QUALIFICATIONS SCOTLAND ACCREDITATION

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE STANDING ORDERS

For the purposes of this document:

- *All references to "the Board" refer to the Qualifications Scotland Board.*
- *References to "member" or "members" refer to Board members.*

1. Authority and Establishment

1.1 The Accreditation Committee (AC) is established by Qualifications Scotland in accordance with the Education (Scotland) Act 2025.

1.2 In carrying out its functions, the Committee (and any sub-committee of it) is not subject to the direction or control of Qualifications Scotland and must act independently of Qualifications Scotland (but this does not prevent the committee or any sub-committee of it and Qualifications Scotland from sharing information with each other).

1.3 The Committee is responsible for determining its own procedures (including its quorum) and for the proper discharge of its statutory accreditation functions.

1.4 The Committee must comply with any direction issued by Scottish Ministers.

1.5 The Accreditation Committee may regulate its own procedures (including quorum) and that of any of its sub-committees.

2. Purpose and Remit

2.1 The Committee shall exercise the accreditation functions conferred on it by the Education (Scotland) Act 2025 and any other enactment.

2.2 The Committee shall advise the Scottish Ministers on any matters relating to its function.

2.3 The Committee shall provide advice to Qualifications Scotland on any matter relating to its function from time to time.

3. Authority and Delegation

3.1 The Accreditation Committee is authorised by Scottish Ministers to operate within these Standing Orders. The Committee may amend or delegate further functions as it deems appropriate.

3.2 The Accreditation Committee may authorise any of its members, any sub-committee established by it or any member of staff of Qualifications Scotland, to perform such of its functions (and to such extent) as it may determine.

3.3 The Accreditation Committee may not authorise another person to approve its Corporate Plan or Annual Report.

3.4 The Accreditation Committee may establish such sub-committees as it sees fit.

3.5 The membership of a committee or sub-committee may include persons who are not members of Qualifications Scotland.

3.6 Operational meetings will be conducted by an internal Qualifications Scotland group, the Accreditation Coordination Group (ACG), usually on a weekly basis and decisions will be recorded and reported to the Accreditation Committee at its quarterly meetings.

3.7 The ACG's remit and Standing Orders will be reviewed by the Accreditation Committee on an annual basis.

3.8 Notwithstanding any delegations of functions of the Committee, its responsibility for the performance of the function or its ability to perform the function itself is unaffected.

4. Membership and Appointment

4.1 The Committee shall consist of a Convener and individuals appointed by the Convener as committee members.

4.2 A majority of the members of the Committee must not be members of Qualifications Scotland.

4.3 Members of staff of Qualifications Scotland may not be appointed as members of the Committee.

4.4 Members shall be appointed for such terms and on such conditions as are consistent with the Education (Scotland) Act 2025.

4.5 Members of staff of Qualifications Scotland must be allowed to observe or participate in meetings of the committee at the discretion of the convener.

4.6 The Board Chair is not a member of the Committee but may attend meetings.

4.7 The Committee can co-opt additional members for a period of time, with the approval of the Convener, to provide specialist skills, knowledge and experience.

4.8 The Convener and other members of the Committee will meet informally with the Chief Accreditation Officer and other members of staff outside of Committee meetings as necessary.

4.9 The powers of this document provide for the Committee to sit privately without any non-Committee members for all or part of a meeting. Additionally, the Committee will meet privately once a year to review its effectiveness.

4.10 The validity of any proceedings of the Committee is not affected by a vacancy in membership or by any delay in the appointment of a member.

4.11 The Chief Accreditation Officer shall be the Lead Executive for the Committee.

4.12 Members' Committee appointments are renewable in line with the Board's appointments policy. Co-opted members may serve for a shorter defined term.

4.13 Removal and vacancy: The Board Chair may remove or replace members at any time. Any vacancy shall be filled as soon as practicable.

5. Convener and Deputies

5.1 The Convener shall be a member appointed by the Scottish Ministers to be the Convener of the Accreditation Committee.

5.2 The Convener is responsible for leadership of the Committee, setting agendas (in conjunction with the Chief Accreditation Officer and Accreditation Officer), ensuring effective conduct of meetings and reporting key matters to Ministers and the Board.

