

# **SQA Annual Conference 1999: Qualifying Scotland for Life**

## **Conference Report**

December 1999

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## Foreword

The second SQA Annual Conference was held on Friday 18 June 1999. It brought together all the organisations who have an interest in the Scottish education and training system, in recognition that the nation as a whole has a stake in education and training.

The conference was an opportunity for us to present our future plans and strategies, and to report on overall performance. For the delegates, the conference provided information on our policies and future plans and an opportunity to discuss issues with SQA management.

This conference report is compiled from the notes of the speakers and the briefing session facilitators. It outlines the content and focus of each briefing session, and gives a flavour of the discussion in each group.

We would like to thank Henry McLeish, Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning for attending and delivering a keynote address. His comments were of great importance to us all at this time of change in Scottish politics.

Finally, thanks to all delegates who attended and participated in the briefing sessions — we found the discussions stimulating and valuable. I hope you enjoyed the conference and look forward to seeing you at next year's event.

David Miller, CBE  
Chairman,  
SQA

# SQA Annual Conference - Friday 18 June 1999

## Programme

1000 - 1030	Coffee and Registration	
1030 - 1040	Welcome and Profile of SQA	David Miller, Chairman, SQA
1040 - 1100	SQA's Strategies and Plans for the Future	Ron Tuck Chief Executive, SQA
1100 - 1130	Question and Answer Session with Ron Tuck	Chaired by David Miller
1130 - 1220	<b>Briefing Sessions</b>	
	<b>Group 1A &amp; 1B Registration, Entries and Results - How IT Can Help</b>	
	Colin Urie, Head of Information Technology, SQA David Falconer, Applications Manager, SQA Jack Greig, Head of Operations, SQA Bill Arundel, Business Co-ordination Team Leader, SQA	
	<b>Group 2A &amp; 2B Advisory Groups and Assessment Panels</b>	
	Eddie Clarke, Head of Qualifications Unit: Services and Social Subjects, SQA Bill Fairbairn, Project Leader, SQA	
	<b>Group 3A &amp; 3B National Qualifications (Higher Still) Update</b>	
	Neil MacGowan, Head of Higher Still Implementation, SQA Bill Reid, Head of Qualifications Unit: Business and Languages, SQA	
	<b>Group 4A &amp; 4B Assessment and Quality Assurance</b>	
	David Elliot, Director (Awards Division), SQA Christine De Luca, Head of Assessment Research & Development, SQA	
	<b>Group 5A &amp; 5B The Role of NTOs</b>	
	Jenny Kellie, Chief Executive, Scottish Council of National Training Organisations (SCONTO) Anneliese Archibald, Head of Hospitality Training Foundation (HtF) Scotland Aileen Ponton, Head of Accreditation, SQA	
	<b>Group 6A &amp; 6B SVQs — Ten Years On</b>	
	Tom Drake, Head of Development Co-ordination Unit, SQA	

**Group 7A & 7B Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework**  
John Hart, Head of Qualifications Strategy Unit, SQA  
Margaret Miller, Qualifications Manager, SQA

**Group 8A & 8B SQA and Local Government - Working in Partnership**  
Jo Cousland, Head of Customer Services Liaison Unit,  
SQA  
Mary McLuskey, Head of Employee Development,  
CoSLA  
Gill Bhatti, Employee Development Manager,  
South Lanarkshire Council

<b>1220 - 1230</b>	<b>Break</b>
1230 - 1320	Briefing Sessions (repeat of previous sessions 1B - 8B)
<b>1320 - 1420</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>1420 - 1425</b>	<b>Henry McLeish, Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning</b>
1430	Close

## List of delegates (alphabetically by organisation)

Mr Les Common	Director of Personnel	Aberdeen City Council
Mr Robert Wallen	Associate Principal	Aberdeen College
Mr Peter Hay	Director of Personnel	Aberdeenshire Council
Mr Denis Hird	Director	ACETO
Mr John Burt	Principal	Angus College
Mr Danny Longwill	Head of Personnel & Training	Argyll & Bute Council
Mr Tom Kelly	Chief Executive	Association of Scottish Colleges
Ms Angela Kelly	Partnership Manager	Ayrshire EBP
Mr Alex Gordon	Principal	Banff & Buchan College
Mr John Russell	Senior Education Officer	BBC
Ms Valerie Hogg	Information Services	Bell College
Mr Iain Bryan	Chief Executive	Board for Education & Training in the Water Industry
Ms Margaret Dundas	Assistant Principal	Borders College
Mr Duncan Wilson	Assistant Secretary	British Plumbing Council
Mr Ray Brooks	Chair	British Plumbing Employers' Council
Ms Sheila McGregor	Group Training Adviser	British Ports Industry Training Ltd
Mr Angus Mathie	BT DQ CC	British Telecom
Mr Jim Smith	Team Manager	British Telecom
Mr Alex MacIntosh	Quality Assurance	Cardonald College
Ms Kate Peart	Social Work Education	CCETSW
Mr Peter Duncan	Principal	Central College of Commerce
Dr Charles Munn	Chief Executive	Chartered Institute of Bankers
Mrs Jayne Foy	Training & Development Officer	Chungwha Picture Tubes
Mr Douglas Fergus	Scottish Manager	CITB
Mr Harry Clarke	Assistant Principal	Clackmannan College
Mr Gordon Benson	Quality Officer	Clydebank College
Mr Matt Mochar	Director of Planning & Research	Clydebank College
Mrs Corinne Seymour	Consultant	Community Justice NTO
Ms Sharon McLellan	Assistant Secretary	COSHEP
Ms Mary McLuskey	Head of Employment Development	CoSLA
Ms Jane Ritchie	Employee Development Officer	CoSLA
Mr Iain McMillan	Director	CBI Scotland
Mr Ian Hay	Chief Executive	Craft Bakery Training Organisation
Miss Juliette Cassidy	Senior Account Association	David Budge Associates
Mr George Forbes	VQ Project Co-ordination	Defence School of Transport

Colonel R Field-Smith MBE	Chief of Staff	Directorate of Education & Training Services
Mr Charles McAteer	Rector	Dumfries Academy
Mr Tom Gilmour	Education Officer	Dumfries & Galloway Council
Mr James Leggat	Headteacher	Dumfries & Galloway Council
Ms Andrea Tyrer	EBP Co-ordinator	Dunbartonshire & Lomond EBP
Mr Iain Ovens	Principal	Dundee College
Mr H Terrell	Chief Executive	Dundee & Tayside Chamber of Commerce
Mr Stuart Allison	Higher Still Support Officer	East Dunbartonshire Council
Ms Anne Blundell	Employee Development Manager	Edinburgh City Council
Mrs Joyce Cunningham	Head of Client Service	Edinburgh's Telford College
Mr Keir Sim	Head of Business & Management	Edinburgh's Telford College
Mr Fred Forrester	Depute General Secretary	EIS
Mr Paul O'Leary	Adviser	Electricity Training Association
Mr Tony Green	Chief Executive	Employment NTO
Mr Bill Mitchell	HR Corporate Development Manager	1st Engineering Ltd
Ms Linda McKay	Principal	Falkirk College
Mr T Harrison	Curriculum Development Co-ordinator	Falkirk Council
Ms June Deasy	Deputy Scottish Parliamentary Office	Federation of Small Businesses
Mr Les Fargie	Education Officer	Fife Council
Ms Vicki Masters	Employee Development Adviser	Fife Council
Mr Douglas Law	Depute Principal	Fife College
Ms Rebecca Stiles	Training Executive	Food & Drink NTO
Mr Tom Gowans	Executive Operations	Forth Valley Enterprise
Professor William Scott	Head of Department	Glasgow Caledonian University
Mr Clive Martlew	Training & Development Manager	Glasgow City Council
Mr John Curley	Senior Officer	Glasgow City Council Education
Mr T Brunton	Senior Lecturer	Glasgow College of Food Technology
Captain Chris Hunter	Principal	Glasgow College of Nautical Studies
Mr Hamish McMorran	Business Development Adviser	Glasgow Development Agency
Mr D Logan	Division Curriculum Services	Glenrothes College
Mr Brian Chalmers	Training Executive	Grampian Enterprise
Mr John Harrison	Training Executive	Grampian Enterprise Ltd

