

Education Scotland's Annual Action Plan 2025 - 26: 'refocus through reform'

For Scotland's learners, with Scotland's educators

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1. Introduction: Gillian Hamilton, Chief Executive, Education Scotland

This plan, which is my second as interim Chief Executive of Education Scotland and the final plan in this strategic planning cycle, is published at a critical stage in the reform of Scotland's education system. It reflects my belief that every child and young person in Scotland should have an excellent education, every day, and that Education Scotland has a distinctive and valued contribution to make to that.

Promoting our role

The plan sets out how Education Scotland will continue to 're-focus through reform' and firmly places curriculum as our primary focus, whilst effectively managing the separation of the Inspection Function (HMIE) from Education Scotland (ES) and associated changes in accountability.

The strategic priorities and key actions in this plan act as a bridge between this intensive reform period and the longer-term organisational strategy for 2026 – 31 and align with the Scottish Government's Programme for Government, public service reform programme, National Improvement Framework (NIF) and Programme for Government (PfG). Importantly, they illustrate Education Scotland's role as an enabler of excellence and equity in education and recognise our contribution to improvement for the wider education system as well as eradicating child poverty in Scotland.

Improving the way we work

We are accelerating the changes to the way Education Scotland works:

- Adopting collective leadership and an evidence-based, user-focused approach to design and delivery of our priorities.
- Building and maintaining effective joint working with partners and stakeholders for the benefit of the people in Scotland's schools and other educational settings, especially trade unions, professional organisations, children and young people, the Centre for Teaching Excellence and, subject to passage of legislation, Qualifications Scotland.
- Increasing our focus on organisational performance and impact.
- Optimising and shaping current and future digital services, including Glow.
- Improving accessibility of professional leadership and learning through agile, flexible, best value delivery, for example, open access online programmes.
- Enabling sectoral expertise and experience to respond to big policy challenges through recruitment of ES Associates.

Building on our achievements

This plan builds on Education Scotland's key achievements in 2024 – 25:

- On education reform: delivering key actions to transition from one public body to two organisations, putting 'staff voice', 'shared services first' and 'public service reform' at the centre of organisational design.
- On curriculum: improving curriculum design and delivery across the system, through initial work on an evidence-based Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC), grounded in collective leadership and collaboration, and mainstreaming inclusion, wellbeing and equalities. In 2024 - 25 work began on the review of - English and Literacy, Gàidhlig and Literacy, Health and Wellbeing, Maths and Numeracy and Sciences.

- On national policy priorities: working with key partners to close the poverty-related attainment gap and deliver key actions from the 'Relationships and Behaviour in Schools: national action plan' and the 'Additional Support for Learning: Action Plan'.

Recognising reform as a process, not an event

This plan has been structured in a way that enables it to be easily separated into two organisational plans when the inspection function (HMIE) separates from Education Scotland (ES) in Autumn 2025. This ensures both organisations have clear strategy and performance reporting arrangements in the early part of the post-reform period while other arrangements are bedding in.

Taken together, this plan illustrates that Education Scotland plays a distinctive and crucial role in Scotland's education system. I am proud of the progress we are making and the changes to how we work. I am excited by the challenges and opportunities set out in this ambitious programme of delivery and alert to the risks and challenges we face as we 'refocus through reform'.

Gillian Hamilton

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Gillian Hamilton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underlining the name.

Chief Executive, Education Scotland

2. Education Scotland Annual Action Plan 2025-26: A summary

Strategic Intent	Education Scotland will ‘re-focus through reform’, as an enabler of excellence and equity in Scotland’s education system
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5 x Strategic Priorities	System Leadership	Curriculum, Learning Teaching and Assessment	Inclusion, Wellbeing, Equity, Equality	Best Use of Evidence	Transition, Transformation
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Key actions plotted against Strategic Priorities These key actions are based on what will deliver 4 x ‘refocus through reform’ areas	Curriculum To work with partners to strengthen curriculum design, enactment and improvement (including continuing the review of the Scottish Curriculum though the Curriculum Improvement Cycle); to ensure the use of highly effective curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment practice is clearly defined and understood in local contexts.	Professional learning and leadership To improve collective action on complex, systemic issues to ensure educators are able to lead effectively in complex circumstances.	Scottish Attainment Challenge To use more data and evidence-informed approaches, working with key partners, to tackle poverty related attainment gaps.	Enhancing inspection To enhance inspection and provide external evaluation of quality and standards of education provision in Scotland, building capacity and informing policy.
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Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), representing organisational performance directly attributed to Education Scotland	NIF outcomes representing Education Scotland’s contribution to the wider education system
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OUR PEOPLE: our people are our most important asset and are at the centre of the delivery of this plan
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Enablers of success: core functions that must be in place to enable excellence and equity for all Scottish learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Services • Governance • Learning, development and support • Effective leadership • Data, evidence and information management • Digital systems and services • Physical estate and sustainability • Workforce planning
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Values: our values underpin the way we work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect • Integrity • Creativity • Excellence
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3. Who we are

