



Annual RETURN

2025





Hello & Welcome

Introduction About Our Organisation

The Scottish independent school sector is recognised for its world leading education offer and high quality pastoral care. Our sector is diverse. It includes small specialist schools supporting pupils with complex needs, city day schools and rural boarding schools. Pupils from more than 80 different countries attend our schools.

Promoting choice, diversity, and excellence in Scottish Education

Scottish Council of Independent Schools

1 Lochrin Square,
Edinburgh,
EH3 9QA

Our Vision

SCIS is a powerful advocacy organisation, representing the views of our member schools, and making a positive contribution to the development of policy and best practice across the Scottish education system.

Our Mission

SCIS schools educate almost 30,000 children of mixed abilities from a range of diverse backgrounds. Our schools are committed to innovation and and collaboration, and they play a major role in promoting excellence in education.

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Words From Our Chief Executive



At a challenging time for the sector, SCIS has continued to fight, adapt, and unite for Scotland’s independent schools.

Lorraine Davidson

Chief Executive



The introduction of VAT on school fees has created considerable financial pressure, leading to a 10% contraction in our sector’s pupil numbers.



Our core belief is that a vibrant, diverse independent sector enriches the entire educational landscape.



We are not just a representative body but a constructive partner, contributing evidence and expertise to national bodies and fostering collaboration

It is my privilege to present the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) Annual Return for the year ended 31 December 2025. This past year has been one of profound challenge and significant strategic evolution for our organisation and the sector we represent. The introduction of VAT on school fees has created considerable financial pressure, leading to a 10% contraction in our sector’s pupil numbers. However, it has also galvanised our purpose, clarified our message, and reinforced the vital role SCIS plays as the authoritative and unifying voice for independent education in Scotland.

In response to this challenging landscape, our focus has been twofold: to provide robust, unwavering support to our members and to articulate the broader value of our sector to the Scottish education system as a

whole. We worked tirelessly to ensure the implications of the new tax policy remained prominent on the political agenda, engaging directly with MSPs and UK parliamentarians. To bolster this advocacy, we invested in a new economic impact tool for our schools, empowering them to demonstrate their significant contribution to local communities and economies. Our core belief is that a vibrant, diverse independent sector enriches the entire educational landscape, and we have been steadfast in championing this message.

Our commitment to our members extended well beyond political representation. In 2025, SCIS strengthened its position as the central hub for professional learning and guidance. We delivered over 52 events, including the launch of new leadership programmes for aspiring senior and

middle leaders and the highly successful Next Steps Conference. These initiatives are a direct investment in the future of our schools, building the leadership capacity and strategic thinking needed to navigate uncertainty. The overwhelming confidence expressed by members in our annual survey is a testament to the hard work of our team and the trust placed in us, and we are determined to build on that. The year was also marked by a fundamental review and restructuring of our own governance. Acting on the recommendations of an external review, the Governing Board approved new Articles of Association that streamline our decision-making,



all pupils in Scotland. Our partnership with School Leaders Scotland to host a collaborative event for independent and state schools was a significant milestone, showcasing curriculum innovations and building bridges between sectors. This commitment is central to our identity; we are not just a representative body but a constructive partner, contributing evidence and expertise to national bodies and fostering the collaboration that is so critical for Scotland’s educational future.

Despite a reduction in subscription income from falling pupil numbers, SCIS has maintained a robust financial position. Our prudent financial planning, which included a staff restructure, successful cost management, and increased sponsorship income, has resulted in a net income for the year and strengthened our reserves. This financial stability is crucial as we continue to support our members and strategically invest in new initiatives to diversify our income streams. We have also continued to invest in our own staff, ensuring we have the expertise and resilience to deliver the high-quality service our members expect.

Looking ahead to 2026, we will continue to be a powerful and respected advocate for our member schools, ensuring their voice is heard in the debates that shape their future. We will deepen our partnerships, embedding collaboration as a core principle of our work, and we will continue to adapt and evolve, developing new revenue streams and services that ensure we remain a resilient and indispensable partner to our members.

90%

Independent schools represented by SCIS.

52

Most learning events ever delivered by SCIS last year.

100%

Of members value the work of SCIS.