Ms Linda Cowie	Project Manager	Grampian EBP
Mr Alistair Brown	Development Officer	Highland Council
Miss Anne Murray	Head of Skills Development	Highlands & Islands Enterprise
Mrs Anneliese Archibald	HtF Scotland	Hospitality Training Foundation
Mr L Williamson	Resource Training Manager	IBM (UK) Ltd
Mr John Pluse	ISNTO Project Officer	ILS - Lead Body
Mr Charles Black	Scottish Representative	Insurance & Related Finance
Mr Albert Henderson	Head Teacher	Inverclyde Council
Mr Bernard McLeary	Executive Director	Inverclyde Council
Dr G Clark	Principal	Inverness College
Miss Susan English	Skills Development Manager	Inverness & Nairn Enterprise
Mrs Susan Bird	Vice Principal	James Watt College
Mr Alan Sherry	Assistant Principal	John Wheatley College
Mr Martin Houston	Personnel Director	Kwik-Fit Insurance Services Ltd
Mr Grant Young	Head Teacher	Kyle Academy
Mr Stuart MacFarlane	Manager	Lanarkshire EBP
Mr Graeme Hyslop	Principal	Langside College
Mr Tommy Cuthbert	Regional Manager Scotland	Lantra
Miss Margaret Lindsay	Compliance Team	LEEL
Mr Brian Lister	Depute Principal	Lauder College
Mr R Matthew	Chief Officer	Merchant Navy Training
Board Ms Ruth Churchill	Head of Lifelong Learning	METIER
Mrs Wilma Walker	Senior Employee Development Officer	Midlothian Council
Mr Richard Millham	Principal	Motherwell College
Mrs Gillian Davies	Academic Development Adviser	Napier University
Mr Bob Currie	Associate Director	National Centre: Education for Work
Mr Bill Gold MBE	Senior Manager (Admin)	NEC Semiconductors (UK) Ltd
Mr John Gray	Head of Staff Support	North Glasgow College
Ms Maureen Baird	VQ Development Officer	North Ayrshire Council
Mrs Sandra Paxton	Senior VQ Officer	North Ayrshire Council
Mr John Cushley	Training Officer	North Lanarkshire Council
Mr Liam Jarnecki	Director	NUS Scotland
Mr Ken Lloyd-Jones	Scottish Affairs Officer	NUS Scotland
Mr John Ramsay	Chief Executive	OPITO
Miss Maureen Laing	Principal Teacher	PA
Mr Stewart Duncan	Assistant Principal	Perth College
Mrs Libby Steele	Education & Training Executive	PINTO
Mr Robert Christie	Secretary for Scotland	Professional Association of Teachers



Mrs Eileen Lamb	Teacher Representative	Professional Association Of Teachers
Mr Robert Allen	Principal Manager	QCA
Mrs Jane Robertson	Regional Executive	Qualifications for Industry
Professor Ian Brown	Dean of Arts	Queen Margaret University
Ms Veronica Rankin	Equality Officer	EIS
Mrs Judith McCarn	SQA Co-ordinator	Reid Kerr College
Mr Campbell King	16+ Co-ordinator	Renfrewshire Council
Miss Natalie Whyte	Clerical Assistant	Renfrewshire Council
Mr John McPherson	Development Officer	Renfrewshire Education Business
Mr Ian Johnston	Training & Development Manager	Royal Mail Scotland
Professor David Swinfen	Chairman	SACCA
Martin Jack	Learning Services Manager	SCET
Mr Alan McDonald	Co-ordinator for Scotland	Science Technology & Maths NTO
Ms Jenny Kellie	Chief Executive	SCONTO
Dr Andrew Walker	Academic Services Manager	Scottish Agricultural College
Mr Andrew Harris	Training Liaison Officer	Scottish Agricultural Science Agency
Mr Derek Robertson	Learning Manager	Scottish Amicable Ltd
Mr James McGonigle	Vice-President	Scottish Association of Teachers
Mrs J Sischy	Director	Scottish Council of Independent Schools
Mr David Mallen	Assistant DOE	Scottish Borders Council
Mr David Smart	VQ Manager	Scottish Enterprise
Mr Dave McWattie	Senior Development Executive	Scottish Enterprise
Mr Brian Keegan	National Manager	Scottish Further Education Unit
Miss Georgina Hay	Teacher	Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
Mr Trevor Jones	Education Member	Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association
Ms Fiona Campbell	Policy Executive	Scottish Office
Mr Alex Brown	Chief Executive	Scottish Training Federation
Ms Cathy MacLean	Assistant Director	SCVO
Mr Alistair Aitken	Head of Qual. For Work	SOEID
Mr David Kelso	HMCI	SOEID
Mr Duncan McNab	IT Specialist	SOEID
Mrs Denise Swanson	Officer	SOEID
Mr Ed Weeple	Head of Lifelong Learning	SOEID
Ms Arlene Quinn	Skillseekers Co-ordinator	South Ayrshire Council

Mr Robert Allan	Assistant Principal	South Lanarkshire College
Ms Gill Bhatti	Employee Development Manager	South Lanarkshire Council
Mr John Thorpe	Director of Standards	Sport & Recreation NTO
Mrs Nancy Ovens	Director	Sport & Recreation NTO
Ms Janice Anderson	Accreditation Officer	SQA
Mr Bill Arundel	Business Co-ordinator	SQA
Mrs Ann Campbell	Head of HRM	SQA
Mrs Sheila Chatham	Sales, Print Distribution Officer	SQA
Mr Eddie Clarke	Head of Qualifications	SQA
Mr Jim Cochrane	Schools Liaison Officer	SQA
Ms Bernadette Cooklin	Customer Services Manager	SQA
Ms Jo Cousland	Head of Customer Services Liaison	SQA
Ms Christine De Luca	Head of Assessment Research & Development	SQA
Mr Tom Drake	Head of Development Co-ordination	SQA
Mr Frank Duff	Helpdesk Adviser	SQA
Mr David Elliot	Director	SQA
Mr Bill Fairbairn	Senior Development Officer	SQA
Ms Angela Falconer	Customer Services Manager	SQA
Mr Angus Forrester	Head of Assessment Services	SQA
Ms Anne Galloway	Head of Approval & Auditing	SQA
Ms Maida Grant	Head of International	SQA
Mr Jack Greig	Head of Operations	SQA
Mr John Hart	Head of Qualification Strategy	SQA
Mr Martin Hughes	Manager Customer Services	SQA
Ms Lorna Hutcheson	Schools Liaison Officer	SQA
Ms Diane Lauder	Customer Services Manager	SQA
Mr Neil MacGowan	Higher Still Co-ordination	SQA
Mr Bob Marren	Customer Services Manager	SQA
Mr Chris Maythorne	Highland Customer Services Manager	SQA
Mr David Miller CBE	Chairman	SQA
Ms Margaret Miller	Qualifications Manager	SQA
Mr Brian Minto	Vice Chairman	SQA
Mrs Catherine O'Hara	Customised Awards Manager	SQA
Ms Aileen Ponton	Head of Accreditation	SQA
Mr Bill Reid	Head of Qualifications	SQA
Mr Gordon Rodgers	MSF Union Rep	SQA
Ms Brenda Ross	Administrative Assistant	SQA
Mr David Ross	Customer Services Manager	SQA
Dr Gill Stewart	Head of Qualifications	SQA
Mr Ron Tuck	Chief Executive	SQA