Who we are?

Education Scotland is a Scottish Government Executive Agency charged with supporting quality and improvement in Scottish education, securing the delivery of better learning experiences and outcomes for Scottish learners of all ages. As an Executive Agency, Education Scotland operates impartially while remaining directly accountable to Scottish Ministers for its performance and use of public funds. This status safeguards the independence of inspection, review and reporting within the overall context of the National Performance Framework.

Education Scotland's Chief Executive is responsible to Scottish Ministers, within the terms of the Agency's [Framework](#) document, for its management, performance, and future development. The Framework document sets out the Chief Executive's relationship with the Director-General Education and Justice, who acts as the 'Fraser Figure', ensuring alignment of the agency's strategy and activities with Minister's objectives and the broader expectations and requirements of Scottish Government.

Background

Education Scotland was established on 1 July 2011 by the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning. Since then, the launch of 'Education Governance: Next Steps: Empowering Our Teachers, Parents and Communities to Deliver Excellence and Equity for Our Children' in June 2017 set out a significantly enhanced role and purpose for Education Scotland, including a move to regional working, giving the Agency a strengthened scrutiny and inspection function and a renewed focus on professional learning and leadership, providing clarity and coherence to the regional and national landscape.

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) [report](#) was published in June 2021. The Scottish Government's response to the recommendations of that report includes a clear commitment to reform Education Scotland, including the HMIE function, and replace the Scottish Qualifications Authority.

Our most important asset: our people

Education Scotland had 412 employees as of the 31st March 2025. The number of Education Scotland employees based on full time equivalent is currently 399.4.

Organisational Structure

In February 2024 we aligned our structure behind national education priorities including key work on Scotland's curriculum, accelerating progress with closing the attainment gap as well as support for improvement in attendance and behaviour. Education Scotland is currently made up of one organisation, two functions: improvement and inspection, although this is subject to change through the education reform referred to above.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education

The Inspectorate has a legal responsibility to undertake inspection of education. Appointment to the post of HM Inspector is subject to approval by His Majesty at a sitting of his Privy Council.

HM Inspectors define high-quality education, providing standards that guide schools in self-assessment, led by quality frameworks which establish common criteria for evaluating quality in education. Our approach empowers schools and settings to self-evaluate, involving stakeholders in a transparent process. Quality standards identify strengths and areas needing

focus, with ongoing support from HM Inspectors. The practice of self-evaluation in Scotland has influenced other sectors and settings globally.

Undertaking inspection enhances professional practice, identifying strengths and offering improvement suggestions. The Inspectorate report on national education performance, publishing reports which summarise education findings and reflect overall educational performance in Scotland. The evidence deriving from inspection activity plays an important part in informing the development and review of educational policy and practice.

Associate Assessors are current senior practitioners such as headteachers, college principals or senior education staff who join an inspection team as peer reviewers. They are seconded either on a part-time basis approximately three/four times per year for inspections, or on a full-time basis for a period of 23 months.

Using peer reviewers as part of inspection teams builds capacity directly and promotes the dissemination of practice around the education system and broader services for children. Again, this is both pedagogical practice and evaluative practice.

In independent schools, link inspectors maintain relationships to assess risks and boost educational quality through regular engagement.

Learners and users of education services are at the heart of inspection and priority is given to evaluating the experiences of all learners and service users.

Each year the Chief Inspector determines the scale and priorities of the inspection and scrutiny programme, in agreement with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, who may also commission specific inspection and scrutiny activity through the Chief Inspector.

The Annual Inspection Plan which describes the range of inspection work we carry out each academic year. These can be categorised as service or establishment level inspections or national thematic inspections. This is published on Education Scotland's website.