83

Record number of senior leaders attended our flagship conference.

reduce the size of the board, and sharpen our focus on educational collaboration and partnership. This refocus has included establishing dedicated Education and Partnership and Safeguarding committees, ensuring our structure is aligned with our strategic priorities. This new governance framework positions SCIS to be more agile and effective in representing a sector facing significant headwinds.

Our mission to advance education extends beyond our immediate membership. In 2025, we solidified our relationships with the wider education community, delivering on our charitable purpose by sharing insights and expertise for the benefit of

Our Core Values



Sector Advocacy

SCIS contributes evidence, insight and expertise to national discussions on education through its membership of a wide range of decision-making forums.

Member Support

A major membership survey confirmed exceptionally high levels of confidence in SCIS, with all respondents rating our work as important or extremely important.

Governance & Reform

The clear repurposing of the organisation with the greater focus on working with state schools attracted media interest.

1

Financial Resilience

Although pupil numbers have fallen by 10 per cent since VAT was introduced, prudent financial planning including significant reductions in operating costs ensured SCIS remained well positioned to support members through ongoing challenges.

2

Professional Learning

Professional learning remained a core strand of our work throughout 2025, supporting schools to develop confident leadership, strengthen practice and respond to an evolving educational landscape.

3

Strategic Collaboration

An early outcome of the call for greater collaboration was an event SCIS held in partnership with School Leaders Scotland (SLS) for independent and state schools to come together and showcase innovative curriculum collaborations and share insights across the sectors.

4

Our Vision

SCIS's vision is to be the preeminent, trusted, and influential voice for a thriving independent school sector that is seamlessly integrated into and collaborates with the wider Scottish education system. It aims to champion high-quality education by fostering partnerships and sharing best practices.

Our Executive Team



Lorraine Davidson
Chief Executive

Lorraine joined SCIS from the Scottish Government where she held roles including: Head of Education Strategy, Head of vaccine oversight during the Covid rollout, and Head of European Engagement in the run up to Brexit. Lorraine was also Head of Communications at the Crown Office. She also had a career in the media, working as a political correspondent for the BBC, STV, The Times and the Daily Mirror.

Kirsten joined the SCIS team in November 2017 from Citizens Advice Scotland where she was ICT Projects & Application Support. Kirsten is responsible for the coordination of professional learning events and conferences, as well as other aspects of member support.