Mr Colin Urie	Head of IT	SQA
Mr Alistair Walker	Customer Services Manager	SQA
Mr Alasdair Ferguson	Liaison Consultant	Standard Life
Mr Michael Leech	Principal	Stevenson College
Mr Ian Bowman	Management Development Officer	Stirling Council
Mrs Anne Fraser	Consultant	Steinbeck Resources
Professor B McGettrick	Principal	St Andrew's College of Education
Mrs Adrienne Armstrong	Examinations Co-ordinator	St George's School for Girls
Dr Judith McClure	Headteacher	St George's School for Girls
Professor David Snaith	Principal	Stow College
Mr Bill Guthrie	Past President	STUC
Mr Kenneth McIntosh	Higher Still Development Officer	Summerhill Education Centre
Mr Tommy Sutherland	General Manager	Support Training Ltd
Mr Neil Munro	News Editor	TESS
Mr Robert Kelly	Headteacher	The Berwickshire High School
Mr Brian Stewart	Development Officer	The Moray Council
Mrs Rhona Gibson	Administrative Assistant	The Robert Gordon University
Ms Melanie Ottens	Researcher	The Robert Gordon University
Ms Andrea Taylor	Researcher	The Robert Gordon University
Mr Donald MacBeath	College Manager	Thurso College
Ms Moira Owen	VQ Co-ordinator	Training Solutions Child Support
Mr Angus Mackintosh	Officer for Scotland	UCAS
Dr Jane Plender Leith	Curriculum Development	UHI Co-ordination
Mr John Lyons	Regional Officer	UNISON
Mrs Patricia Lowrie	Dean of Faculty of Education	University of Paisley
Professor Stephen Ingle	Vice Dean for Teaching	University of Stirling
Dr Neil Martin	Programme Development Co-ordination	University of St Andrews
Mr Donald Gordon	SQA Centre Contact	West Dunbartonshire Council
Mr Tony Godden	Principal	West Lothian College
Mrs Irene Reid	Higher Still Development Officer	West Lothian Council
Mr Iain Stewart	Director	Western Isles EBP
Mr James Hutchison	Rector	Woodlands High School

# Presentations

## David Miller CBE, Chairman, SQA

Ladies and gentlemen, my name is David Miller and as Chairman of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, it is with great pleasure that I welcome you here today to the SQA Annual Conference.

Before I begin, can I mention that copies of the slides Ron and I are using today are in your pack.

The formation of the Scottish Qualifications Authority on 1 April 1997 was a significant event in the history of education. It was the first step towards reaching many long-term goals: closing the gap between academic and vocational qualifications, the creation of a simple and flexible qualifications framework and a system of credit transfer which will increase access and make progression easier.

Attainment of these goals will deliver a world-class system that will equip Scots with the quality of education and training they will need to fulfil their own potential and help Scotland grow.

From the launch of SQA, Ron and I have been convinced that SQA cannot achieve its goals alone. It is only through consultation and dialogue with you as stakeholders, that SQA can develop excellence in its qualifications and services.

It is, therefore, reassuring to see so many of you here today registering your support for Scottish education and training and showing your enthusiasm and commitment to working with each other.

Today's conference is most definitely about partnership. Shortly, you will hear from Ron, who will present a progress report on SQA's previous year. You will hear of SQA's plans and future strategies but, most importantly, you will have the opportunity to give us your views that so inform our future thinking and planning.

This conference is only part of a comprehensive liaison programme SQA has developed for its stakeholders.

- Senior members of SQA staff are now responsible for maintaining contact with specific organisations and sectors which fall into a particular geographical area. Such organisations could be local authorities, LECs, schools or colleges.
- We have identified that some centres deal with several SQA contacts on a regular basis. To streamline this, we have introduced an account management system for day-to-day business with employers and private training providers. This means that the same small team of SQA staff will be the only SQA contact for this customer group.
- We have a marketing strategy in place that uses a mix of events, PR and publications to communicate with customers and stakeholders. We provide marketing support for centres and from this have developed many varied marketing partnerships.

- An informal group, comprising representatives from SQA, the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum, the Scottish Council for Educational Technology, the Scottish Council for Research in Education, the Scottish Community Education Council, and the Scottish Further Education Unit are working together to establish opportunities for co-operation and collaboration on issues of common interest. The group will look at support for qualifications and associated developments holistically and provide a more co-ordinated development service for Government and other stakeholders.

Overall, SQA will continue to consult regularly on every aspect of its policies and plans. For example, this year has seen large-scale consultations on the design of an integrated system for quality assurance and assessment, the development of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework through consultation with key partners, and the creation of Advisory Groups.

The creation of Advisory Groups is a demonstration of how consultation with stakeholders is at the heart of SQA's core activity — developing relevant qualifications in response to the needs of education, business, and industry. These 19 sector-based groups consist of volunteers from industry, education, training, and the wider community. They will take a strategic view of SQA's qualifications and other activities. Those attending the Advisory Group Briefing Session later this morning will receive an update on the implementation of these groups.

Before handing over to Ron, I'll take a few moments to give you a bit more background on SQA and its functions.

SQA is a non-departmental public body responsible to the First Minister for Scotland. It is funded by means of entry charges it recovers from centres offering its qualifications and may also receive funding for special projects directly from The Scottish Executive or from the Enterprise Network.

The SQA has an annual turnover of just over £29m, employs around 500 members of staff across two sites, offers qualifications in around 1,300 approved centres, works in 40 countries and offers 44 Standard Grades, 34 Higher Grades, 270 Higher National Certificates (HNCs), 200 Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and 682 Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

SQA's business is overseen by a number of committees who provide support and assistance in the development of its qualifications. Both SQA's Board and Committee membership is representative of education, training, and employment interests in Scotland.

Chief Executive Ron Tuck leads a senior management team of three Directors — David Elliot, Don Giles and Dennis Gunning. A Management Team of Unit Heads — many of whom are here today, supports this team.

As you will hear from Ron shortly, SQA's early years have been challenging to say the least. But it has been made easier with the support and guidance you have given us. I thank you for that. A great deal has still to be accomplished in the years ahead. I hope we can count on your continued support and that together we can fulfil Scotland's aim of producing a world-class education and training system.

I would now like to hand over to Ron Tuck and invite him to deliver his presentation on SQA's strategies and plans for the future.

## **Ron Tuck, Chief Executive, SQA**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. It is good to see so many colleagues and partners here this morning in this impressive venue.

I will present an overview of some of our key achievements during the past year — many of which have come about through consultation with yourselves and with your support and co-operation.