5.3 If the Convener is absent, the Deputy Convener will act. If neither is present, or there is no Deputy Convener, the members present shall elect a Convener for that meeting or the meeting shall be deferred and rescheduled.

5.4 The Scottish Ministers may assign to a person appointed as a member of Qualifications Scotland –

(a) the function of deputising for the convener,

(b) the function of convening the committee during any period when there is no Convener.

5.5 The role of deputising can be resigned without resulting in resignation as a member of the Committee. If the deputy is not already a member of the committee in their own right, they are to be treated as a member of the committee when acting as the deputy.

References to Convener forthwith will apply equally to the Deputy Convener if their role has been activated by Ministers.

6. Meeting Management

6.1 The Accreditation Officer (or other such appropriate person) will provide administrative support to the Committee including agenda preparation, distribution of papers, minute taking and maintenance of records including actions and the conflicts register.

7. Conduct of Business

7.1 All meetings will follow these Standing Orders. Members must follow Qualifications Scotland's Code of Conduct for Board Members.

7.2 The Convener will decide on all questions about the order, relevance, and conduct during meetings.

7.3 Members must adhere to:

- The Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000
- Board Members' Code of Conduct
- Qualifications Scotland Framework Document

8. Quorum

8.1 A quorum for meetings of the Committee shall be three members, one of whom must be the Convener or Deputy Convener (if designated, or another person specified by the Committee for that purpose).

8.2 The quorum must include at least three members of the Accreditation Committee, the majority of whom must be members (and not observers) of the Accreditation Committee who are not Board members of Qualifications Scotland.

8.3 If a quorum is not present within 15 minutes of the scheduled start time the meeting may be adjourned; decisions may not be made other than in accordance with Section19 Urgent Decisions Between Meetings.

8.4 Notwithstanding the above, where there is not a quorum present at a meeting, the Convener may determine that the scheduled business be considered informally, and any recommendations noted. Recommendations around approvals would not be effective until ratified or amended at the subsequent meeting of the Committee.

8.5 If a quorum is not available for the passing of a resolution on any matter, then that matter will not be discussed further or voted upon at that meeting. Such a position will be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

8.6 If at any meeting the Convener is not present within 15 minutes after the time appointed for holding the meeting or is unwilling to act, Convenership will revert to the Deputy Convener. In the event of a Deputy Convener not being appointed, the members of the Committee present will choose one of the members to be the Convener of the meeting.

8.7 A quorate meeting will be adjourned if, by virtue of members absenting themselves during proceedings, the number falls below the stipulated quorum.

In such an event:

8.7.1 Unfinished business will be placed on the agenda for the next scheduled meeting of the Committee; or

8.7.2 The Convener and remaining members present may determine that scheduled business is dealt with in accordance with 8.4 above.

9. Meetings – Frequency and Notice

9.1 Frequency: The Committee shall meet no fewer than four times per year and otherwise as required by the Convener or Scottish Ministers.

9.2 The Accreditation Officer, in consultation with the Convener, shall prepare an annual calendar of meetings, considering public and school holidays and aligned with the Board calendar.

9.3 Electronic invitations will be sent to members once the calendar is finalised.

9.4 The Convener may waive notice in exceptional circumstances; any such waiver shall be recorded in the minutes.

10. Remote Meetings

10.1 The Committee may operate virtual meetings. Any member attending virtually shall be counted for quorum and voting subject to any technical or security conditions set out by Convener. All members present must be able to participate effectively in discussions.

10.2 Security and confidentiality requirements for remote participation shall be defined by the Convener but members of the Committee are expected to comply at all times with the requirements of 7.3 above.

11. Attendance, Observers and Invitees

11.1 The Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland shall have observer status on the Accreditation Committee.

11.2 The Committee may invite Board members who are not members of the Committee, executive staff, external advisers and others to attend meetings as observers or advisers for particular items. Invitees attend at the invitation of the Convener and have no voting rights.

11.3 Attendance shall be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

12. Agenda, Papers and Circulation

12.1 The agenda shall be agreed by the Convener and the Chief Accreditation Officer. Papers required by the Committee shall be drafted to a standard which enables informed decision-making and shall include an executive summary, recommendation(s), and any implications (legal, financial, EDI, risk).

12.2 Papers will be distributed normally at least 5 working days in advance. Late papers will only be permitted in exceptional circumstances and require Convener approval.

