ORKNEY
ISLANDS COUNCIL

Item: 7

Education, Communities and Housing Committee: 11 November 2026

Qualifications Scotland – System Verification Visit – The Learning Link.

Report by Director of Education, Communities and Housing.

1. Overview

1.1. This report advises of the outcome of the Qualifications Scotland System Verification visit undertaken at The Learning Link in August 2026, for noting.

1.2. In August 2026 Qualification Scotland completed a System Verification visit of the Learning Link.

1.3. The purpose of the System Verification visit was to review all policies, procedures, resources and practices to ensure The Learning Link is meeting Qualification Scotland's quality assurance criteria.

1.4. The outcome of the visit is detailed below:

- Management of the centre – High confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualification Scotland standards within the centre.
- Resources - High confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualification Scotland standards within the centre.
- Candidate Support - High confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualification Scotland standards within the centre.
- Internal assessment and verification - High confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualification Scotland standards within the centre.
- External assessment - High confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualification Scotland standards within the centre.
- Data Management - High confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualification Scotland standards within the centre.

1.5. There was one recommendation discussed during feedback. This was to review the current policy on internal assessment and verification and ensure a new written policy includes details of the three stages of internal verification.

1.6. Qualification Scotland have awarded The Learning Link a High Confidence rating, indicating the centre meets all the criteria required to operate and a Qualification Scotland award centre. Due to the confidence level future Systems Verifications will be held in 3 years.

2. Recommendations

2.1. It is recommended that members of the Committee:

i. Note the Systems Verification Visit Report relating to The Learning Link, issued by Qualification Scotland on 20 August 2026, attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

3. Background

3.1. The Learning Link is the Adult Learning Centre for the Community, Learning, Development and Employability Service. It is a Qualifications Scotland recognised centre and as such is required to undergo external audit and scrutiny to ensure the service is meeting all the required criteria, to deliver Qualification Scotland accredited qualifications. The last system verification visit took place on 11 May 2023.

3.2. Systems verification is the process used to ensure that Qualifications Scotland Centres comply with the quality assurance criteria and have internal quality assurance systems appropriately documented, effectively implemented and evaluated, and show continuous improvement in their application.

3.3. During the verification visit, all policies, procedures, resources and practices are reviewed to ensure the Centre is being managed in a way that meets Qualifications Scotland's quality assurance criteria. Unlike a qualifications verification, it is not subject specific – the verification focuses on the underpinning quality assurance systems in place within the Centre.

3.4. Prior to the Systems Verification visit, The Learning Link staff had to provide the evidence of:

- Roles and responsibilities (SQA Coordinator, assessor, internal verifier and invigilator).
- Invigilation procedure where centres use the Scottish Online Assessment Resource (SOLAR).
- Malpractice Policy/Procedure.
- Conflict of Interest Policy/Procedure.

- Recruitment/selection policy for assessors and internal verifiers.
- Candidate induction materials/checklist.
- Equal access to assessment policy.
- Assessment Arrangements/Reasonable Adjustments Policy/Procedure.
- Candidate Complaints Procedure.
- Internal Verification Policy/Procedure.
- Internal Assessment Appeals Policy/Procedure.
- Procedures for registering, entering and resulting SQA candidates, including the data exchange statement used to inform candidates that their personal details would be shared with SQA.

3.5. During the visit, the Qualifications Scotland verifier spoke with the Head of the Centre, the Centre Coordinator, centre staff and recent learners. In addition, they looked at how current policies, processes, paperwork and resources were used within the centre, to triangulate evidence, and gain assurance that they were implemented effectively in the day to day running of the Centre.

3.6. Initial feedback and the final Systems Verification report. attached as Appendix 1 to this report, uses a 'traffic light' rating against each criterion:

- Green: You have provided evidence that fully meets the criterion. There are no required action points.
- Amber: You have provided some evidence in support of this criterion, but it is not enough. Required action points will be set.
- Red: The evidence you have provided falls well short of meeting the criterion. Required action points will be set.

For Further Information please contact:
Lindsey Johnson, CLDE Team Manager – Adult Learning and Employability, extension 2437, Email: lindsey.johnson@orkney.gov.uk.

Implications of Report

1. **Financial** - None directly relating to the recommendations in this report.
2. **Legal** – None directly relating to the recommendations in this report.
3. **Corporate Governance** – Not applicable.
4. **Human Resources** – None directly relating to the recommendations in this report.
5. **Equalities** – An Equality Impact Assessment is not required for performance monitoring.
6. **Island Communities Impact** – An Island Communities Impact Assessment is not required for performance monitoring.