- Since our creation in 1997, we have played a pivotal role along with Higher Still Development Unit colleagues in the Higher Still Development Programme. Without doubt, it presented our biggest challenge last year. Indeed, I'm sure many of our staff feel we have done little else but concentrate on Higher Still in the past year, such is the scope and intensity of the development work going on behind the scenes.
- A key element of our Higher Still work has been the development of the National Assessment Bank. This development is of crucial significance for two reasons: one, in easing the workload of staff in centres — who will not have to reinvent wheels, devising their own assessments; and second, in promoting the consistent application of national standards in internal assessment. So far, 444 packs have been published. While this is an impressive figure, it must be set against the target of some 5,000 assessment instruments (five for each high uptake unit), which constitutes 'steady state'. After that, we would keep the Bank refreshed and updated on an ongoing basis. We may also consider extension of the idea to the other qualifications blocks — HNQs and SVQs — if there is a demand.
- Another important area of Higher Still work has been the Core Skills audit, now substantially complete. Over the coming year, we will monitor use of this profile in National Qualifications as well as exploring the extent to which Core Skills can be extended to HNQs and SVQs so that all SQA candidates can benefit from Core Skills achievement.
- Scottish Group Awards are another significant part of the Higher Still reform, encouraging the development of coherent programmes of study and providing common benchmarks of attainment across academic and vocational education. Following the decision last year that all external assessments should take the form of courses — so as to have parity of esteem for vocational areas — we have begun to face the new challenge of developing new courses at Intermediate 2 and Higher level. Soon the range of Highers on offer will include, for example, Mental Health Care and Industrial Plant, alongside the current range of subjects.
- It is satisfying to see the work of the last five years coming to fruition. Notwithstanding the difficulties and controversies, it is good to talk to staff in centres who are enthusiastic about the new opportunities Higher Still will offer their students, particularly at Intermediate level. We want to work with staff in centres to help smooth the path of implementation over the next two to three years — so that the new National Qualifications become securely bedded in. However, we in SQA must also now ensure that Higher Still work is not so dominant that other qualifications areas are neglected.
- After extensive consultation, the review of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas is now complete, and a range of changes to the design rules for these qualifications has been agreed. The new design rules will apply to those HNC/Ds validated after 1 January 2001, and SQA is currently working on the guidance and support materials which centres will need. SQA also plans to have three complete HNC/D programmes ready in the new format for introduction in autumn 2001; these are in the areas of IT/Computing, Communication, and Social Science.

- The new design rules will maintain the strength of HNCs and HNDs, especially the strong vocational focus that employers value so highly, while also aligning these qualifications with the new Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. We are currently working with:
  - Napier University and the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council to improve progression from HNC/Ds to degree programmes
  - the Universities of Paisley and Stirling and the Robert Gordon University to develop guidance and case studies on the transfer of credit from degree programmes to HNC/Ds
  - the University of the Highlands and Islands Project, under a Memorandum of Understanding, to explore the integration of HNC/Ds with degree programmes
- As an accreditation body, we have been working closely with QCA to develop revised criteria and guidance for SVQs. We are pleased with the outcome of this development and responses from other SVQ awarding bodies have also been favourable.
- As an awarding body, SQA remains wholly committed to the place of SVQs in its qualifications portfolio. However, the process of re-accreditation of all SVQs is an onerous one, and we must take account of the fact that around half of SVQs currently have little or no uptake. We hope that Government policy will allow a more flexible and market-oriented approach that will ensure a closer matching to the needs of Scottish employers. Experience of awarding SVQs to date has provided useful information on which future awarding activity, within the new criteria and guidance, can be based.
- However, in the short term there is a need for SQA to balance its desire for as wide an SVQ portfolio as possible with the requirement to be financially prudent. We are developing an SVQ Business Plan which will confirm the importance we place on SVQs, while charting a realistic way forward.
- We have been in detailed discussion with the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise, and Highlands and Islands Enterprise on how to improve access to SVQs. We are especially keen to provide relevant qualifications for those New Deal clients undertaking a six-month option. In response, we are piloting Scottish Progression Awards in the areas of: Administration, Care, Children's Care and Play, Construction, Hospitality, and Retail

Each consists of five carefully selected units from an existing level 2 SVQ. Scottish Progression Awards, however, are not intended to indicate full occupational competence. Instead, they are designed to show current and potential employers that candidates have completed a programme of personal development to national standards and are well prepared to progress towards the full Scottish Vocational Qualification.

Initial expressions of interest, particularly in the Care SPA, are very encouraging. The pilot will be fully evaluated later this year before we decide on the future of SPAs.

- The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework is the 'big idea' in Scottish Qualifications. It builds on all the qualifications developments of the last 20 years — Standard Grade, Action Plan, the reform of HN qualifications, SCOTCAT in the higher education sector, GSVQs and SVQs, and finally Higher Still — and brings them into a single coherent framework. What will be its advantages?

- Simplicity. One framework with standard terminology covering all types of qualifications whether general education or work-based and at all levels from Access 1 to postgraduate.
- Coherence and progression. Progression routes through the system will become clarified and it will be easier to progress from one sector of education and training to another.
- Credit transfer. There will be a common points tariff, so that students can claim credit for relevant previous attainment.

The consultation period ends this month and an announcement of the outcomes of consultation will be made in September, with a full policy paper to follow.

It is our view that with the development of Higher Still and the SCQF, the qualifications house is now built. While the house will require ongoing maintenance and occasional refurbishment, it should require no major structural alterations. I hope that we can now anticipate a period of relative stability where we have the opportunity to consolidate these changes and maximise the benefits for Scotland's learners.

- One of the first tasks undertaken by SQA on its formation was the development of its policy on assessment and quality assurance. We inherited policies and procedures from our predecessor bodies, and these had to be integrated. We also had to take account of decisions already made in relation to the Higher Still provision. Assessment and quality assurance of HNC/Ds were also under review, as were the criteria for SVQs. Convergence, where possible, with the emerging policies of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has been another important consideration.

The first step was to consult on moderation/verification. Following this consultation process, in which the principles we proposed received widespread support, we progressed to the development and publication of the criteria.

SQA works in partnership with centres to ensure that all of its qualifications are subject to rigorous quality assurance, and has drawn up a number of quality assurance principles to maximise the effectiveness of its partnership. Specific elements of quality assurance are based on these principles. These elements are: validation of qualifications, approval of centres and of specific qualifications; internal and external moderation; quality control of external assessment; and monitoring of standards. Together, they are designed to ensure that all SQA qualifications are assessed to national standards.

- Centres are facing a lot of change. It would be surprising if the implementation of Higher Still, new quality assurance processes, and new administrative procedures did not throw up a range of problems, hopefully minor, but nevertheless requiring to be addressed.

In anticipation, SQA is establishing three Assessment and Awards Focus Groups, one for the school sector, one for FE, and one for the heterogeneous range of other centres — employers, private training providers, voluntary organisations and so on. The role of these Focus Groups will be to collect and consider evidence of implementation problems and recommend corrective action. I anticipate that they will meet over a two-year period, but by the end of this period, that we will have achieved stabilisation.



- The areas of activity I have been dealing with so far have been very much in the public eye. However, there has also been a hidden challenge — the Awards Processing System or APS. SQA inherited from its predecessor bodies two IT systems, each designed and built to cater for the specific needs of the respective bodies. In the area of data collection, for the past two years we have continued to operate under two systems, from separate sites, with two sets of operational procedures and have issued separate certificates. During that period we have been developing a single integrated processing system capable of meeting the needs of both internal and external stakeholders. This system, which will go live on 1 August 1999, is what we call the APS. We have tried to draw on the strengths and to address the weaknesses of the inherited systems. We have consulted with a range of stakeholders and their software suppliers and have taken on board the message that APS should be easy to deal with and provide appropriate levels of flexibility. We believe that we will meet these demands.