Community Learning and Development Standards Council (CLDSC)

The CLDSC is a practitioner led body, the administration of which is staffed by civil servants. The Council's strategic aims and objectives, which are set and agreed by the Scottish Ministers, are to:

- Deliver a professional approvals structure for qualifications, courses and professional learning opportunities for everyone involved in CLD.
- Maintain and develop a registration system, available to practitioners delivering and active in CLD practice.
- Develop and maintain models of continuing professional learning and training opportunities for CLD practitioners.
- Improve and develop our organisational capability.
- Collaborate and contribute to relevant CLD policy and workforce development information.

There is a [framework agreement](#) in place between Education Scotland and CLDSC.

The Registrar of Independent Schools

The Registrar of Independent Schools is located within Education Scotland. The Registrar's role is to:

- Maintain a publicly available register of independent schools (online at: [Independent schools in Scotland: register - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/independent-schools/register)).

- Administer applications to register new independent schools, or applications to amend the registration of existing schools.
- Support the development and implementation of government policy in relation to independent schools.
- Liaise with both Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate (and other bodies as appropriate) to understand inspection outcomes and gather intelligence which may be relevant to the Scottish Ministers.
- Provide advice to the Scottish Ministers in relation to the independent schools' sector (in particular, where related to the Scottish Ministers' regulatory functions over the independent schools' sector as set out in Part V of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, as amended).

Corporate Services and Governance

Corporate Services and Governance (CS&G) is often characterised as the 'glue that holds the organisation together'. Alongside Digital Services, CS&G is the key enabler function for Education Scotland and seeks to become a public service exemplar for organisational strategy, governance and strategic insight.

The roles within CS&G are varied and are underpinned by a broad range of statutory and regulatory obligations that Education Scotland must meet. These fall into four main categories:

1. **Education Scotland's role as a public body and Executive Agency of the Scottish Government**

This includes organisational governance in its broadest sense, including the running of Boards (Advisory Board, Audit and Risk Committee). It also extends to our governance framework, including the Framework Agreement with Scottish Government, our financial, procurement, risk, audit and performance management arrangements, information governance and transparency, especially around Freedom of Information and Parliamentary Questions. This category cross-cuts a number of CS&G teams but is mainly led by people who work across Governance, including Finance.

2. **Education Scotland's role as an employer and civil service organisation**

This category also cross-cuts a number of CS&G teams. Staff voice is critical to meeting our obligations and this is underpinned by our Trade Union relations through our Partnership Board. Our Human Resources and Organisational Development and Internal Communications are key to meeting our obligations as an employer, and Estates & Facilities ensure Health and Safety compliance. We also have good workforce planning arrangements in place. Delivery of organisational priorities relies on the essential core activities provided by CS&G, for example, the Strategic Business Unit and Travel Unit.

3. **Education Scotland's role as a system 'thought' leader**

This category cross-cuts a number of CS&G teams but is mainly led by the Chief Executive's Office, and a small team of Personal Assistants, supporting strategic engagement between the Chief Executive and Leadership Team (LT) with wider Government at Scottish and UK Levels, and with key Sector Leaders, on shared challenges and priorities. The Data, Performance and Research (DPR) team also play a distinctive role here, leading development of organisational strategy, providing strategic insight, impact and evidence-based analysis in support of priority setting and wider improvement. The DPR team also focus on research and evaluation around our big priorities.

4. **Education Scotland's role as a system partner and stakeholder within the Education system**

This category cross-cuts a number of teams and is mainly led by the DPR team – sharing learning, research, and data and evidence, supporting improvement, working with and through the NIF and the Children's and Young People Improvement Collaborative (CYPIC).

Our External Communications is central to our role, keeping partners and stakeholders sighted on key developments, ensuring consistency in external messages across our priority work.

Digital Services

Education Scotland delivers the Digital Learning and Teaching (DLT) programme on behalf of the Scottish Government. This programme includes Glow which provides digital learning and teaching services that are in use across Scotland by teachers and learners, as well as connectivity for use by education establishments to a number of local authorities via the Scottish Wide Area Network (SWAN).

Education Scotland's Corporate Digital Services (CDS) team also ensure that the wider organisation have the appropriate digital systems (hardware and software) available to them to enable them to carry out their roles. Digital technology is introduced and managed in alignment with Scottish Government policies on service design, accessibility and security standards.