7. **Links to Council Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Council Plan strategic priorities:
   ☒Growing our economy.
   ☒Strengthening our Communities.
   ☐ Developing our Infrastructure.
   ☐ Transforming our Council.
8. **Links to Local Outcomes Improvement Plan:** The proposals in this report support and contribute to improved outcomes for communities as outlined in the following Local Outcomes Improvement Plan priorities:
   ☒Cost of Living.
   ☒Sustainable Development.
   ☒Local Equality.
   ☐ Improving Population Health.
9. **Environmental and Climate Risk** – Not applicable.
10. **Risk** – Not applicable.
11. **Procurement** – Not applicable.
12. **Health and Safety** – Not applicable.
13. **Property and Assets** – Not applicable.
14. **Information Technology** – Not applicable.
15. **Cost of Living** –Not applicable**.**

List of Background Papers
None.

Appendix
Appendix 1 – Systems Verification Visit Report from Qualification Scotland.

Systems Verification - Visit Report

Systems verification is the process we use to ensure that Qualifications Scotland centres comply with the quality assurance criteria and have internal quality assurance systems appropriately documented, effectively implemented and evaluated, and show continuous improvement in their application. Guidance for centres relating to the systems verification visit can be found at https://www.sqa.org.uk/qualityassurance.

Rescheduled date		Reason	
Centre Name	**The Learning Link**	Centre Number	**6065031**
Systems Verifier Name	**Fiona McKenzie**	Systems Verifier Contact Details	**Fiona.McKenzie@sqa.org.uk**
Double Banker Name (if applicable)		Date/Time of Virtual Event	**20 Aug 26 - 10:00**
Head of Centre Name	**Lindsey Johnson**	Head of Centre Email Address	**Chrissie Matthews**
Qualifications Scotland Co-ordinator Name	**Chrissie Matthews**	Centre Email Address	**Chrissie.Matthews@orkney.gov.uk**

Summary of Visit		
	Outcome Statement	Non-Compliant Criteria
Management of a Centre	**High Confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualifications Scotland standards within this centre**	
Resources	**High Confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualifications Scotland standards within this centre**	
Candidate Support	**High Confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualifications Scotland standards within this centre**	
Internal Assessment and Verification	**High Confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualifications Scotland standards within this centre**	
External Assessment	**High Confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualifications Scotland standards within this centre**	
Data Management	**High Confidence identified in the systems that support the maintenance of Qualifications Scotland standards within this centre**	

Sanctions	

Records of Discussions	
Discussions with Candidates	Yes
if YES, please provide a brief summary of the discussion:	You had very kindly arranged for one of your most recent candidates to be available for me to contact by phone during our meeting. This candidate has recently completed and achieved with your centre, and it was clear that they were extremely proud of this achievement. In discussion they expressed the motivation to consider further qualifications, truly a sign of a positive learning experience. They explained how they had been inducted with all information provided from the start, and then felt fully supported throughout, with the flexibility to contact their assessor when they felt the requirement. They were aware of all requirements of their qualification, and avenues within Qualifications Scotland where they may need to raise any appeal, complaint or query. Finally, they explained how their assessor had been a constant source of encouragement and support during their learning journey. I congratulate them on their achievement, and yourselves as as centre for providing an excellent learning experience. Please express my sincere thanks to them for their valuable time and input on the day, it is always fantastic to hear this type of feedback directly.

Discussions with Assessors	Yes
if YES, please provide a brief summary of the discussion:	Chrissie, you are an assessor for your centre, all discussion within body of report.
Discussions with Internal Verifiers	Yes
if YES, please provide a brief summary of the discussion:	Chrissie, you are an internal verifier for your centre, all discussion within body of report.

Outcome Summary

1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.10
2.1	2.2	2.3	2.5						
3.1	3.4	3.5	3.6						
4.1	4.5	4.7	4.8						
5.1	5.2	5.3							
6.1	6.2	6.3	6.4						