We hope that stakeholders will immediately benefit from the APS.

- All centres will be able to send registration, entry, and results data to us in the format that best suits them, either on paper or electronically or a combination of both. All such data will be sent to one address and according to one set of instructions and data formats.
  - Candidates will receive a single Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) recording all of their achievements. This will be updated as candidates gain further qualifications.
  - Educational bodies, employers, and other users of the Certificate will have access via the SQC to comprehensive and up to date information on candidate achievement.
- David has already stressed how important we believe links with stakeholders are. From this autumn we will establish 19 Advisory Groups — providing a strategic voice for all stakeholders, over all our qualifications. Each group will cover academic and vocational areas and will link back to their ‘constituencies’.
  - We have also begun to implement a regional liaison strategy whereby each member of our Management Team liaises with the local authority, LEC and FE colleges in a defined geographical area.
  - In order to ensure we serve all stakeholders to the best of our ability, we have begun undertaking a tracking study to monitor satisfaction across key stakeholder groups. It is important to us to gauge this opinion and to be open and accountable.

In the current climate and particularly with the advent of the Scottish Parliament, accountability is of supreme importance for every public body.

- SQA has now identified eight corporate performance indicators, which will be used to monitor performance across our key functions. These cover :
  - stakeholder satisfaction (with the qualifications themselves, with our responsiveness, and with our operational effectiveness)
  - the uptake of qualifications
  - consistency of standards both across a given level (ie all Highers in whatever subject should be broadly equivalent) and over time (ie the same qualifications should be roughly as demanding now as 10 years ago)

- commercial income gained from domestic and international contacts
- and the real level of entry charges after adjustment for inflation (obviously our aim is to maintain or reduce the price of qualifications)

These corporate performance indicators will be further amended and refined to ensure that the best service is delivered and that we are accountable at all times.

- Like many other public and private sector organisations, we have started to go down the EFQM Excellence road, with an initial focus on key processes and on customer satisfaction. SCOTVEC had gained Investors in People (IiP) but this lapsed automatically on merger. We aim to (re)gain IiP by September 2000 and to extend ISO 9000 registration as appropriate.
- In our first year, we worked out what we believed to be the most appropriate integrated organisational structure for SQA. However, translating the structure into reality required the filling of some 180, mostly internal, vacancies, and the resulting organisational flux added to the problems of an already difficult year. I would like to take this chance to thank our staff for the commitment they have shown in continuing to run the business and implement major reforms while also enduring the process of restructuring. The next phases of organisational development include: the development of a new performance management system; the implementation of an external programme of training and development; the completion of organisation-wide job evaluation; and putting in a new pay and grading system.
- We have had to cope with significant cost pressures this year, and the previous year, with:
  - the development of APS
  - Higher Still development and the National Assessment Bank
  - staff restructuring and physical reorganisation

This has resulted in a budget deficit, met from our reserves, but I am pleased to say that the deficit was less than forecast, thanks to efficiency savings and some additional funding from the Scottish Executive.

Cost pressures remain high in 1999/2000, with expenditure still being incurred in these three areas. Uncertainty over the amount and timing of National Qualifications income adds to the pressure.

However, these financial pressures have not impacted on stakeholders. Entry charges have risen at slightly below the level of inflation, making them stable in real terms. However the aim is to balance the budget planned for 2000/2001 and from 2001/2002 to seek to rebuild our revenue reserves, within the limits originally set by Treasury. This will be achieved through winning contracts both in the UK (mainly testing services) and abroad (mostly consultancy on vocational qualifications or exams reform).

- The first two years have been exciting and challenging, but also extraordinarily demanding. I think, however, that we can now begin to lift our heads above the parapet. While we need to continue to focus on the immediate challenges I have described, we also need to look ahead.
  - The Scottish Parliament will have an impact on all our lives. For SQA, it will undoubtedly mean a higher level of public scrutiny. Let me say quite honestly that we look forward to it. While no doubt it will at times be inconvenient or burdensome, it is entirely appropriate that a body such as ours is completely open and accountable.
  - The Government, both in Scotland and at UK level, is very determined to promote lifelong learning, particularly through the Scottish University for Industry. We are actively considering how, working with a range of parties across Scotland, we can improve the accessibility and attractiveness of qualifications, both for the 20% or so of school leavers who do not return to education and training, and for the large number of adults in Scotland who believe that learning is just for the young.
  
- However, I have little doubt that even bigger challenges lie ahead, not so much in the structure of the qualifications system itself (as I have said, I believe that a whole era of reconstruction is now coming to an end), but in the way they are delivered. Information and communication technology will impact enormously on our business. There are insistent demands for more frequent access to external assessment and for the development of online assessment. We must face these challenges, firstly because there are enormous potential benefits to Scottish learners, but also because if we don't we will be left behind.
  
- And there is the closely associated challenge of globalisation. The development of ICT brings the advent of global education and training institutions ever nearer. Also, multinationals operating on a global basis will need to be able to compare and calibrate the qualifications of different countries.

To be part of these exciting developments, SQA will need to be at the cutting edge of technology — or in partnership with those who are — and be perceived as a leading player on the world stage.

## Question and Answer Session with Ron Tuck

### **Q Fred Forrester, Depute General Secretary, EIS**

Has the merger between the Scottish Examinations Board and SCOTVEC exposed any differences in ethos within SQA? Will Higher Still be the catalyst to bring assessment methods together?

### **A Ron Tuck**

Assessment is assessment. I can honestly say that disagreements about assessment philosophy have not been a major problem. There were other cultural differences which were more significant. We are trying to create an SQA ethos based on defined values. We have in place a training and development programme together with a performance management system — both designed to reinforce these values.

### **Q Veronica Rankin, Equality Officer, EIS**

What plans does SQA have to address equality issues?

### **A Ron Tuck**

We have an equal opportunities policy in place; we have drawn from best practice and from SQA's parent organisations. With respect to specific gender related issues, for example, under-achievement of boys, or the under-representation of women, SQA's role is to develop assessment free of bias and to monitor this through research. Differences in attainment are a matter for centres.

### **Q Jim McGonigal, Vice-President, Scottish Association of Teachers**

Are decisions being taken for reasons of economy rather than in the best interest of candidates? For example the consolidation of some Standard Grade subjects resulting in fewer exams.

### **A Ron Tuck**

Maintaining national standards and fairness to candidates comes first in SQA's agenda. However, cost effectiveness is important and should also play a part. The proposal with respect to Standard Grades was part of a consultation paper. The results of the consultation indicate that centres didn't like the proposition, and so the National Qualifications Committee has decided that it will drop the proposal.

### **Q Bill Guthrie, STUC**

Is late payment of bills becoming SQA's policy?

### **A Ron Tuck**

This could be a problem of a recently integrated system. If you can give us the details, then we shall pursue the matter.

**Q Adrienne Armstrong, Headteacher, St George's School for Girls.**

Within the UCAS tariff, where does Higher sit in comparison to AS?

**A Ron Tuck**

We are working with the Scottish Executive and UCAS to develop a tariff. UCAS is to consult on the tariff this autumn. SQA has already undertaken a comprehensive study of A-levels, Highers and Advanced Highers. This study will form the basis for decisions. It is important to remember that Scottish candidates gain many of their qualifications a year earlier than their English counterparts, so a straightforward comparison is difficult.