Digital Services, across both areas of delivery of DLT and CDS, endeavour to ensure that the organisation is able to identify, and benefit from, the opportunities that digital services can provide, to support the wider organisation in achieving their objectives. They also support the embedding of digital thinking across Education Scotland, outside of Digital Services.

4. Education Scotland Annual Action Plan 2025-26

Over this reporting year, Education Scotland will continue to 'refocus through reform' as an enabler of excellence and equity across Scotland's education system. For 2025-26, we have continued to set our key actions based on our four 'refocus through reform' areas: Curriculum, Professional learning and leadership, a refocused Scottish Attainment Challenge and enhancing inspections. In recognition of the curriculum as Education Scotland's primary function, the Curriculum Strategic Priority absorbs Learning, Teaching and Assessment. We have aligned our strategic priorities, and key actions that flow from them, with the NIF. Strategic Priorities are interconnected and should be viewed holistically rather than as discrete or separate activities. This plan fully recognises that Education Scotland cannot deliver on its own and must work effectively alongside stakeholders, partners and networks to achieve excellence and equity for all of Scotland's learners.

The Annual Action Plan below sets out:

- key actions that deliver our five Strategic Priorities. These key actions are based on our four 'refocus through reform' areas.
- a proportionate range of KPIs which are directly attributable to Education Scotland.
- alignment with NIF outcomes which illustrate Education Scotland's contribution to Scotland's education system.
- the lead Strategic Director (SD) and senior leader from the Extended Leadership Team (ELT) for each Strategic Priority.

Timelines set for delivery of key actions are based on 'quarters'. All key actions are set for Q4 unless indicated otherwise. Any divergence from set timelines will be monitored and reported as part of planning and reporting arrangements.

Strategic Priority: Curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment

'refocus through reform' area	Curriculum
Key actions 2025 - 26	<p>Curriculum Improvement Cycle (NIF)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We will continue to 'co-create and evolve' the curriculum in the following areas: English and Literacy, Gàidhlig and Literacy, Health and Wellbeing, Maths and Numeracy and Sciences.• We will commence CIC review activity in the following areas: Ethos and Life of the School, Expressive Arts, Interdisciplinary Learning, Modern Languages, Personal Achievement, RME, Social Subjects and Technologies.• We will fully consider cross curricular expectations for the evolved technical framework for Scotland's Curriculum.• We will grow and improve our national professional learning programme for curriculum design.• We will develop arrangements to embed inclusion, wellbeing and equalities within curriculum design.• We will develop and co-create a new professional learning offer on pedagogy.• We will contribute to the publication of a single combined timeline for reform of curriculum, qualifications and assessment (Q1).

KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 95% of participants¹ involved in CIC activities (e.g. core or collaboration groups) will report that they contributed authentically, felt their input was valued, and influenced the process in a meaningful way. • At least 95% of participants who are involved in professional learning and improvement support opportunities in curriculum will report they are likely to implement their learning in practice.
NIF outcomes 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. • Excellent partnership working, in line with the GIRFEC approach. • Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment. • Closing the poverty-related attainment gap. • Excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all learners. • An education system effectively engaging in digital technology.
Education Scotland leads	SD: Ollie Bray ELT: Joan MacKay, Andy Creamer

Strategic Priority: System Leadership

'refocus through reform' area	Professional learning and leadership
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will provide, and improve access to, high quality professional learning which supports the education system and uses the professional expertise from across the system, with an evidence-based focus on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ national programmes including: 'Into Headship', 'Leading the How of Change' and 'Building Racial Literacy' (NIF). ○ building capacity and confidence of practitioners and Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students to work with parents and families (NIF). ○ working collaboratively with teachers and other practitioners in schools and local authorities to provide resources and programmes of professional learning focused on Gaelic Medium Education at national and local levels (NIF). ○ working with ADES to support leadership development and self-evaluation for education leaders, particularly within the central team within all local authorities. ○ improving service users experience of accessing Education Scotland's professional learning, including implementation of the collaboration space. • We will develop and implement an enhanced leadership professional learning offer for early learning and childcare practitioners and leaders (NIF).