Management of a Centre

	Criteria	Impact	Compliance Level	Comments	Agreed Action	Good Practice	Recommendations
1.1	Policies and procedures must be documented and reviewed to ensure full compliance with Qualifications Scotland quality criteria.	High	Green	You utilise a footer system of version control, and a change log for most of your documented policies and procedures. This is something you carry out in conjunction across your roles, with version numbers and dates updated as and when required.			
1.2	Policies and procedures must be endorsed by senior management and disseminated to all relevant staff.	Low	Green	You explained that all policies and procedures are within your procedural documentation, available in hard copy but also within your shared drive for all relevant staff to access. Your Head of Active Communities Garry Burton was available for feedback provided from our systems meeting.			
1.3	Qualifications Scotland must be notified of any changes that may affect the centre's ability to meet the quality assurance criteria.	High	Green	All changes that Qualifications Scotland require notification of, are listed under the role and responsibilities of the Centre co-ordinator.			
1.4	The roles and responsibilities of those involved in the administration, management, assessment and quality assurance of Qualifications Scotland qualifications across all sites must be clearly documented and disseminated.	Medium	Green	Your LL01 Roles and responsibilities document details the assessor, internal verifier and Centre co-ordinator sufficiently. You explained all staff are currently employed for your centre.			
1.5	Suspected candidate or staff malpractice must be investigated and acted upon, in line with Qualifications Scotland requirements.	High	Green	Your LL02 Malpractice policy fully meets all our requirements, containing information on your investigation procedures, reporting procedures, procedures for appeal and retention requirements. You also have your LL09 Plagiarism policy which outlines what you will do if someone is suspected of plagiarism from initial identification and review.			

1.6	No-one with a personal interest in the outcome of an assessment is to be involved in the assessment process. This includes assessors, IVs and invigilators.	Low	**Green**	Your LL03 Conflict of interest policy is clear, detailed, and also provides examples of mitigations which is great to see. You support this with your LL03.1 Conflict of interest form where you would record any concerns.			
1.7	There must be an effective process for communicating with staff, candidates and Qualifications Scotland.	Medium	**Green**	You work in a small, close-knit team, and therefore communication is frequent. You shared minutes of meetings on screen for me during our meeting which you tend to schedule fortnightly, and you also demonstrated information share on your systems via email etc. Your candidates are most often attending your centres/premises for learning and assessment, however you also facilitate remote meetings/support where appropriate, and you are flexible to manage the most accessible methods of communication and information share to suit the requirements of all.			
1.8	Feedback from candidates and staff must be sought and used to inform centre improvement plans.	Low	**Green**	You provide evaluation forms at the end of your candidates qualifications which are completed digitally, and form part of your learner exit and review process. Any feedback is collated and discussed at your regular meetings. Feedback across staff is very frequent, informal, and also recorded formally at your meetings.			
1.9	The centre must comply with requests for access to records, information, candidates, staff and premises for the purpose of external quality assurance activities.	High	**Green**	This is documented within the role and responsibilities of the Centre Co-ordinator, and all correspondence and information prior to our meeting has been prompt and professional, so thank you for this.			
1.10	Outcomes of external quality assurance must be disseminated to appropriate staff and any action points addressed within agreed timescales.	Medium	**Green**	This is embedded within the role and responsibilities of the Centre Co-ordinator.			

Resources

	Criteria	Impact	Compliance Level	Comments	Agreed Action	Good Practice	Recommendations
2.1	Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.	High	Green	You have it embedded within your roles and responsibilities for centre, the requirements you check for anyone employed as an assessor or internal verifier for your centre.			
2.2	Assessors and internal verifiers must be given induction training on Qualifications Scotland qualifications and requirements.	Medium	Green	Your LL10 Assessor/verifier induction checklist is a really good checklist for completion when inducting any new assessors or verifiers to your centre. No completed copies viewed at this verification, as you explained there are no new additions to your team since your last systems verification.			
2.3	There must be a documented system for initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.	Medium	Green	Resources are discussed and managed across your team as required, raised in your regular informal, and formally recorded team meetings.			
2.5	All sites where candidates undertake assessments for Qualifications Scotland qualifications must be safe and appropriately resourced, and must provide access for candidates, staff and Qualifications Scotland personnel.	Medium	N/A	You have your LL12 Site Selection Checklist for any sites that are not owned or operated by yourselves, and which fully meets Qualifications Scotland requirements. All assessment is currently at your own premises. No completed copies viewed as all sites currently assessed at are your own.			

Candidate Support

	Criteria	Impact	Compliance Level	Comments	Agreed Action	Good Practice	Recommendations
3.1	Candidate induction must include information about the Qualifications Scotland qualification and Qualifications Scotland requirements.	High	Green	You carry out induction with your candidates either in cohorts, or individually, whatever is required/planned, and also to suit the needs of your candidates. You complete your LL11 Candidate induction checklist, which is a comprehensive recording document of all information provided to and discussed with your candidates at this key stage. You provide the data exchange statement and privacy link on the candidate registration form. You explained that you utilise an exercise with most candidates at the outset, to help gauge level, and support tailored learning and assessment planning from this point. You also explained all tools and facets you utilise to inform your community of the opportunities presented by your centre, all fantastic to hear.			
3.4	Policies and procedures must give Qualifications Scotland candidates equal opportunities for assessment.	Low	Green	You have an equal opportunities policy which commits to ensuring equal access to assessment for all, and you list the nine protected characteristics within your policy.			
3.5	Individual candidates' requirements for assessment arrangement must be discussed, identified, implemented and recorded.	Medium	Green	Your LL04 Assessment arrangements procedure outlines your procedures on how you record and decide upon any assessment arrangement. You also provide information on what you could potentially support with, e.g. scribing, and you discussed various examples of how you have supported your candidates in the past.			