**Q Peter Duncan, Principal, Central College of Commerce**

The real issues with external assessment are timing and flexibility, rather than a second diet.

**A Ron Tuck**

FE issues are high on SQA's agenda. We are looking internally at the impact of ICT on assessment methods. We have still to scope what is involved in developing flexible external assessment using ICT. SQA is very conscious of its importance, but we also need to look at the scale of investment.

**Q John McPherson, Development Officer, Renfrewshire Education Business Partnership**

The end user of qualifications is the employer. What is SQA doing to explain qualifications to this group?

**A Ron Tuck**

This is a difficult task. My aspiration is for a system so well understood, that a reporter taking a roving mike into a city centre could stop a passer-by and obtain a reasonably accurate description of the qualifications. This is a long-term aim, which we need to pursue over a period of time through partners and intermediaries.

**Q Derek Robinson, Learning Manager, Scottish Amicable Ltd.**

Can you expand on SQA's plans for Account Management?

**A Ron Tuck**

SQA deals with so many people and so many organisations. School and colleges generally know their way around SQA, but independent training providers and employers sometimes find it difficult. The Account Management initiative was piloted with a small number of employers and has now been rolled out to 150 employers. Josephine Cousland, Head of Customer Services and Liaison Unit will be able to give more information.

**Q Maureen Laing, Professional Association of Teachers**

How does SQA plan to manage the exams now that they are later in the year, and markers will be on holiday?

**A Ron Tuck**

SQA is consulting with markers on this issue. For example, we might spread the work over two weekends rather than three, and give markers smaller allocations of scripts, so that there is a more concentrated period of work.

**Q John Burt, Principal, Angus College**

The quantity and quality of Higher Still materials are much better compared with the support offered during Action Plan. However, there is a need to get moderation right. Are Phase 2 Highers so important? Are our priorities right; do they need revisiting?

**A Ron Tuck**

There are many competing priorities, but FE asked us to produce Phase 2 courses to allow them to offer SGAs in the coming session. In consultation with colleges we have prioritised aspects of the Phase 2 development to meet college needs.

**Q Trevor Jones, Education Member, Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association**

Have SQA considered the impact a second diet might have on Scottish secondary schools?

**A Ron Tuck**

The Secretary of State asked SQA to consult in March on the second diet. The final decision will be taken by the Minister based on the findings of the consultation and SQA's recommendations. The view from FE was that a second diet was a step in the right direction, although it did not go far enough to create real flexibility. Schools, although they understand FE's needs, had reservations. One of the issues identified was the likelihood of parental pressure to use a second diet for resits. There is also the problem of extra setters and markers. We hope that a resolution can be found which will meet both FE and schools' interests.

**Q Nancy Ovens, Sport & Recreation and Allied Occupations NTO**

It would have been helpful if SQA had consulted more widely on the SPAs it recently developed. For example SPRITO would like to have been consulted on the Children's Care and Play SPA. I recognise that there is support for SPAs and that currently they are being piloted. However, because they look like being extended to other NTO areas — I would like reassurance that there will be no further development without consultation.

**A Ron Tuck**

Absolutely right — we apologise. We will consult more thoroughly next time.

# Briefing Sessions

## Advisory Groups and Assessment Panels

### Presenters

**Eddie Clarke, Head of Qualifications Unit: Services and Subjects, SQA**

**Bill Fairbairn, Project Leader, SQA**

This briefing session was aimed at providing users of SQA qualifications with an update on the implementation of SQA Advisory Groups. This session was also useful to those who prepare and assess candidates for SQA qualifications as the arrangements for an SQA assessment panel were also discussed.

### Questions from delegates

- Q Does SQA ensure there is balanced representation on each of the Advisory Groups?
- A Representation in each group might be different but will reflect the needs of the sector.
- Q When will members be informed they have been appointed to an Advisory Group?
- A As soon as possible after selection has been made.
- Q Would examiners be expected to be involved in Assessment Panels?
- A No, for reasons of objectivity examiners will not be invited to sit on Assessment Panels.
- Q How much information has been published regarding Advisory Groups?
- A Information leaflets have been produced and have been widely distributed. There is also information on SQA's website.
- Q What is the deadline for informing members of meetings?
- A Two months before the meeting date.
- Q What is the difference between the terminology - Verifier and Moderator?
- A Moderators verify National Qualification and Higher National centres' systems and assessment practices. Verifiers would carry out the same type of work but for SVQ centres only.
- Q Have all members been appointed to the Advisory Groups?
- A Memberships have been agreed for 18 Advisory Groups. Members will be informed directly by mid August 1999.
- Q How will issues be addressed that affect cross-sector activity?
- A All Advisory Group minutes will be available from SQA's website. Each Advisory Group can consider cross-sector issues as necessary.

- Q What criteria will be used to select Convenors?  
A SQA will be looking for individuals who are seen as ‘active’ in the sector and have a recognised constituency and influence.
- Q Will Advisory Groups be consulted by SQA on relevant issues relating to their sectors?  
A Advisory Groups act in an advisory capacity. They will review operational plans and represent the views of stakeholders.
- Q Will there be variation between sectors?  
A Sectors differ — this is expected. There is a possibility that the same qualifications will be used in different sectors.
- Q Will moderators/verifiers be trained specifically to deal with the varied operational techniques stemming from different sectors?  
A Yes, training will include this.
- Q How will information be disseminated?  
A SQA’s website, joint working parties will be established as necessary, and there will be a Convenors’ Forum.
- Q Will QCA also be establishing 19 Advisory Groups?  
A No. QCA’s remit is vocational qualifications only, although wider consultation has been proposed.
- Q What are the respective roles of Advisory Groups and the Accreditation Committee? Could this lead to conflict and duplication?  
A No. The Accreditation Committee is a separate senior committee which only accredits SVQs.
- Q Does SQA feel the recent increase in staff turnover is useful?  
A There is now a balance between experienced staff and ‘new blood’ who bring fresh eyes to SQA’s policies and procedures. It is natural for any organisation of SQA’s size to have a regular turnover of staff.



# National Qualifications (Higher Still) Update

## Presenters

**Neil MacGowan, Head of Higher Still Implementation, SQA**

**Bill Reid, Head of Qualifications Unit: Business and Languages, SQA**

The implementation of the new National (Higher Still) Qualifications began in August 1999. This briefing session updated delegates on SQA's position in relation to key implementation activities and timelines. These included operations and procedures, assessment moderation, assessment support, Scottish Group Awards, the impact of the second diet, publicity and marketing, and the new Scottish Qualifications Certificate.

## Questions from delegates

Q How are you addressing the academic/vocational divide in relation to work-based qualifications?

A For Scottish Group Awards, related SVQs can be credited.

Q How will the Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC) be promoted to employers? A summary of the Robert D Bruce case study would be useful.

A As part of our marketing strategy for 1999 - 2000 we will be promoting the SQC. This activity will be targeted at candidates, parents and employers and will explain simply and clearly the main points of the SQC.

Q In Scottish Group Awards such as Intermediate 2 Hospitality, how would SQA envisage moderation taking place?

A Visiting moderation will involve sampling candidates' performance and evidence. Details of the type of moderation to be used for each National Unit are contained in the document "Putting Assessment Moderation Policy into Operation" issued to centres in April 1999.

Q Can candidates who narrowly fail to achieve a course at one level be awarded the level below?