¹ All KPIs referencing 'participants' are defined as participants who complete and submit surveys

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will continue to work collaboratively with other public agencies (including Public Health Scotland and Police Scotland) to develop the Health Approach to Learning (PHAL), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> completion of phase 1: 'Learning and refining' (Q3) . commence phase 2: 'partnership models for working at scale to foster a multi-agency system leadership response for prevention and intervention approaches and place-based curriculum insight' (Q4).
KPIs ('attribution')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 95% of participants involved in professional learning and improvement support opportunities will report that they are likely to implement system leadership learning in practice. The reach of ES's professional learning programme will increase from 2025 - 26 as indicated by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> over 200 CLD leaders and practitioners from local authorities and third sector will have accessed an improved range of national Education Scotland professional learning opportunities. over 300 practitioners will have attended the Pondering Pedagogy sessions. over 80 practitioners will have attended sessions on parental engagement and family learning.
NIF Outcomes ('contribution')	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. Excellent partnership working, in line with the GIRFEC approach. Excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all learners.
Education Scotland leads	SD: Dave Gregory ELT: David Burgess

Strategic Priority: Inclusion, Wellbeing, Equity and Equality (IWEE)

'refocus through reform' areas	Scottish Attainment Challenge Professional learning and leadership
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will work with local authorities to improve attendance, attainment, relationships and behaviour and the curriculum to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inform, share and promote wider approaches to improvement to support the closing of attainment gaps (NIF). deliver on key actions from the 'Relationships and Behaviour in Schools Action Plan' and the 'Additional Support for Learning: Action Plan' (NIF). continue to develop data literacy for senior leaders and practitioners, particularly at Senior Phase (NIF). improve attainment and achievement outcomes for children and young people and reduce variation (NIF). deliver bespoke 'leadership for equity support' Equity Professional Learning, to augment school approaches to improving excellence and equity (NIF).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ build capacity and increase skills of classroom practitioners, ASN specialists and enable better support for children with ASN (NIF). ○ further develop support for improving attendance and engagement (NIF). ○ deliver Wave 4 of the CYPIC National Improving Writing Programme with five further local authorities (Q3) (NIF). ● We will work with Scottish Government and local authorities to hold a 'data summit' on Additional Support for Learning, focused on recommending actions for improving consistency of identification, support and reporting of children's needs at a local level.
KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At least 95% of participants involved in professional learning and improvement support opportunities in IWEE will indicate they are likely to implement their learning.
NIF outcomes 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. ● Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment. ● Closing the poverty-related attainment gap. ● Excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all learners. ● Improving relationships and behaviour, and attendance, with increased engagement in learning and a culture of dignity and respect for all.
Education Scotland leads	SD: Dave Gregory ELT: Sarah Elliot, Heather Robertson

Strategic Priority: Best use of Evidence

'refocus through reform' areas	Curriculum Professional learning and leadership Scottish Attainment Challenge
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● We will negotiate and implement data sharing arrangements between Education Scotland, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for Scotland and Scottish Government, in support of educational improvement. ● We will meet our public body obligations to respond fully and effectively to public inquiries, including the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI), Scottish COVID Inquiry and UK COVID Inquiry, including drafting of statements, provision of evidence, and all associated preparatory work. ● We will develop and implement a research and evaluation programme to support improvement in Education Scotland's key priority areas, including evaluating the impact of the 2024 - 25 local authority attendance work (NIF). ● We will support improvement to the way the education system engages with children and young people's voice. ● We will develop a corporate position on Artificial Intelligence.
KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AAP quarterly reporting will show improved use of data and evidence from 2024/25.

NIF outcomes 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. • Excellent partnership working, in line with the GIRFEC approach. • An education system effectively engaging in digital technology.
Education Scotland leads	SD: Rob Strachan ELT: Jacqui Ward