12.3 The agenda and papers will be sent to all members of the Committee and the observers set out in 11.1.

13. Decision Making and Voting

13.1 The Committee will seek to reach decisions by consensus. If a vote is required, decisions will be by simple majority of those present and voting. The Convener has a casting vote.

13.2 In no circumstances may an absent member vote by proxy. Absence is defined as not being present, either physically or virtually, at the time of the vote.

13.3 A record of decisions and the rationale shall be recorded in the minutes and any actions allocated.

14. Conflicts of Interest

14.1 All Committee members must comply with Qualifications Scotland's Conflicts of Interest Policy. Members must declare interests that might give rise to a conflict at the start of each meeting and any register maintained shall be reviewed annually.

14.2 Where a member has an actual, perceived or potential conflict relating to an item, the Convener will determine whether the member should withdraw. The nature of the conflict and any withdrawal shall be recorded in the minutes.

14.3 Declaring a financial interest has the effect of prohibiting any participation in discussion and voting.

14.4 A declaration of a non-financial interest involves a further exercise of judgement on the member's part. A member must consider the relationship between the interests which have been declared and the particular matter to be considered. If a member feels that, in the context of the matter being considered, their involvement is neither capable of being viewed as more significant than that of an ordinary member of the public, nor likely to be perceived by the public as wrong, then declaring an interest will not preclude their involvement in discussion or voting.

14.5 If a member is not confident about the application of this objective yardstick, they must play no part in discussion and leave the meeting room until discussion of the particular item is concluded. That person will not vote on any question relating to the matter.

14.6 If it is the Convener who holds a conflict of interest, the Deputy Convener should lead in determining the appropriate course of action. In the case that no Deputy Convener is appointed or available, the Committee will together determine the appropriate course of action with the Convener not taking any part in the discussion or decision making in that regard.

15. Failure to Attend Meetings

15.1 If a member fails to attend three consecutive meetings or more, the Convener will assess the reason for non-attendance and may withdraw membership, appoint a replacement and inform Scottish Ministers of their decision and reasons.

16. Confidentiality, Information Handling and Freedom Of Information (FOI) /Data Protection Authority (DPA)

16.1 Committee members and invitees must observe confidentiality in respect of documents marked confidential and in respect of items so minuted. The Committee shall operate in accordance with Qualifications Scotland's FOI and Data Protection policies; the Chief Accreditation Officer is the FOI/DPA contact for the Committee and its papers.

16.2 Where publication of papers is appropriate, redaction should be applied in accordance with FOI practice and legal advice.

17. Minutes and Action Tracking

17.1 Minutes of each meeting shall record attendees, decisions, reasons, action points (with owners and deadlines where applicable), and any declarations of interest or confidentiality. Draft minutes shall be circulated to the Convener for comment within 10 working days of the meeting and circulated to members for approval at the next meeting.

17.2 A forward action tracker shall be maintained and reported at each meeting.

17.3 A copy of the approved minutes will be published on Qualifications Scotland Accreditation's website.

18. Reporting

18.1 The Accreditation Committee must prepare and publish a corporate plan as soon as reasonably practicable after the day on which it is established under the 2025 Act.

18.2 The corporate plan must set out how the committee intends to exercise its functions but may include such other material as the committee considers appropriate.

18.3 The committee may prepare a new corporate plan at any time and must publish any such new plan.

18.4 The Accreditation Committee must, as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of each financial year prepare and publish a report on its activities during that year send a copy of the report to the Scottish Ministers who will thereafter lay a copy of the report before the Scottish Parliament.

18.5 The Accreditation Committee will determine the form and content of each report.

19. Urgent Decisions Between Meetings

19.1 Where an urgent matter arises which would ordinarily fall to the Committee and delay would be prejudicial, the Convener (or Deputy, if appointed) in consultation with the Chief Accreditation Officer can either call an extraordinary meeting or invoke emergency procedures

19.2 A request for an extraordinary meeting of the Committee can be made by the Convener. The usual necessary quorum applies to extraordinary meetings.

19.2.1 The call to convene an extraordinary meeting of the Committee at short notice will be given not less than two clear working days before the meeting and will state the particular business to be transacted. No other business will be competent.