A Where candidates fall into the 'near miss category' (45-49 percent), they will be awarded Grade C in the course in the same subject (if it is available) at the level below, provided that they have successfully completed the units at the upper or lower level (or a combination of both). So, a candidate who is successful in unit assessment at Higher, but attains a near miss in Higher external assessment, will automatically be awarded Grade C at Intermediate 2.

Q What is the point of this automatic review if someone has already gained an A or B pass at the level below?

A This would be recognised and the candidates would not be awarded a lower pass than that already gained.

- Q Will Advanced Higher replace Higher as the “Gold Standard” in Scotland?
- A This is unlikely. It is intended that Higher will continue to be regarded as the benchmark for entry into higher education.
- Q Can appeals only be made for the level lower than that entered for?
- A No. An assessment appeal can be made for any level up to and including that for which the candidate has been entered, provided suitable evidence at the level appealed for can be provided.
- Q Why are Scottish Group Awards not automatically generated by SQA?
- A Given the complex nature of routes to SGAs and the need for coherence and relevance to candidates, centres are required to specify the SGA the candidates are entered for.
- Q Why wasn't the consistent use of “National” maintained, ie the use of National Qualifications, National Units and National Courses but Scottish Group Awards? SGA and SQA are so similar that those not professionally involved in education may become confused.
- A Decisions on nomenclature were taken by the SOEID following consultation.

# Assessment and Quality Assurance

## Presenters

**David Elliot, Director (Awards Division), SQA**

**Christine De Luca, Head of Assessment Research and Development, SQA**

Earlier this year SQA published Quality Assurance Principles, Elements and Criteria. The paper summarises SQA's approach to assessment and quality assurance. The briefing session discussed each of the quality elements and identified what they mean for centres.

## Questions from delegates

- Q Given the move towards desk auditing, to what extent will there be feedback to candidates?
- A Candidates have not really been the focus of our various consultation exercises or feedback mechanisms. SQA expects centres to be responsive to student concerns and to have an internal appeal system in place.
- Q Can SQA reconsider the two recent lists issued re approval (List A and B)? Where colleges have considerable experience in delivering qualifications in a particular area in List B, could the transfer of approval to the new qualification not be automatic as for list A?
- A SQA will give this question careful consideration.
- Q Will credit transfer from SQMS be allowed?
- A SQA is committed to the principle of credit transfer and so that arrangement would be honoured.
- Q What form will feedback from central moderation take?
- A SQA is very conscious that visits have the potential for rich feedback. SQA plans to make feedback from central moderation as rich as possible. It will pinpoint good practice as well as problem areas, and will clearly detail which parts were problematic and how to correct it.
- Q Will centres have to produce reports of meetings?
- A While SQA expects centres to have an effective system of internal moderation we do not wish to make this paper-intensive. Our new Assessment and Quality Assurance guides will give information on what we consider is good practice. The focus groups will keep us in touch with any problems. Discussion from these groups will be documented on SQA's website.
- Q Will the level of supervision required for internal assessment not have the effect of making it inflexible?
- A We need to balance the need for flexibility with the need for credibility. The documents mentioned above will address these issues. The teacher/lecturer must be confident that what the candidate submits is his/her own work. In work-placed assessment for example it may be that a supervisor could vouch for that candidate's work. We will try to be flexible. Again the focus groups will review this. We may have to issue more guidance as time goes on if issues arise.

- Q How does SQA quality assure the NAB assessment instruments?
- A SQA has a joint responsibility with HSDU for producing NABs. HSDU writes them and SQA quality assures them. Where we find problems with the NABs we involve vetters. Our Qualifications Managers check them before they are finally processed. We will gradually build up the bank so that you will have a choice. However, SQA welcomes feedback on any you consider to be problematic.
- Q Will education authority managers receive copies of all material SQA sends to centres?
- A Perhaps this is something which we have not ironed out properly yet. The two predecessor bodies had different approaches to this and we want to ensure we get it right. SQA will check this, and it will be useful to hear what you would like to receive.

# The Role of NTOs

## Presenters

**Aileen Ponton, Head of Accreditation, SQA**

**Jenny Kellie, Chief Executive, SCONTO**

**Anneliese Archibald, Head of HtF Scotland**

This briefing session focused on the role of National Training Organisations (NTOs), with specific reference to Scotland and including the role of SCONTO.

## Questions from delegates

Q Why were NTOs not included as one of SQA's stakeholder groups during the morning presentations?

A NTOs are normally always listed. NTOs are very much included as a major stakeholder; global categories were only given as examples in the morning presentations.

Q Modern Apprenticeships are featured very heavily by the new Scottish Parliament. How will SQA meet needs?

A The way forward is to increase partnerships in Scotland. This will be a massive exercise for all involved.

Q How do HtF liaise/work with industry?

A Employers in the industry are members of SQA's Advisory Groups. SCONTO encourages direct links between employers and NTOs to ensure wide consultation and to increase employer representation as much as possible. This will be done in a number of ways.

Q How do HtF disseminate/feedback information to employers?

A HtF's Board of Trustees and various other groups have representation from trade, employers and professional bodies.

Q To what extent has HtF liaised with employment/careers services? Many young people are not aware of opportunities or how to go about finding out.

A HtF has representation from employment services; we use various information media eg newsheets; we have field representatives working to promote the industry to schools, colleges, careers advisors, etc. In the future SCONTO will be talking to guidance teachers, as they are very aware that there is a problem getting information to young people. SQA use a number of sources to promote including BBC website, exhibits etc, but are aware that we need to continue to work to get the message out there.

Q How are SCONTO reviewing NTO funding and self financing with the change to levy etc?

A The NTO network is attempting to review all NTO funding mechanisms eg Skillset is one example of a successful partnership.

Q Are there any examples of school partnerships?

A There are various initiatives ongoing eg Education Business Partnerships.

Q Are SCONTO promoting sufficiently to industry? There appears to be a need to promote NTO activities to employers

A SCONTO is aware that some business and small businesses are unaware. SCONTO are limited financially for promotion but do try to ride on partnership operations. There is a need to lobby new MSPs. SCONTO's new offices will have a flagship launch, and will use electronic communication including website, chatline etc. The intention is to raise awareness with employers.

Q How many NTOs have Scottish contacts?

A There is a lot of representation in Scotland and we are trying to promote NTOs in Scotland, but again have financial constraints. SCONTO is trying to promote and network as much as possible.

# SVQs — Ten Years On

## Presenter

**Tom Drake, Head of Development Co-ordination Unit, SQA**

This briefing session outlined SQA's accrediting and awarding roles; the nature, levels, range and uptake of SVQs; current and planned developments including Scottish Progression Awards.

## Questions and comments from delegates

- There is a need for academic and vocational qualifications to allow for reciprocal credit transfer within the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

SQA acknowledges the importance of this articulation and is very active in this regard.

- There are concerns that some centres deploy Assessors who are not fully occupationally competent to carry out the Assessor role.

SQA has a requirement for Assessors to be occupationally competent/qualified within the work-related area being assessed and to work towards attainment of the D Units. New guidance has been developed for awarding bodies to help ensure standardisation of key principles. Should any concerns be raised about the appropriateness of assessor deployment, SQA should be informed in writing. All approved centres must name the proposed Assessors and provide CVs prior to gaining authorisation to practise. A centre must satisfy the SQA criteria for the appointment of additional Assessors. SQA also conducts external verification visits to check this on an on-going basis.