Kirsten Hamilton
Events & Business Support Manager



Sarah Sinclair
Head of Professional Learning

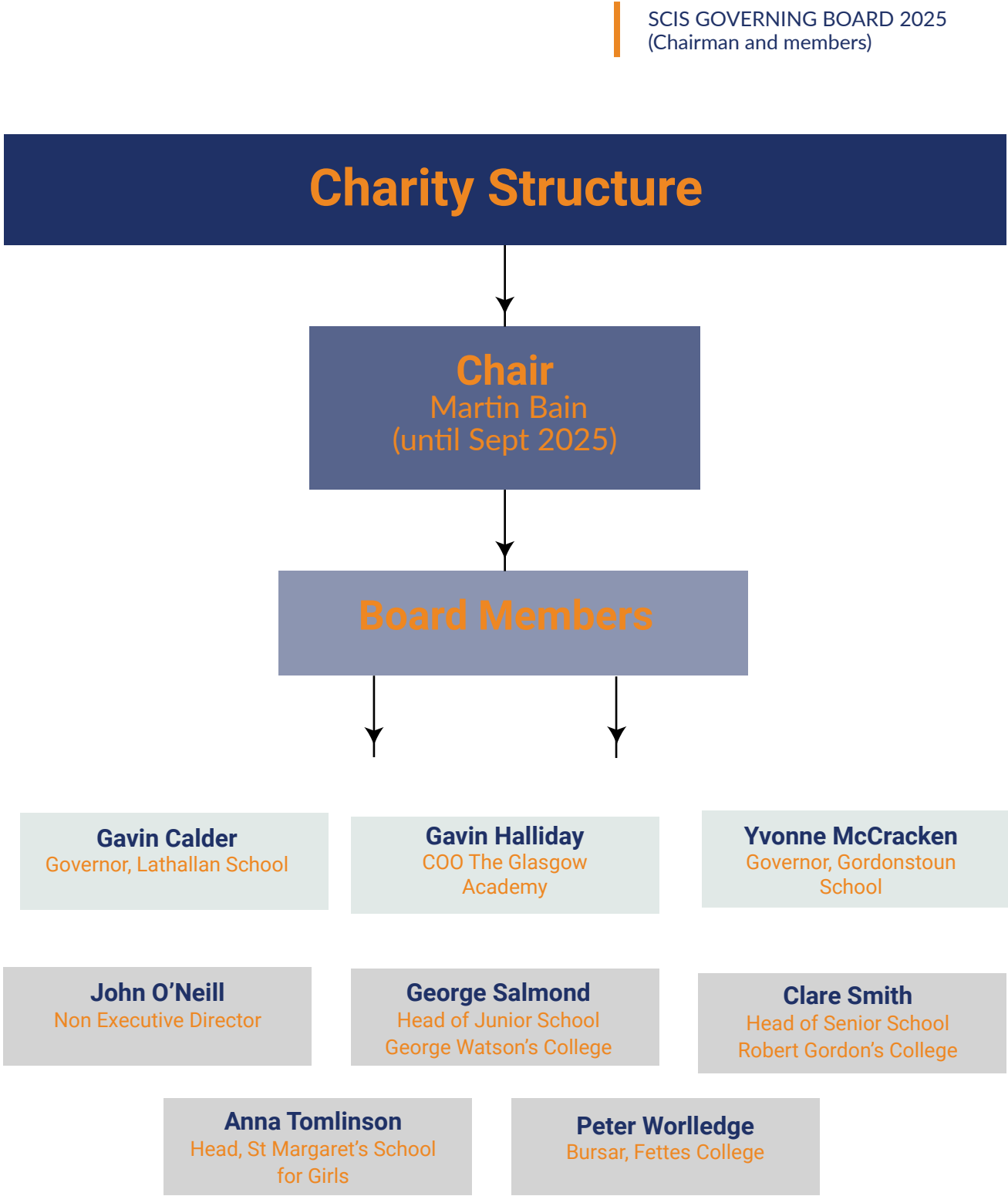
Prior to joining SCIS in April 2024, Sarah was Sub Warden Pastoral at Glenalmond College. She has previously held a number of roles including Teacher of Mathematics and Housemistress as well as serving as the Chair of the Independent Schools' Child Protection Committee in Perth and Kinross Council.

Originally from Yorkshire, Joanne has lived in the north of Scotland since 1992. She joined SCIS in 2025 and works closely with Lorraine Davidson and the Governing Board. She has also held a number of roles at Gordonstoun.



Joanne Devey
Governance Manager

Board of Directors



Our Achievements

Members of the SCIS Governing Board (directors for the purpose of company law) who are also charity trustees for the purposes of charity law, have pleasure in submitting their report, together with the audited financial statements, for the year ended 31 December 2025.

Supporting the Wider Education Sector

In September 2025, SCIS conducted its annual census, revealing a 10% drop in pupil numbers following the introduction of VAT on fees and sharing this critical data with government officials and the media to aid state school planning. The organization also hosted its largest-ever conference focused on innovation and state-sector collaboration, partnered with School Leaders Scotland to showcase cross-sector curriculum projects, and strengthened relationships to improve educational outcomes for all pupils. Additionally, SCIS actively contributed to major national reviews, including the Scottish and UK Covid Inquiries, provided expert testimony on restraint and seclusion to inform parliamentary scrutiny, and engaged with the Scottish government on hospital tuition and medical equipment access, securing greater clarity for schools, families, and local authorities.



SCIS Annual Conference, Edinburgh



Gavin Calder gave evidence at the Scottish Parliament

Supporting Our Members

Over the past year, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) has reinforced its role as the authoritative voice of the independent school sector by actively engaging with the Scottish and UK governments, parliamentarians, and national education bodies to influence policy, curriculum development, and teaching standards. It provided crucial advocacy against the implications of VAT on schools, equipped members with economic impact tools to demonstrate their local contributions ahead of the 2026 Holyrood elections, and facilitated ministerial visits to highlight sector innovation and inclusion. The organisation guided schools through significant regulatory changes under the Charities Act 2025, hosted a key conference with senior education officials, and maintained exceptionally high member confidence through expanded collaboration and strategic engagement.



