of the Learned Societies Group. The Society plans to engage further with Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland to inform the reformed organisation and any curriculum or qualifications review.

We would like to acknowledge the support of our Full and Supporting Member Organisations, a group of approximately 80 organisations, working in diverse disciplines across the biosciences. RSB facilitates a number of policy groups, which meet to discuss and formulate responses to Government and other consultations. Member Organisations contribute their expertise to these groups and the responses, which are submitted on behalf of all RSB members. To find out more about organisational membership, and our current members, visit the [RSB website](#).

Previous published responses:

- Scottish Government's independent review of qualifications
<https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSE-AP-LSG-Haywards-review-of-qualifications-and-assessment-2023.pdf>
January 2023
- Scottish Government's National Discussion on education
<https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSE-AP-LSG-National-discussion-on-education-20231.pdf> (joint submission)
https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB_response_Scotland_-_National_discussion_on_education_05December.pdf (RSB submission)
December 2022

1 Naoroji Street, London WC1X 0GB Tel: +44 (0)20 3925 3440 education.policy@rsb.org.uk www.rsb.org.uk

- Scottish Government's consultation on enhanced data collection
<https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSE-AP-LSG-Enhanced-data-collection-for-educational-improvement-2022.pdf>
August 2022
- Response to Ken Muir's review of Education Scotland And Scottish Qualifications Authority
http://www.rsb.org.uk/images/Ken_Muir_education_reform_consultation_-_Learned_Societies_Group_response.pdf
December 2021
- Letter to Shirley Anne Somerville in response to OECD's review of the Curriculum for Excellence
http://www.rsb.org.uk/images/LSG_letter_to_Shirley-Anne_Somerville_MSP_-_OECD_report.pdf
September 2021
- Learned Societies Group Advice paper on OECD's review of the Curriculum for Excellence
<https://rse.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/RSE-AP-Curriculum-for-Excellence-Review-2020.pdf>
December 2020

Background

[Education \(Scotland\) Bill](#) introduced on 4 June 2024:

Part 1 of the Bill establishes Qualifications Scotland. Qualifications Scotland will:

- replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority, which is dissolved by the Bill
- develop and award qualifications (other than university degrees)
- have an independent Accreditation Committee to regulate qualifications (other than university degrees) and the organisations that award them
- give advice to Scottish Ministers
- produce charters setting out what learners, teachers and practitioners should expect from Qualifications Scotland
- involve learners, teachers and others in decision making through a Board of Management, committees and an advisory council

Part 2 of the Bill establishes the Chief Inspector and sets out what they will do and how they will operate. The Chief Inspector will:

- inspect places where education is provided and education services
- have an Advisory Council
- publish an inspection plan and reports on inspections
- publish an annual report, and reports on the performance of the Scottish education system
- tell Scottish Ministers when a school or education authority is not making necessary improvements

If the inspector finds that a school, or education authority, is not making necessary improvements Scottish Ministers can give enforcement directions if required. The Bill also gives Scottish Ministers the powers to require that improvements are made.

Royal Society of Biology response to Education Children and Young People Committee's call for views on Education (Scotland) Bill

Demographic information

Q1. Privacy notice: Yes

Q2. Response publication: Published in its entirety

Q3. Name: Lauren McLeod

Q4. Email Address: consultation@rsb.org.uk

Q5. Individual or Organisation: Organisation

Organisation Details:

Q1. Name of organisation:

Q2. Information about your organisation:

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) is a single unified voice for biology: advising Government and influencing policy; advancing education and professional development; supporting our members, and engaging and encouraging public interest in the life sciences. The Society represents a diverse membership of individuals, learned societies and other organisations. Individual members include practising scientists, students at all levels, professionals in academia, industry and education, and non-professionals with an interest in biology.

We would like to acknowledge the support of our Full and Supporting Member Organisations, a group of approximately 80 organisations, working in diverse disciplines across the biosciences. RSB facilitates a number of policy groups, which meet to discuss and formulate responses to Government and other consultations. Member Organisations contribute their expertise to these groups and the responses, which are submitted on behalf of all RSB members.