3.6	Candidate complaints must be handled in line with a documented complaints procedure which meets Qualifications Scotland requirements.	Medium	**Green**	Your LL05 Complaints procedure gives details on two designations that can be approached with a complaint, and how complaints can be raised informally and formally. You also include detail on the right of escalation to Qualifications Scotland, where a candidate may remain dissatisfied once having exhausted your internal procedure. Finally, you include information on the SPSO, as you are part of the local authority.			

Internal Assessment and Verification

	Criteria	Impact	Compliance Level	Comments	Agreed Action	Good Practice	Recommendations
4.1	Internal assessment and verification procedures must be documented, monitored and reviewed to meet Qualifications Scotland requirements.	Medium	Green	You have detailed roles and responsibilities for your internal verifier, and you displayed completed copies of your internal verification reports on screen for me during our meeting. You explained that your sampling strategy is to verify at 100%, for the volume of candidates that you have, and this suits your internal quality assurance standard. You also displayed on your system where you have the documentation and guidance from the IV toolkit, and from which you utilise resources.			Though we had discussion around your processes, and you showed me evidence of these in completed records, I found it difficult to determine where you had specifically documented procedures around your internal verification strategy, and the three stages of internal verification which must be covered. This is a key part of your delivery and internal quality assurance of Qualifications Scotland qualifications, and I therefore strongly recommend that you review your current policy/procedures for this criterion, against what is in the Qualifications Scotland requirements and guidance. This must include clearly what your centre will do over the three stages of internal verification, which are pre-assessment, during assessment and post assessment. This also must include information on your sampling strategy for centre. For further guidance on the systems verification requirements for this criterion, refer to pages 39-40 of the 'Systems Verification Criteria: Guidance for centres' and pages 31-32 of the 'Systems Approval and Verification: Support Materials'.

4.5	Assessment materials and candidate evidence (including examination question papers, scripts and electronically-stored evidence) must be stored and transported securely.	High	**Green**	Your LL08 Data retention, collection and deletion outlines your procedures for ensuring the safe storage of candidate data, including password protections, user restrictions and restricted access to your drives. You also have your LL06 Secure acquisition and storage of assessment materials policy and procedure, which details your procedures around the safe storage of candidate evidence and assessment materials. This includes detail on the correct use of the secure site, and distribution and handling of any assessment materials. Your procedures also cover the requirement to report any breach immediately, and your provision of storage of paper-based materials in locked filing cabinets also.			
4.7	Candidate evidence must be retained in line with Qualifications Scotland requirements.	High	**Green**	Your LL08 Data retention, collection and deletion document contained all information on your periods of retention, including for appeals and malpractice. There were some parts of this which were incorrect, stating 5 years, however we discussed this during our meeting, and you updated all parts of this document in real time to ensure all requirements are clear, correct and therefore met.			

4.8	Internal assessment appeals must be handled in line with a documented procedure which meets Qualifications Scotland requirements.	Medium	**Green**	Your LL07 Assessment appeals procedure is a good, clear procedure, with a three stage internal process for any candidate wishing to challenge an assessment decision. You also have your LL07.1 Appeals form, which is your recording documentation for any such raised appeal. You had also provided in your evidence, another procedure titled 'Statement of appeals procedure' which included an escalation to Qualifications Scotland, which is not applicable to any of the qualifications you are currently delivering. You explained this may be a historic version, so I would advise this is archived as appropriate to avoid any potential misinformation.			

External Assessment

	Criteria	Impact	Compliance Level	Comments	Agreed Action	Good Practice	Recommendations
5.1	Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under Qualifications Scotland's required conditions.	High	**N/A**	There is no external assessment within the Qualifications Scotland qualifications you are currently delivering.			
5.2	Assessment materials and candidate evidence, (including examination question papers, scripts and electronically-stored evidence) must be securely stored and transported.	High	**N/A**	There is no external assessment within the Qualifications Scotland qualifications you are currently delivering.			
5.3	The centre must submit, where appropriate, within published timelines, results services requests.	Medium	**N/A**	There is no external assessment within the Qualifications Scotland qualifications you are currently delivering.			