STV's Rona Dougall and Professor Judy Robertson



Lorraine Davidson at the AGBIS conference, London

Our Achievements (cont'd)

Professional Learning

In 2025, professional learning was a central focus, marked by the delivery of more than 52 events for Scotland’s independent sector that emphasized leadership, practice improvement, and adaptation to educational changes. Key initiatives included the launch of new leadership programmes for aspiring senior and middle leaders, developed with input from school heads and consultants to bolster succession planning. The inaugural Next Steps Conference, which partnered with UCAS and apprenticeship providers, helped to enhance guidance on post-school pathways. The flagship Heads & Deputes Conference drew 83 senior leaders for dialogue on sector-wide issues, with feedback praising the blend of expert input and networking. Collectively, these efforts underscore a strategic, responsive commitment to strengthening leadership and practice across the sector.

Governing Board

The Governing Board implemented significant governance reforms to better serve Scotland’s entire education system, streamlining its structure for greater effectiveness. Key changes included adopting electronic decision-making and online meetings, reducing the maximum number of trustees to 13 (with up to three co-opted members) following an external review that deemed the previous board too large, and repurposing the organization to focus more on state schools - a shift that garnered positive media attention. In 2025, two new committees (Education and Partnership, and Safe-guarding) were established to advance sector priorities, while the Finance committee was dissolved to avoid over-governance, replaced by the appointment of a Chartered Accountant as Finance Trustee and a reaffirmation of all trustees’ financial oversight duties. Following the restructuring, the Chair stepped down in September, to allow for leadership with educational expertise, with Interim Chair Anna Tomlinson leading the recruitment for a permanent successor. A strategy day held in November, at the High School of Dundee, assessed member needs and financial risks, identifying key development areas, while the Board also carefully defined the skills required for the new Chair and launched a recruitment process to secure the best candidate to drive the organisation’s and sector’s ambitions forward.



Sarah Sinclair at the annual conference

The Working Process

Sustainability Statement

SCIS is committed to an active sustainability policy and recognises environmental and social accountability as integral to its responsibilities. It aims to maintain an efficient working environment that uses energy responsibly. The organisation continually seeks to minimise any foreseeable negative impact on the environment and has introduced flexible working arrangements for employees.



By moving to a modern network of office accommodation, staff are able to work from offices closer to their homes and from member schools. This approach helps to reduce CO2. In addition, SCIS endeavours to:

- Support diversity and inclusion.
- Comply with all relevant environmental legislation.
- Improve understanding of the direct and indirect environmental impacts of its activities.
- Minimise or offset its environmental impact wherever possible.
- Promote the conservation of energy, water, and natural resources across all operations.
- Reduce environmental impact by purchasing environmentally friendly products and services
- Cut resource consumption and waste through the adoption of cloud-based and other sustainability focused technologies.

Structure, Governance & Mangement

Reference and Administration Information

The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) was established as a company limited by guarantee and is governed by the provisions of its Memorandum and Articles of Association which were most recently updated in 2025. SCIS was granted charitable status in 1990 and was entered on the Scottish Charity Register in 2006.



SCIS Governors Conference, Edinburgh

The Working Process (cont'd)

Organisation and Structure

The SCIS Governing Board meets at least twice a year. Board meetings focus on the main educational, regulatory, political and legal developments in the independent sector as well as key issues for SCIS itself. The Chief Executive and Governing Board are responsible for the decision-making process at SCIS. All trustees are responsible for Finance and a lead Trustee who is a Bursar and Chartered Accountant provides strong oversight and advice to the board.

The Chief Executive and the staff at SCIS are responsible for implementing decisions and for the day-to-day operation of SCIS. The Chief Executive is able to consult the Chair of the Governing Board, and the Bursars on the Board at any time; and the Chief Executive and staff receive considerable support throughout the year from members of the Board and from the Heads and Bursars of member schools.

