

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 8 October 2025
15th Meeting, 2025 (Session 6)

PE2170: Abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland

Introduction

Petitioner Paul Blaker on behalf of Accountability Scotland

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland and replace it with a government agency.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2170>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 16 June 2025.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 60 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received submissions from the Scottish Government and the petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C** of this paper.

Action

7. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
October 2025

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2170: Abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland

Petitioner

Paul Blaker on behalf of Accountability Scotland

Date Lodged

16 June 2025

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland and replace it with a government agency.

Background information

Many concerns have been raised about GTCS not meeting its principal legislative aims regarding:

- handling of safeguarding concerns which GTCS often dismiss as 'frivolous', evidenced in the Professional Standards Authority's review of the Fitness to Teach process.
- lack of action regarding credible concerns of potential widespread bullying of teachers by superiors
- concerns that the Fitness to Teach function was allowed to be weaponised unfairly against teachers
- concerns of potential collusion with one or more teacher unions to wrongly prevent or influence bona fide peer to peer teacher referrals
- Scottish Government responses to parliamentary questions, confirming awareness of specific concerns raised.

The GTCS is not supporting teachers' professional development nor are they helping children to experience improved quality learning and teaching.

The government decided to replace Education Scotland and reform the Scottish Qualifications Authority. Now GTCS, which has presided over declining standards and serious concerns, must be abolished in the public interest to ensure that trust in teaching and their regulator is maintained.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on PE2170

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

General Teaching Council for Scotland

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) is the independent regulator for teachers in Scotland. It was initially set up in 1965 and was established to support standards for the teaching profession in Scotland. Its role is to register and regulate teachers and college lecturers. GTCS' statutory functions are set out in the [Public Services Reform \(General Teaching Council for Scotland\) Order 2011](#). The 2011 Order sets out the aims of GTCS, which are:

- to contribute to improving the quality of teaching and learning; and
- to maintain and improve teachers' professional standards.

The GTCS' general functions are also set out in the 2011 Order. These are that the GTCS:

- keeps a public register;
- sets the standards for entering and remaining in the teaching profession;
- investigates the fitness to teach for individuals;
- considers the education and training of teachers and prospective teachers; and
- provides advice to the Scottish Government.

The 2011 Order also provides that the "GTCS must have regard to the interests of the public when performing its functions."

Fitness to Teach review

GTCS is currently undertaking a review of its Fitness to Teach process. It undertook a public call for views in 2024 and asked the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care (PSA) to undertake an independent review of the performance and efficiency of the Fitness to Teach process. [The PSA's report](#) was published in May 2025. [The PSA said](#)—

"Our findings highlight several areas for improvement such as reducing the time it takes to resolve cases, supporting vulnerable participants, simplifying public-facing guidance and documentation, and enhancing case management."

In [response to the findings of the report, GTCS said](#)—

"We will consider the PSA's recommendations in full and we will be presenting an action plan to our Professional Regulatory Assurance Committee. In the meantime, we ask all our partners and stakeholders to read the report in full

and consider it in the context of the wider regulatory system in which we all operate.”

Reform of GTCS

The [intention of the 2011 Order was to make](#) the GTCS “an independent, self-regulating, professional body for teachers working in Scotland.”

The Scottish Government considered reform of the GTCS in the previous session of the Scottish Parliament. In [November 2017, the Government consulted on a potential education reform bill](#). This included a proposal to establish an ‘Education Workforce Council’ to take on the responsibilities of the General Teaching Council for Scotland and the Community Learning and Development Standards Council and to register other education professionals.

On 26 June 2018, the then Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, announced that the Government would not take forward legislation and some of the aims of the reform would be taken forward in partnership with local government. In relation to the GTCS specifically, [John Swinney MSP said](#), “I accept that those proposals should not go forward because there is not sufficient agreement for that move to be undertaken.”

This parliamentary session, the Government has pursued reform of national education agencies. Reform of GTCS has not featured prominently as part this work.

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
24 June 2025

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Annexe C: Written submissions

Scottish Government written submission, 4 July 2025

PE2170/A: Abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland

Does the Scottish Government consider the specific ask[s] of the petition to be practical or achievable? If not, please explain why.

The Scottish Government has no plans to abolish The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). The Scottish Government considers GTCS to be effective in its independent role as regulator for teachers in Scotland. The Scottish Government therefore does not consider the ask of this petition to be practical or achievable.

One of GTCS's core roles is to ensure teaching standards and decide if someone should belong to the teaching profession. Through the Fitness to Teach process, GTCS investigate serious concerns about teachers and college lecturers on their register and individuals applying to be on their register. Ministers cannot intervene in their processes or question decisions made by independent Fitness to Teach panels. Panel members are independent and are not GTCS employees.

Under the [Public Services Reform \(General Teaching Council for Scotland\) Order 2011](#), GTCS has an obligation to investigate the fitness to teach of any individual seeking registration (article 18(1)(a)) and may investigate any registered teacher's fitness to teach where GTCS becomes aware of circumstances which GTCS considers justify such an investigation (article 18(1)(b)). Accordingly, GTCS has discretion as to what circumstances it would investigate a registered teacher's fitness to teach.

Any changes to GTCS remit and processes would require significant changes to their underpinning legislation.

The Scottish Government is assured that the GTCS takes its child protection responsibilities very seriously and that they are constantly ensuring that they are appropriate and proportionate. The GTCS are currently looking for ways to make their Fitness to Teach process as efficient as it can be while meeting the public interest.

Overall, the Scottish Government does not believe it is in the public interest to abolish the GTCS in favour of a government agency and has no plans to do so.

What, if any, action the Scottish Government is currently taking to address the issues raised by this petition, and is any further action being considered that will achieve the ask[s] of this petition?