The Royal Society of Biology is committed to supporting and encouraging the study of biology at primary and secondary level, including policy related to teacher training, recruitment and subject-specific continuous professional development. The Society brings together education and science communities to inform policy makers and provide impartial, evidence-based advice. RSB welcomes this Education, Children and Young People Committee into planned reform of the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

The Royal Society of Biology is a member of the Learned Societies Group on Scottish STEM Education, established in 2012 to address concerns about major reforms in the delivery of STEM education in Scottish education, and convened by The Royal Society of Edinburgh. In recent years the group has focussed on the STEM education and training strategy, resourcing in schools, teacher workforce planning, subject choice, and responding to inquiries into Scottish education conducted by Ken Muir, Louise Hayward and OECD review of Curriculum for Excellence. <https://rse.org.uk/about-us/governance/standing-committees/learned-societies-group/>

RSB has previously contributed to calls for views on the reports and reforms, including joint responses as part of the Learned Societies Group in Scotland, and letters to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills. To inform this submission, RSB has drawn on these previous responses and policy positions, RSB's Evolving 5-19 Biology: recommendations and framework for 5-19 biology curricula, and discussions with policymakers and other science organisations as part of the Learned Societies Group. The Society plans to engage further with Scottish Qualifications Authority and Education Scotland to inform the reformed organisation and any curriculum or qualifications review.

Royal Society of Biology's Evolving 5-19 Biology: recommendations and framework for 5-19 biology curricula, and a summary for policymakers are available at <http://www.rsb.org.uk/curriculum>

Key Questions:

Q1. What are your views on the proposals for Qualifications Scotland?

Following reviews by OECD into the Curriculum for Excellence, Professor Hayward's independent review into qualifications and assessment, and Ken Muir's report on replacing Scottish Qualifications Authority, reform of Education Scotland and removal of its inspectorate, and the national discussion on education, the Royal Society of Biology expected a more comprehensive package of reform to be announced, seeking to address the recommendations in those reports and putting forward a vision for Scottish education, with the Education (Scotland) Bill setting out the means to deliver it.

The Society is concerned that the existing legislation only addresses a small part of the expected reforms, and that those seem relatively superficial with the renaming of Scottish Qualifications Authority to Qualifications Scotland while retaining the same functions, and plans set out to create a separate inspection agency but no further information about Education Scotland or plans for the Curriculum for Excellence.

The Royal Society of Biology is well prepared for feeding into curriculum and qualification reform, and to contribute subject-specific views on teacher training, recruitment, retention, and career-long professional learning. Over the last ten years, in anticipation of curriculum review, the Society has developed and published *Evolving 5-19 Biology: recommendations and framework for 5-19 biology curricula*, along with a summary for policymakers and will soon publish further papers discussing sustainability education, practical activities, teachers' perception of ecology, and transferable skills. In this suite of documents. The framework and recommendations have been designed to sufficiently future-proof curricula to reduce the need for regular updates of the curriculum and the disruption this causes schools.

RSB notes that there is a commitment to establish a Strategic Authority Council, and for Qualifications Scotland to prepare and publish learner, teacher and practitioner, and other charters, and that Qualifications Scotland will be expected to report to Ministers. RSB advocates for a long term vision for biology, and STEM, teaching and learning with curriculum, qualifications and teacher workforce initiatives with a statutory duty for Qualifications Scotland to consult with teachers and subject organisations and experts, and to draw on data and evidence to inform reforms.

As part of the Learned Societies Group, RSB responded to Scottish Government's consultation on enhanced data collection for improvement. RSB supports Scottish Government's proposals to use key measures of progress to close the poverty related attainment gap, and in our joint response suggest other measures and use of other existing data collections to better inform STEM education in Scotland.

"As one example, while the STEM Education and Training Strategy lists a Key Performance Indicator of meeting Initial Teacher Education student intake targets for all STEM subjects, there is little corresponding data on retention rates, making it difficult to know whether recruitment efforts have been successful over the longer-term. As long as gaps in the data exist, it will be difficult to gauge the true condition of the Scottish 'STEM pipeline' and what could most usefully be done to ensure every pupil can realise their STEM aspirations both in the classroom and beyond."

RSB recommends that a clear vision for Scottish STEM education is established, within the broader context of reform of Education Scotland and a new Qualifications Scotland body.

RSB recommends that a commitment is made to reform curriculum and qualifications in Scotland, drawing on recommendations of Hayward and Muir reviews and with early engagement from subject organisation stakeholders and other subject and pedagogy experts.

RSB recommends that a commitment to enhanced data collection is included within the Bill as part of the duties of Qualifications Scotland

Evolving 5-19 Biology: recommendations and framework for 5-19 biology curricula:
https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/Evolving_5-19_Biology.pdf

Summary for policymakers:

https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB_-_Curriculum_Framework_-_Summary_for_Policy_Makers_-_D1.pdf

Learned Societies' Group for Scottish STEM Education response to Scottish Government consultation on enhanced data collection for improvement

<https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSE-AP-LSG-Enhanced-data-collection-for-educational-improvement-2022.pdf>

Q2. What are your views on the proposals for a new HM Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland?

The Royal Society of Biology has not responded to this question, however as a member of the Learned Societies Group for Scottish STEM Education, we support the joint response to the detailed call for views which includes comments on the establishing a new HM Chief Inspector of Education in Scotland.