Audit Opinion

The auditor has issued an unqualified opinion on the financial statements of the Scottish Council of Independent Schools for the year ended 31 December 2025. The statements – comprising the Statement of Financial Activities, Balance Sheet, Cashflow Statement, and accompanying notes – are judged to present a true and fair view of the charity's affairs and its income and expenditure. They are also properly prepared in accordance with UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice and comply with the Companies Act 2006, the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005, and the relevant Charities Accounts (Scotland) Regulations.

Basis, Going Concern, and Other Information

The audit was conducted under International Standards on Auditing (UK), with the auditor confirming independence and



SCIS Board Strategy Day at the High School of Dundee

adherence to UK ethical requirements. The audit evidence obtained is deemed sufficient and appropriate. Regarding going concern, the auditor agrees with the governing board's use of that basis and has identified no material uncertainties that would threaten the charity's ability to continue for at least twelve months from the statements' approval date. The auditor also confirms that the other information in the Report of the Governing Board shows no material inconsistencies or misstatements relative to the audited financial statements.



Tetraplegic journalist Melanie Reid speaking at our annual conference



This Year's Highlights

A defining highlight of the year was SCIS's robust and influential response to the significant challenges facing the sector, most notably the 10% drop in pupil numbers following the introduction of VAT on fees. The organisation acted decisively, with its annual census providing critical data that was shared with the Scottish and UK Governments, civil servants, and the media to inform national planning.



Our Executive team at the SCIS office in Aberdeen



The Times reported our economic impact study of VAT on fees



Advocacy was strengthened by equipping member schools with a new BiGGAR Economics tool to demonstrate their local economic impact, ensuring the sector's voice remained prominent on the political agenda in the lead-up to the 2026 Holyrood elections.



Speakers, delegates and demonstrators at our annual conference held at Murrayfield Stadium in Edinburgh

Income & advocacy

Despite the fall in subscription income, prudent financial planning and significant reductions in costs, combined with a strategy to increase non school income by expanding sponsorship opportunities around the annual conference, resulted in a strong financial performance. Net income before investment gains was £77, 346 and reserves were increased to £503,000 to ensure the organisation can continue to offer a high quality service despite the drop in pupil numbers reducing its subscription income.



This Year's Highlights (cont'd)

Financial Report Of 2025

The financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2025 show a net income before investment gains of £77,346 (2024: net expenditure £17,436). Net income, after investment gains, was £106,110 (2024: £5,642).



Risk Register

SCIS maintains a Risk Register which is a standing item for each Governing Board meeting. The key risks are the reduction in sector size and a corresponding fall in subscription income. Mitigation strategies include increasing non-subscription income and extending the availability of professional learning courses to non-SCIS participants.

£340k

Market value of SCIS's Investment Portfolio.

£73.5k

Earned from the annual conference (e.g., sponsorship, exhibitor stands), up from £36,136 in 2024.

SCIS Schools



Reserves Policy

It is the policy of SCIS to maintain a reserve fund to cover contingencies, unexpected expenditure, development, and projects. At 31 December 2025, reserves amounted to £503,263, compared with £397,153 in 2024. This is the approximate equivalent of 13 months of operational expenditure. The Governing Board considers this level necessary to manage the significant ongoing financial risks to the sector and the organisation.

Key Engagement: We held direct discussions with key figures, including the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills at Holyrood and the Scottish Conservative Education Spokesperson.

Influencing Policy: SCIS contributed evidence and insight to several major national reviews and inquiries, including the Scottish and UK Covid Inquiries and parliamentary scrutiny on restraint and seclusion.

Flagship Events: Our flagship Heads & Deputies Conference attracted 83 delegates, who engaged with leaders from the SQA, the Care Inspectorate, and the GTCS. We also introduced the Next Steps Conference, helping schools support pupils in making informed post-school

Building Community: A major membership survey confirmed exceptionally high levels of confidence in SCIS. In response, we expanded collaboration through webinars, school visits, and sector events. A high-profile visit by Ministers to mainstream and specialist schools was also facilitated.



1 Lochrin Square,
Edinburgh,
EH3 9QA

www.scis.org
0131 556 2316

Charity regulation no: SC018033