GTCS are currently reviewing their [Fitness to Teach Rules](#). These rules set out the legal framework for when and how GTCS investigate Fitness to Teach referrals and how the outcomes of cases are determined. Scottish Government officials continue to engage with the GTCS as their review of the Fitness to Teach Rules progresses.

GTCS commissioned an independent review by the Professional Standard Authority (PSA) of the performance and efficiency of the Fitness to Teach process in the context of the statutory framework within which it sits. This report was [published](#) on 22 May. GTCS state that the results of the review will help inform the changes they need to make to the Fitness to Teach process and the rules that govern it.

Furthermore, GTCS has also published a [summary of feedback](#) from an open call to the public for views on the Fitness to Teach process. Likewise, it has been to inform the changes that they need to make in the Fitness to Teach process.

Is there any further information the Scottish Government wish to bring to the Committee's attention, which would assist it in considering this petition?

The petitioner, Paul Blaker, has repeatedly corresponded with the Scottish Government regarding GTCS and the Fitness to Teach process. Responses from the Scottish Government have focussed on the fact that the GTCS is the independent regulatory body for the teaching profession and Scottish Ministers have no locus to intervene in how GTCS are handling correspondence from members of the public.

Education Workforce Team

Workforce, Infrastructure & Digital Division

Directorate for Learning

Petitioner written submission, 5 September 2025

PE2170/B: Abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland

We write to express our deep concern regarding the Scottish Government's response to Petition PE2170, which calls for the abolition of the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS). The government's reply dismisses the petition as neither "practical nor achievable," yet offers no substantive engagement with the issues raised — issues that directly affect the quality of education and the safety, health and wellbeing of children and teachers across Scotland.

Scotland's educational performance has entered a period of serious decline. According to PISA over the past decade, national scores have dropped by 70 points despite an increase in education spending. Meanwhile, England has seen only a modest fall in performance while reducing its expenditure now ranks 4th in Europe with Scotland, once internationally respected for its educational standards slipping to 16th place.

This deterioration cannot be dismissed or deflected. It raises urgent questions about the effectiveness of our national education bodies. Government assurances that the General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) is fulfilling its statutory role are increasingly difficult to reconcile with the reality of declining outcomes. The system is not delivering, and the evidence demands accountability.

We are further troubled by the conduct of the Scottish Government's handling of this petition. Within 24 hours of its publication, Scottish Government staff emailed senior figures at the GTCS with the subject line "Petition," stating: *"Hi both – I'm assuming*

you're aware of this. We can discuss this afternoon – we have a template to fill in..”
Within minutes the GTCS's Chief Executive replied *“We are aware. See you later”*.

This correspondence suggests a level of coordination that undermines the GTCS's claim to independence. If the GTCS is truly an autonomous regulator, why is a senior civil servant initiating informal discussions with its leadership about a parliamentary petition that directly concerns its future? At best, this creates the appearance of bias; at worst, it raises serious questions about the integrity of the approach to the response process.

The government's assertion that our proposal is unachievable is demonstrably false. England abolished its equivalent body the General Teaching Council for England in 2012. Our proposal is not only achievable, it is necessary. The GTCS has faced sustained criticism from MSPs, the media, and members of the public as evidenced by the following articles -

BBC News

- Fears over teacher safeguarding investigations
- Handling of complaints against teachers in Scotland to be reviewed
- School teacher misconduct investigations need revamp

Daily Mail Online

- Probe into a teacher accused of misconduct has lasted more than eight years

These examples point to systemic failures in teacher regulation. To claim that the GTCS is “effective” in its role is not credible. Its core mission to uphold professional standards and protect pupils is not being met.

We believe the root of the problem lies in the insular nature of Scottish education governance. There is a revolving door between the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, local authorities, and the GTCS. Senior officials frequently move between these bodies, creating a network that is too close, too opaque, and too resistant to scrutiny. For example:

- The current GTCS Chief Executive previously held senior roles in Angus and Aberdeen Councils.
- West Dunbartonshire's Chief Education Officer was formerly Interim Chief Executive of Education Scotland, having joined from the GTCS.
- Her successor at Education Scotland is the Scottish Government's current Director of Learning.

The largest teaching union, the EIS, is also contributing to the problem when they confirmed to the Chairman of Accountability Scotland that they will not support teachers who wish to refer colleagues to the GTCS for professional misconduct. The GTCS is aware of this stance. This position is clearly not in the public interest. Teachers must be able to report wrongdoing when necessary, with the backing of

their union. Without this support, professional standards are undermined and whistleblowers are left vulnerable.

Furthermore, widespread bullying of teachers by senior staff often protected by their employer is causing significant harm. This is evidenced not only by the GTCS's own survey of provisionally registered teachers, which shows that up to 10% of new teachers experience bullying early in their careers, but also by a teacher bullying survey, which highlights severity of the issue. Despite this, the teaching regulator refuses to act, claiming that this is an employer issue. This is a misrepresentation of their statutory role, which includes maintaining and improving teaching standards and safeguarding the overall learning experience. The GTCS's failure to intervene based on their own teacher exit surveys is contributing to the exodus of talented teachers from the profession. Their inaction is unacceptable.

This level of interconnectedness is unhealthy. It fosters groupthink, discourages accountability, and undermines public trust and caused harm to pupils, teachers and support staff. It is precisely this culture that our petition seeks to challenge.

We therefore urge Parliament to scrutinise the government's response with care. Our petition was created in good faith by teachers and parents with experience of the GTCS's shortcomings. It deserves more than a perfunctory dismissal. Stronger, independent teacher regulation is essential to protect children and restore confidence in our education system.

We stand by our call to abolish the GTCS and replace it with a more transparent and accountable organisation.