

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 25 February 2026
5th Meeting, 2026 (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. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 8 October 2025. At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received new written submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner, which are set out in **Annexe C**.
4. The GTCS Fitness to Teach review action plan states that updated Fitness to Teach Rules are being developed and will be published by spring 2028.
5. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage.
6. Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing for this petition.
7. The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 4 July 2025.
8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 62 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

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

Clerks to the Committee
February 2026

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: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2170 on 8 October 2025

The Convener: PE2170, which was lodged by Paul Blaker on behalf of Accountability Scotland, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland and replace it with a Government agency. The petitioner believes that the General Teaching Council for Scotland is not supporting teachers' professional development, nor helping children to experience improved quality learning and teaching.

The statutory functions of the GTCS are set out in a 2011 order, the purpose of which was to establish it as an independent self-regulating professional body for teachers working in Scotland. Some of its main functions are to keep a public register, set standards for the teaching profession, investigate individuals' fitness to teach and provide advice to the Scottish Government.

The Scottish Government does not see the ask of the petition as practical or achievable, as it considers the GTCS to be effective in its statutory role. The Government states that it cannot intervene in processes or decisions made by fitness-to-teach panels, and that panel members are independent and not GTCS employees.

The GTCS commissioned the Professional Standards Authority for Health and Social Care to undertake an independent review of its fitness-to-teach process. The PSA's findings highlighted some improvements that could be made, such as reducing the time that the GTCS takes to resolve cases, supporting vulnerable participants, simplifying public-facing guidance and documentation, and enhancing case management. The GTCS has committed to presenting an action plan to its professional regulatory assurance committee in the light of those recommendations.

The petitioner's additional submission brings forth further examples to illustrate his concerns that the GTCS is not meeting its core mission to uphold professional standards and protect pupils. It is a very determined representation, but the Government clearly takes an alternative view.

Fergus Ewing: This petition is similar to one of the previous petitions, in that we have received a substantive supplementary written submission from the petitioner commenting on the Scottish Government's response. In that submission, dated 5 September, which is fairly recent, the petitioner makes some fairly fundamental criticisms of the Scottish Government's response. For example, the petitioner suggests that there is perhaps an inappropriate closeness between the Scottish Government and the GTCS, as evidenced by the fact that, within 24 hours of the petition's publication, Scottish Government staff had emailed senior figures at the GTCS, which raises questions about the independence of the GTCS.

What is more significant is that the Scottish Government's response referred to the PSA criticism, and the PSA has, as you said, convener, made a very detailed report. It added other criticisms, incidentally. For example, it said that the five-year rule is entirely arbitrary, which is absolutely correct. However, the Scottish Government did not actually mention the fact that the PSA report was fairly critical with regard to how

these reports are normally shaped. In fact, it was very critical indeed. The Scottish Government also did not say that the equivalent of the GTCS in England was abolished in 2012—it just does not mention that at all. Therefore, plainly, that is something that could be done. I am not advocating for that—I am not taking a side on this—but, to give voice to the petitioner, we should go back to the Scottish Government to ask for a specific response on the points that the petitioner has made, and to ask what exactly is going to be done to address those criticisms, in the light of the fact that the report from the professional standards authority, which, as I understand it, is an independent body, was critical in numerous aspects.

It all looks to me as though there is potential substance to the petitioner's claim that there is a very cosy relationship between all these bodies and that their leaders pass between them, so that the independence is theoretical, not real. I am not suggesting that we call on the minister to give evidence, because I am aware of the timetable pressure. I would have called for that had we been earlier in the parliamentary session. However, I think that we should make those requests of the Scottish Government for a specific response to the petitioner and to hear what it feels must be done in relation to pursuing the PSA recommendations, rather than it just drifting away and nothing happening, which is often the case.

The Convener: Thank you. Mr Ewing recommends keeping the petition open and pursuing the points of interest with the Scottish Government. Are colleagues content to do so?

Members indicated agreement.

Annexe C: Written submissions

Scottish Government written submission, 6 November 2025

PE2170/C: Abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland

Thank you for your letter to the Scottish Government after consideration of PE2170 at a meeting of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on 8 October 2025.

As set out in the Scottish Government's initial response, any changes to GTCS remit and processes would require significant changes to their underpinning legislation. In this, the Scottish Government stated that it has no intention to do so, considers the GTCS to be effective in its independent regulatory role, and does not view its abolition as either desirable or proportionate. In this context, the term "not practical or achievable" reflects a policy judgement – not a legal or procedural impossibility. This position has not changed.

We believe it is reasonable for officials to refer to GTCS when considering petitions that are publicly available and directly concern the organisation's remit. Policy officials maintain regular contact with the GTCS as part of their ongoing responsibilities, and such engagement ensures that responses are informed and accurate.

Finally, Scottish Government officials are staying in close communication with GTCS while it implements the recommendations of the PSA Report. The GTCS is an independent regulator and, therefore, it is within their remit to take forward improvement work of their processes.

Directorate for Learning

Petitioner written submission, 9 February 2026

PE2170/D: Abolish the General Teaching Council for Scotland

Thank you for inviting further comment following the Scottish Government's written submission of 6 November 2025.

The petitioner's position is that it would be unsafe and unwise for the Committee to close this petition without further clarification from the Scottish Government. The latest response does not address the concerns raised by the Committee, nor does it engage with the substantive evidence previously submitted.

1. The Government has not answered the Committee's questions about GTCS effectiveness

The Government continues to assert that the GTCS is "effective" but provides no evidence to support this claim. It does not address:

- the PSA's criticism of the GTCS

- the widely reported delays in Fitness to Teach cases
- public safeguarding concerns raised by the public, media and MSPs
- the impact of this on pupils, teachers, and public confidence

The Committee specifically expressed concern about the PSA report. The Government's response does not engage with a single one of the PSA's criticisms. Without evidence, the assertion of effectiveness cannot be accepted.

2. The Government has not addressed the concerns about civil servant–GTCS correspondence

The Government states that it is "reasonable" for officials to refer to GTCS when considering petitions. This does not address the issue raised.

The concern is not that officials sought factual information. The concern is that a senior civil servant initiated an informal discussion with the GTCS leadership within hours of the petition's publication, using the subject line "Petition" and stating "we have a template to fill in".

This creates a reasonable perception of coordination between Government and regulator on a petition concerning the regulator's own future. The Government's explanation does not address this perception or the implications for independence, transparency, and fairness.

3. The Government has changed its position on "not practical or achievable"

The Government now states that this phrase reflects a "policy judgement", not a legal or procedural barrier. This is a material shift from its earlier position, which implied that abolition could not be done.

The Government now accepts that abolition is legally and procedurally possible. This clarification is welcome, but it highlights the need for the Committee to understand the basis of the Government's policy position, particularly in light of the PSA findings and the concerns raised by the Committee.

4. The Government has not addressed the wider evidence of systemic failure

The Government's response does not address:

- the decline in national educational outcomes
- the barriers to whistleblowing created by the EIS stance
- the GTCS's refusal to act on its own survey data on teacher bullying
- the revolving-door governance culture across Scottish education bodies

These issues go to the heart of whether the current regulatory model is functioning in the public interest. The Government's silence on these matters is concerning.

Conclusion

The Scottish Government's latest submission does not provide the clarity or reassurance required to close this petition. Key questions raised by the Committee remain unanswered, and the concerns highlighted by the PSA and by the petitioner have not been addressed.

Given the seriousness of the issues involved—public protection, regulatory independence, and the integrity of Scotland's education system the petitioner respectfully asks the Committee to seek further clarification from the Scottish Government before considering its next step.