Data Management

	Criteria	Impact	Compliance Level	Comments	Agreed Action	Good Practice	Recommendations
6.1	Candidates' personal data submitted by centres to Qualifications Scotland must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate.	High	Green	Your LL14 Data management procedures are comprehensive, and cover all aspects of data management and transfer to Qualifications Scotland. This includes principles and procedures on SCNs, GDPR, data exchange, processing registrations, resulting and data cleansing procedures.			
6.2	Data on candidate entries submitted by centres to Qualifications Scotland must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate and the qualification.	High	Green	I carried out a data check of your centre on 20th August 2026, at which time you had two open entries on system. No concerns over data management.			
6.3	Data on candidate results submitted by centres to Qualifications Scotland must accurately reflect the current status of the candidate and the qualification.	High	Green	I carried out a data check of your previously certificated candidates on 20th August 2026, from the period of 1st January 2026 until date, of which there were 18. No concerns raised over sampled data.			
6.4	There must be an effective and documented system for the accurate recording, storage and retention of assessment records, internal verification records and candidate records of achievement in line with Qualifications Scotland requirements.	Medium	Green	Retention periods are noted on your LL08, which meets Qualifications Scotland requirements of a year beyond completion.			

Summary of Feedback to Centre	You have good, clear policies and procedures for your centre, which support the efficient delivery of your Qualifications Scotland qualifications, from induction, assessment, internal quality assurance, data processing and finally to resulting. You work in a small team, delivering to your community with an adaptive and flexible approach, and it was great to hear how you support your learners to achieve. There has been a bit of recent responsibility change for personnel, and you are ensuring that your processes are being reviewed, updated and shared as necessary through these changes to ensure consistency is maintained in your quality and knowledge base. Your procedures for induction allow you to determine the starting point of your candidates, which in turn allows you to tailor support and level, to meet requirements and maximise achievement. There were some minor updates to be made to your retention periods within one of your policies, however you carried these out during our meeting, to ensure all information is accurate and to requirement. I have noted one recommendation within your report for criterion 4.1, and I would strongly advise that you take some time to consider this for your centre. I have provided specific page details for our current criteria guidance and support materials, however I would also encourage you to utilise the multiple links provided on these pages, if you require any further guidance or information. May I take this opportunity to thank you Chrissie and Lindsey, for your dedicated preparation beforehand, and your discussion and further information on the day. It was great to learn more about the challenges and opportunities your candidates face, and how you navigate and support these through your flexible delivery and adaptive practice. Would you also pass on my thanks to your candidate who was willing to talk to me on the day, it was very much appreciated, and also to Garry, your Head of Active Communities, whose involvement fully demonstrates the support and cohesive working ethos of your organisation. I wish you all, all the best.

Name of Centre Representative present during feedback	
Name	**Designation**
Chrissie Matthews	Qualifications Scotland Co-ordinator/Assessor/Internal verifier
Lindsey Johnson	Head of Centre
Garry Burton	Head of Active Communities

Evidence Seen	Evidence uploaded to the centre hub in good time for meeting: LL14 Data management procedures, LL13 Equal opportunities policy, LL12 Site selection checklist, LL11 Candidate induction checklist, LL10 Assessor/internal verifier induction checklist, LL09 Plagiarism policy, LL08 Data retention collection and deletion procedures, LL07.1 Appeals form, LL07 Assessment appeals procedure, LL06 Secure acquisition and storage of assessment materials policy, LL05.1 Complaints form, LL05 Complaints procedure, LL04 Assessment arrangements procedure, LL03.1 Conflict of interest declaration form, LL03 Conflict of interest procedure, LL02.1 Malpractice reporting form, LL02 Malpractice policy, LL01 Roles and responsibilities, Qualifications Scotland Quality Assurance System, Initial candidate registration form, Checklist for assessors in preparation for internal verification, Assessors report, Declaration of authenticity, Malpractice and plagiarism information sheet, Statement of appeals procedure. Evidence shared on screen during meeting: completed registration forms, completed induction checklists, completed internal verification reports, minutes of meetings, email information.
Staff Interviewed	Chrissie Matthews and Lindsey Johnson.

General Information	The Learning Link has been an approved centre since 1999, most recently on our systems under the name Orkney Community Education Service, with their last systems verification having been carried out in May 2023. They currently deliver ESOL, Food Health and Wellbeing, and Literacy and Numeracy qualifications. At the time of this meeting, they had two open entries on system.