Strategic Priority: Transition and Transformation

'refocus through reform' areas	Curriculum Professional learning and leadership Scottish Attainment Challenge
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will implement Organisational Development of Education Scotland, including improvements to organisational structure. • We will build internal leadership capacity and capability linked to a refocused organisation, with staff voice being at the centre. • We will recruit and induct an Advisory Board and Audit and Risk Committee for the refocused Education Scotland. • We will explore independent advisory arrangements for a refocused Education Scotland that incorporate the input of practitioners and learners. • We will develop and implement all necessary financial and budget management arrangements, including allocation of assets and liabilities. • We will deliver changes to digital services for His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for Scotland and Education Scotland, including new email addresses, SCOTS identities, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for Scotland website, and any necessary changes in Salesforce. • We will co-create the future of Glow with stakeholders (NIF). • We will manage the migration of local authorities from SWAN to SWAN 2. • We will undertake a Business Continuity Assessment of Education Scotland in early post reform period. • We will develop and implement shared service arrangements for digital, estate and facilities, including governance and a re-charging model. • We will review and improve organisational governance frameworks including Education Scotland's approach to Best Value and Assurance Mapping. • We will work with Scottish Government to consider and respond to the Independent Review of Community Learning and Development (CLD).
KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of staff turnover and retention. • At least 65% of Education Scotland staff will report they feel supported and ready for change.

NIF outcome 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. • An education system effectively engaging in digital technology.
Education Scotland leads	SD: Rob Strachan ELT: Lesley Whelan, Roz McCracken

5. Introduction: Janie McManus, His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education for Scotland

This plan, my second as His Majesty's Interim Chief Inspector of Education, is published at a pivotal moment in the ongoing reform of Scotland's education system. It builds on the progress we made last year and sets out the next phase in our transition towards the establishment of an independent inspectorate.

Our work is shaped by a broader vision: an education system that delivers inclusion, excellence and equity for all, supports the wellbeing and rights of children and young people, and continuously improves through learning, collaboration, and trust. Inspection plays a vital role in this, not only in offering assurance and accountability, but in enabling learning, sharing effective practice, and shining a light on what matters most for learners.

This plan sets out how we will contribute to that ambition by:

- Providing accountability and assurance on the quality of Scottish education.
- Support education providers to improve through building capacity and the sharing effective practice.
- Using evidence to inform the development of educational policy and practice.
- Invest in our people and evolving our approaches to support transition and organisational readiness..

We will deliver our annual programme of inspections, share clear and constructive messages about what is working and what needs to improve, and continue to support the education system.

Equally important is our focus on relationships, especially with learners. By listening closely and engaging respectfully, we aim to ensure that our work contributes to meaningful, lasting improvement. We want our work to be trusted and useful, and we want practitioners to benefit from both the experience of inspection and the insights we share.

Throughout the year, we will collaborate with stakeholders and will remain open to feedback. This plan will be kept under review to ensure it reflects evolving legislation, the creation of HMIE, national priorities, and the changing needs of the system.

In parallel with our national priorities, we are actively contributing to international dialogue on the future of education and the use of technology. In 2025–26, we are participating in a joint international project exploring the role of artificial intelligence in education systems. This work will help inform our evolving understanding of evidence, improvement, and innovation in inspection.

While we prepare for future independence, we continue to operate within the current accountability framework. Accordingly, this plan aligns with the Education Scotland Annual Action Plan and Financial Strategy.

I look forward to the year ahead and to continuing our journey of reform — together.

Janie McManus

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janie McManus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education for Scotland

Strategic Priority: Provide accountability and assurance on the quality of Scottish education

'refocus through reform' area	Inspection
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will carry out our published annual programme of inspection. • We will embed and evaluate our new framework and model for inspecting Early Learning and Childcare, developed in partnership with the Care Inspectorate. • We will continue our review of school inspections, taking forward changes that make inspections more responsive, proportionate, and aligned with our future vision. We will publish a new framework for the inspection of local authorities. • We will further develop thematic inspection models, enabling us to respond more flexibly to emerging risks and persistent challenges such as equity, inclusion, attendance, and learner experience. • We will increase public understanding and trust in inspection by being transparent about our methods, findings, and the impact of our work.
KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of planned inspections carried out. • The percentage of inspection reports published within timescale each academic year. • The percentage of inspection findings documents published at the same time as the report. • The percentage of headteachers / heads of setting who report that the professional dialogue with HM Inspectors during the inspection has helped the school / setting to make improvements. • The percentage of Education Scotland (Inspectorate) staff reporting they feel supported and ready for change.
NIF outcomes 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. • Excellent partnership working, in line with the GIRFEC approach. • Excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all learners. • An education system effectively engaging in digital technology.