- Government initiatives such as New Deal seem to have created a shift in perception away from the original ethos of SVQs.

SVQs are not training courses and should facilitate the accreditation of consistent competent performance. These initiatives should reflect the industry's needs and not be compromised to suit funding requirements. It is vital also to ensure that these qualifications enhance the employability of the participating individual.

- With regards to the new Scottish Progression Awards, there was concern over the level of consultation between SQA and NTOs prior to the launch of the pilot. It was requested that in future, SQA consults on a much wider basis prior to the piloting or launch of a new product.

This suggestion was noted and in future a thorough consultation exercise would be undertaken with the relevant key bodies.

Q What is the annual candidate uptake figure?

A 35,000 represents the uptake figures for last year.

Q What is SQA's role within the University for Industry initiative?

A SQA is in the early stages of liaison and has a co-ordinating function with specific focus on education and training. This will include identifying needs/skills gaps/ marketing and accessibility of qualifications.

Q What is the NTOs' role with respect to lifelong learning?

A NTOs liaise with all key bodies and consult widely. They are concerned that all initiatives towards lifelong learning have intrinsic value.



# Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

## Presenters

**John Hart, Head of Qualifications Strategy Unit, SQA**

**Margaret Miller, Qualifications Manager, SQA**

The first public paper on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) *Adding Value to Learning* sets out proposals for the initial shape of the Framework, together with an outline of future developments. This briefing session outlined the main features and aims of the SCQF and explored some of the future work required for implementation.

## Questions from delegates

- Q The consultation paper states that the SCQF will help with national and international comparisons. How will it help?
- A The development of the SCQF has involved looking carefully at the Scottish Qualifications System and establishing an agreed position on its characteristics and the relationships between the qualifications within it. Because it has this agreed basis, it should help us to approach cross-border and international comparisons. For example, it has already helped in work which SQA had been carrying out to develop a tariff for Scottish qualifications on behalf of UCAS.
- Q What implications are there for delivery and funding — eg if schools, colleges and universities are all offering qualifications at the same level?
- A As we developed the proposals we were aware that the SCQF could raise underlying issues of this kind and provoke public debate about aspects of the system. The Framework contributes to the debate by setting down the architecture of the qualifications system, but the Framework can't directly resolve the issues.
- Q The implementation of the SCQF represents a difficult challenge. What are the timescales? How and when will employers be able to make sense of it?
- A The SCQF will allow us to give points and levels to the qualifications which are the responsibility of SQA and the higher education institutions. Some of that work is already well in hand through the implementation of SQA's new National Units, Courses and group awards and through SCOTCAT. Once that has been done, we will have covered a good deal of the Scottish qualifications system. We then want to go on to look at professional qualifications. Where the mechanisms for achieving this don't entirely lie with SQA, it is difficult to indicate precise timescales at this stage.

SQA plans to implement its parts of the framework over a two-year period if the mechanisms allow it and over that period we will have to explain to employers how the new levels work and what the points mean.

Q The framework is reflective, but it should also be progressive. As we bring qualifications into the framework, we will have to be sure that the allocation of levels and credits are reliable. How do we ensure this?

A The framework consolidates existing systems of qualifications, but it also brings them together in stronger relationships and may be used in ways that create new relationships. The SCQF should make progression easier with its levels and points.

Qualifications and learning programmes which are included in the framework will need to go through a formal process to ensure they are at the right level and given an appropriate number of points. When the Joint Advisory Committee is finally set up, one of its functions will be to establish the mechanisms for doing this. However, the framework will also offer a new set of measures for institutions to carry out assessment of prior learning for local or individual needs.

Q In the UCAS tariff the A- Level gets more credit than Advanced Higher does in SCQF. Why?

A SQA has been working with UCAS on a tariff for Scottish qualifications following UCAS work on the A- Level system. The proposals we have developed draw on the comparability study we carried out last year which showed that A-Levels and Advanced Highers should match grade for grade.

SCQF gives Higher and Advanced Higher points in their own right and in relation to each other, not in comparison to the English system. No points have been allocated to English qualifications. However, if A- Levels were to be given SCQF points, it would be expected that this would be the same as the Advanced Higher.

We have been looking at ways of making connections between the two points systems — the UCAS tariff and the SCQF.

Q I would like clarification of SCQF levels. Will HNC/Ds be brought into these levels?

A Yes. Full HNCs come in at the same level as Advanced Highers and the first level of degree studies. Full HNDs come in at the same level as the second level of degree studies and SVQ level 4.

Q Are HN Units all at Advanced Higher level, and are there funding issues here?

A HN Units will be at different levels — some will be at the same level as Advanced Higher, but we will have to carry out a rolling programme of review to establish the level of individual units. There may be funding issues but it is too early to tell what these will be.

- Q HNC Civil Engineering is different from HNC Chemistry. Is it really fair to put levels on these? Are they comparable?
- A They will be comparable for SCQF purposes although they are very different in subject matter.
- Q Exemption based on SCQF points looks good, but may not work in practice if the qualifications are on different levels.
- A As happens currently the amount of specific credit or exemption which an institution or faculty can give will vary, but there will now be a common reference point from which decisions on credit are made. There should be more public discussion of these issues as a result of the introduction of the SCQF.
- Q What does the allocation of points to an Honours Degree really mean?
- A It should mean that there is a common definition in the framework. This will explain the characteristics which all qualifications with a particular title have in common. Where there are new qualifications or unfamiliar qualifications, this should help users, but where users are very familiar with a qualification the SCQF may not be so helpful in this respect.
- Q Is this really an education sector initiative?
- A It is true that the origins of the SCQF lie largely in educational reforms, but also in the contribution which the employment sector has made to these reforms — directly or in response to them. SCOTCAT and Higher Still include both vocational and general educational/academic learning. From the beginning all the partners agreed the importance of including SVQs and workplace learning.
- Q There are benefits to employers. They can quote their needs in terms of points, but x points in themselves would not be enough. How do you take account of levels?
- A The SCQF is not set up to give a single total. If the points are recorded, it would be in terms of total points of each level.
- Q This will do different things for different people. How will it help people get employment?.
- A Agreed — this is an important function. For recruitment, most employers only need to know about qualifications at specific times. For some employers that could be once in two or three years. Perhaps, they require a ready reckoner for recruitment purposes not a detailed and comprehensive knowledge of the system. The SCQF should be able to help because you will be able to say “this is a level 7 qualification and it includes 60 points worth of learning”. That should be a useful start.
- Q Many employers won't know the details of the qualifications — eg they won't know that Access has more than one level.
- A That shouldn't matter too much, if they can refer to SCQF levels where they are clearly shown. In the longer term, people may just refer to SCQF levels when talking about Scottish qualifications.

Q How can this make a difference to employers? How can you take account of non-formal learning here?

A Mechanisms will have to be established by the Joint Advisory Committee.

Q Many HE Institutions won't accept people with vocational qualifications.

A This should depend on the extent to which the vocational qualifications are suitable preparation for the degree course in question. There are already some very good articulation arrangements in place at present, but again the principals of the SCQF should encourage more links of this kind.

Q How do Units build into a Higher Course? Do you get credit for assessment?

A National Courses have a design length of 160 hours — they are normally made up of three 40-hour Units and an external assessment and they are given four credits. The external assessment shouldn't go beyond the content of the component Units, but should require the candidate to exercise additional skills, like integrating the learning from the individual Units. Preparation for the external assessment and the assessment itself are expected to require the same effort as a Unit, so they get the same credit.