19.3 Emergency procedures provide powers for the Committee to deal with matters of urgency that require approval and cannot await the next ordinary, or extraordinary meeting of the Committee. This allows for the passing of Committee approvals by written procedure. That is, decisions can be taken without calling a physical meeting of the Committee.

19.3.1 For these urgent matters, the Accreditation Team will circulate proposals electronically with relevant briefing documents and set a deadline for member responses.

19.4 Requests for emergency procedures can be made by the Convener, Chief Accreditation Officer, or Scottish Ministers. Requests may include:

19.4.1 A decision required in respect of maintaining a sound system of internal control that supports the achievement of Qualifications Scotland Accreditation's organisational deliverables; or

19.4.2 A matter that the Convener or Chief Accreditation Officer or Scottish Ministers deem is sufficiently urgent.

19.5 Decisions require responses from a quorum, including the Convener.

19.6 Written resolutions carry the same authority as decisions made at meetings and will be reported for ratification at the next meeting.

19.7 If consensus is not reached, the matter will be deferred or an extraordinary meeting convened.

19.8 All powers and duties set out in this document will be applicable equally under the above procedures.

20. Review of Standing Orders

20.1 These Standing Orders shall be reviewed at least annually by the Committee. The Committee retains authority to amend or suspend these Standing Orders and will inform Scottish Ministers of any such use of authority in its annual report.

20.2 Any significant change in law, governance guidance, or structure shall trigger an immediate review.

21. Publication

The Committee will publish these Standing Orders (subject to redaction for confidential material) alongside its Terms of Reference, membership and minutes to the extent permitted by FOI/DPA.

22. Process for Appeals

All awarding bodies and standards setting organisations (hereafter known as 'the appellant') have the right to appeal any decision made by ACG. The sole basis for an appeal is that the decision made by ACG, based on the evidence available at the time, was incorrect. To establish this, the appellant must demonstrate either that the decision was unreasonable or that there was procedural irregularity by ACG.

22.1 Qualifications Scotland Accreditation defines an unreasonable decision as one which:

- lacks plausible justification;
- involves the decision maker(s) considering irrelevant factors or failing to consider relevant ones;
- lacks reasons, or if the reasons were provided, these are unclear; or
- involves a breach of procedural requirement.

22.2 All appeals should be submitted in writing, setting out the reasons for the appeal and the remedy sought, to the Chief Accreditation Officer. All appeals must be received by Qualifications Scotland Accreditation within 20 working days of the date on which the decision of the ACG meeting at which the decision was made was sent to the appellant.

22.3 The appeal submission will be reviewed by the Chief Accreditation Officer or in their absence, a nominated representative, to determine that it constitutes a valid appeal. The Chief Accreditation Officer or nominated representative will inform the Convener of the outcome of the review.

22.4 If the submission is deemed valid, an Extraordinary Meeting of the AC, independent of the ACG, will be held to hear the appeal. The Extraordinary Meeting of the AC must be quorate, meaning that it must involve more non-Board members than Board members. Members will be expected to declare any potential conflict of interest before joining the Extraordinary Meeting.

22.5 Based on the information provided by both parties, the Convener will decide whether the appeal can be considered without the appealing party and Qualifications Scotland Accreditation being present. If required, the Convener may invite one or both parties to attend the Extraordinary Meeting to seek clarification on any information submitted. Regardless of the approach taken, the appellant will be notified of the date of the meeting at least 30 working days in advance.

22.6 If the Convener requires either or both parties to attend, then the appellant may be represented by up to two members of staff. The names and roles of attendees must be provided to the Chief Accreditation Officer at least five working days before the hearing. Similarly, Qualifications Scotland Accreditation may also have up to two representatives. Legal representation is not normally permitted.

22.7 If the Convener deems that a meeting is necessary, then a member of staff from Qualifications Scotland will be present to take notes on the proceedings.

22.8 If the Convener deems it necessary for the appellant and Qualifications Scotland to be present during the meeting, the parties will make separate oral submissions. Qualifications Scotland Accreditation staff will make the initial submission and then withdraw from the hearing. The appellant will then make their submission before also withdrawing. Members of the AC may ask questions of both parties and may invite either party back for clarification. No new evidence may be introduced at this meeting.

22.9 Following the Extraordinary Meeting of the AC, both parties will normally be informed of the outcome within five working days. The decision letter serves as a written record of the meeting. The decision of the AC is final.