Strategic Priority: Support education providers to improve through building capacity and sharing effective practice

'refocus through reform' area	Inspection
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will strengthen how we communicate our findings, delivering regular, accessible, and insight-led outputs that support improvement at all levels of the system. This will include work to refresh our communications approach, ensuring alignment with our evolving role and audience needs. We will systematically identify, distil, and share effective practice from our inspections and thematic work by supporting practitioners and leaders to learn from what works. • We will begin to design mechanisms for continuous sharing of insights across sectors. • We will continue to develop the Associate Assessor role, increasing sector engagement, enhancing their contribution as sector-facing leaders who support both inspection and wider system improvement. • We will strengthen how we engage with children, young people, and practitioners to ensure that their experiences inform our work and contribute to meaningful system improvement.
KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of examples of effective practice identified and published. • The percentage of school inspections each academic year which involve an Associate Assessor. • The percentage of inspected school headteachers / heads of early learning and childcare settings who agree that the inspection has provided the establishment with a clear agenda for change. • The percentage of Associate Assessors who report that the experience they have developed in this role is utilised within their organisation.
NIF outcomes 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. • Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment. • Excellent learning, teaching and assessment for all learners.

Strategic Priority: Use our evidence to inform the development of educational policy and practice

'refocus through reform' area	Inspection
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will implement a new Knowledge and Evidence Strategy as part of reform and transition, enhancing our ability to capture, synthesise, and use evidence to drive improvement. • We will publish national and sectoral overview reports, aligning with the priorities of the NIF. • We will meet our obligations as a public body to contribute fully and effectively to national inquiries, including the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI), Scottish COVID Inquiry, and UK COVID Inquiry - ensuring accuracy, transparency, and professionalism in our responses. • We will strengthen our engagement in national policy and stakeholder groups, ensuring that inspection evidence directly informs key decisions and contributes to system learning at national level. • We will sharpen our focus and deepen our insight into key system challenges — including attendance, behaviour, curriculum development, and the experiences of children and young people who require additional support for learning..
KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of headteachers / heads of setting who report that the professional dialogue with HM Inspectors during the inspection has helped the school / setting to make improvements. • The percentage of inspected school headteachers / heads of early learning and childcare settings each academic year who agree that the inspection has provided the establishment with a clear agenda for change. • The percentage of inspected school headteachers / heads of early learning and childcare settings each academic year who agree that the establishment made changes as a direct result of the inspection.
NIF outcomes 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment (CIC). • Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level. • Excellent partnership working, in line with the GIRFEC approach. • Inclusive and relevant curriculum and assessment.

Strategic Priority: Invest in our people

'refocus through reform' area	Inspection
Key actions 2025 - 26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will review and update our professional learning strategy for inspectorate staff, aligning it with organisational reform priorities and ensuring it supports the knowledge, skills, and behaviours needed for our future role. • We will prepare for transition to His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for Scotland, ensuring Day 1 readiness to fulfil anticipated statutory functions. Throughout this process, we will support and engage our workforce to build shared understanding and confidence. We will co-design a new induction and development offer for all staff, aligned with our new functions and responsibilities, to build shared understanding, confidence, and a strong sense of purpose across the inspectorate. • We will reflect on and evaluate our own practice, ensuring continuous learning and improvement across the inspectorate.
KPIs 'attribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of Education Scotland staff reporting that they are able to access the right learning and development opportunities when they need to. • The percentage of Education Scotland staff reporting they feel supported and ready for change.
NIF outcomes 'contribution'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Globally respected, empowered and responsive education system with clear accountability at every level.

6. Education Scotland's corporate planning, performance, and financial planning cycle: before, during and after reform

It is important that this plan clearly explains Education Scotland's corporate planning, performance, and financial planning cycle for the periods before, during and after reform:

- 2021-22: Education Scotland published a five-year Corporate Plan which set out how Education Scotland would continue to work towards a vision of achieving excellence and equity for Scotland's learners, in partnership with Scotland's educators.
- 2022-24: Education Scotland published an updated Corporate Plan aligned to reform timelines set at that time and interpreted national expectations following the Scottish Government's response to Professor Ken Muir's review of Scotland's education system¹.
- 2024-25: Education Scotland extended the 2022 – 24 Corporate Planning period by a further reporting year through publication of the Annual Action Plan 2024-25, retaining Strategic Priorities, updating the key actions and highlighting the pivot towards a refocused Education Scotland. The Education Scotland Financial Strategy 2024-25 was published in tandem with the Annual Action Plan. The Annual Action Plan 2024 – 25 is consistent with the Accountability Framework, set out a proportionate set of KPIs and aligned with NIF. The Annual Action Plan 2024-25 recognised 'Inspection' as a 'refocus through reform' area, supported the initial work to make the shift to an independent Inspectorate (HMIE) and set out a distinctive set of key actions for the Chief Inspector.
- 2025-26: Education Scotland extends the Corporate Planning period by a further reporting year through publication of the Education Scotland Annual Action Plan 2025-26 and Education Scotland Financial Strategy 2025-26. Iterative improvements have been made to priorities, KPIs and alignment with NIF and Programme for Government. The Annual Action Plan 2025 – 26 and Financial Strategy 2025 – 26 cover the most intensive period of reform. Taken together, the documents enable an effectively managed divergence of Education Scotland and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for Scotland accountability arrangements through good planning and reporting within the reporting year, recognising the break point in accountability between Education Scotland Chief Executive and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for Scotland Chief Inspector scheduled for Autumn 2025.
- In tandem with the reform process, Education Scotland will begin to develop an evidence based Corporate Plan for the longer term (2026-2031) which aligns the refocused Education Scotland Corporate Plan and Financial Strategy. His Majesty's Inspectorate of Education for Scotland will develop a longer term, evidence-based Inspection Programme for the new Inspection Agency in accordance with statutory expectations.
- 2026-2031: The Education Scotland Corporate Plan will be developed and published in early Summer 2026. It will align organisational and financial strategy and set out clear priorities, resourcing, delivery and performance arrangements for these, including iterative changes to KPIs and alignment with NIF.

Education Scotland's reporting cycle follows the financial year (April to March) rather than the school year. This enables Education Scotland to meet its public body obligations, including the alignment of organisational performance and finance: Quarter 1 relates to April to June, Quarter

2 relates to July to September, Quarter 3 relates to October to December and Quarter 4 relates to January to March. As this reporting cycle differs from the school year we will continue to increase awareness of what reporting period each quarter represents.

Resources

The Resource Budget for ES in 2025 – 26 is over £40 million, made up of core budget plus resources allocated in support of national priorities. This represents approximately 0.1% of the Education Budget in Scotland.

This resource covers staffing costs, contracts by external providers, digital, buildings and energy, and administration as well as some grants for external bodies. Our budget is, and will continue to be, under pressure due to several inter-related challenges that, when taken together reduce the level of available resources for programme and project activities. Consequently, this plan makes a clear commitment to pivot resources behind priorities, with a primary focus on curriculum. In doing so, we are clear about the things that we will pay most attention to.

While we remain committed to delivering a wider set of actions across the organisation, beyond those articulated in this plan, we are clear that their delivery will not be at the expense of our priorities set out in this plan and our distinctive role as an enabler of equity and excellence in education in Scotland. We will look to deliver reform through this plan and existing resourcing arrangements as far as practicable, recognising that priorities and accountabilities will change during this reporting year and the associated resourcing implications which will require to be worked through.

Longer term, organisational and financial strategy will align as far as practicable as part of a longer-term corporate planning arrangements, as set out above.

Measuring and monitoring our progress

In this plan, we set out the key actions that we will focus our attention on this year. This plan provides the touchstone for plans within Education Scotland Directorates and Teams. Management of the Annual Action Plan is undertaken by the LT and monitored by our Advisory Board (AB). Within Directorates and Teams, more consistent monitoring practices have been introduced. Strategically significant pieces of work – as well as linkages across priorities and actions – are overseen by the Support and Improvement Board (SIB), Corporate Services and Governance (CS&G) Board and Digital Services Board (DSB).

Education Scotland has set organisational KPIs to monitor performance and this plan aligns these with the Strategic Priorities. The KPIs highlight areas of organisational performance directly attributed to Education Scotland ('attribution'). NIF is aligned with Strategic Priorities and highlights areas of system performance that Education Scotland contributes to, reflecting our distinctive role in Scotland's wider education system ('contribution').

Moving forward, we will continually improve qualitative and quantitative measures of success and capture not just the work we are doing, but how that work is experienced and the impact it has. We will report against the key actions set out in this plan on a quarterly basis to the LT, AB and the Scottish Ministers and will continue to align, integrate and improve organisational planning, reporting and monitoring arrangements as far as practicable.

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