



Audit Report

Skillsfirst Awards

19 June 2013

Note

Restricted or commercially sensitive information gathered during SQA Accreditation's quality assurance activities is treated in the strictest confidence. However, please note the following:

- ◆ The findings of this report and the associated Action Plan will be presented to SQA's Accreditation Committee.
- ◆ The report and Action Plan will be published on SQA Accreditation's website following receipt of the signed acceptance of audit findings.
- ◆ The contents will contribute towards the Quality Enhancement Rating which will, in turn, contribute towards the quality assurance activity and timescales.

Please note that SQA Accreditation's quality assurance activities are conducted on a sampling basis. Consequently, not all aspects of an awarding body's performance in quality assurance, contract compliance, implementation, awarding of certificates and fee arrangements (not an exhaustive list) may have been considered in this report to the same depth.

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Executive summary

This was the first audit of Skillsfirst Awards since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation on 16 January 2013.

1.1 Scope and approach

The audit was designed to review and evaluate Skillsfirst Award's strategies, policies and procedures to ensure compliance under SQA Accreditation's *Regulatory Principles (2011)*, Regulatory Principles Directives, the requirements of the clauses within and any conditions attached to the approved awarding body agreement and the Criteria for Accredited Qualifications.

As this was a full audit of Skillsfirst Awards, all Principles were included within the scope of the audit.

A Requirement has been raised where SQA Accreditation found evidence that the awarding body has not met SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements.

The following timescales apply:

- ◆ SQA Accreditation will issue this report within 30 working days of the audit date.
- ◆ The awarding body must sign and return the audit report and associated Action Plan within 30 working days of the audit report being issued.
- ◆ Within a further 20 working days of receiving the proposed Action Plan, SQA Accreditation will confirm whether the Action Plan is appropriate to address the Requirements. This will be subject to the actions proving appropriate to the issues raised.
- ◆ SQA Accreditation will monitor progress towards completion of the actions identified in the Action Plan.

A Recommendation may be recorded in instances where SQA Accreditation considers there to be scope for improvement. Where these are agreed during the audit, they are recorded on the report for future reference. As Recommendations are recorded for awarding body consideration only, it is not necessary to agree either actions or timescales to resolve these in the awarding body Action Plan.

1.2 Awarding body audit report timeline

Skillsfirst Awards audit date	19 June 2013
SQA Accreditation audit report date	17 July 2013
Date audit report and Action Plan to be signed and submitted by Skillsfirst Awards	28 August 2013

1.3 Background

Skillsfirst Awards was formed as an awarding body in 2009 and was approved by SQA Accreditation during 2013. The initial approval included accreditation for the SVQ 2 in Customer Service. The awarding body offers a range of qualifications which primarily cover the contact centre, sales and customer service sectors. Skillsfirst Award's headquarters are situated in Birmingham. The Audit Team was provided with full access to the awarding body's premises, staff and documentation.

1.4 Overview

As a result of the audit and post-audit activities, one Requirement has been raised and one Recommendation recorded.

The one Requirement forms the basis of the Skillsfirst Awards Action Plan. This must be completed and submitted to SQA Accreditation for agreement within 30 working days of the audit report being issued. The Action Plan must be submitted by 28 August 2013.

Outcome	Area of concern	Risk rating
Requirement 1	Principle 14	Low
Recommendation 1	Principle 18	Not applicable

Skillsfirst Awards has not approved any centres for the SVQ 2 Customer Service since the qualification was accredited. The Audit Team was therefore limited with regard to physical evidence for centre files and external verification activity. However, the processes around these were discussed with the relevant personnel. The Audit Team was satisfied that Skillsfirst Awards has robust and reliable systems which will accommodate SQA accredited provision.

The Audit Team also indicated that they would like to see Skillsfirst Awards raise its profile in Scotland. This will require the awarding body to put resources into identifying business opportunities in Scotland and seeking accreditation for new awards where appropriate.

2 Audit findings

The following sections detail Requirements raised and Recommendations recorded against SQA Accreditation's *Regulatory Principles (2011)*, Regulatory Principles Directives, the requirements of the clauses within and any conditions attached to the Approved Awarding Body agreement and the Criteria for Accredited Qualifications.

2.1 Requirements

Principle 14. The awarding body must consult with stakeholders, taking into account relevant equality and diversity groups, to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to entry to the assessment of the qualifications they design and/or offer for different groups of learners.

Skillsfirst Award's *Equality and Accessibility Policy January 2013* does not make appropriate reference to qualifications in Scotland.

The evidence available indicates that Skillsfirst Awards does not meet the requirements of Principle 14. This has been recorded as **Requirement 1**.

2.2 Recommendations

Principle 18. The awarding body and their centres must deal with complaints on a fair and equitable basis, in line with their published procedures and timescales, and without unreasonable delay. The awarding body, their centres and learners must be made aware of how and when they can complain to SQA Accreditation. Where a complaint is upheld, the awarding body and/or centre must take appropriate, corrective and/or preventative action.

The wording within Skillsfirst Award's *Complaints Policy January 2013* could be construed as misleading as it indicates that complaints can be made to SQA Accreditation where a centre is operating in Scotland and this is not strictly correct. It does however indicate elsewhere that that complaints can be made to SQA Accreditation where the award is an SQA accredited qualification, therefore, the policy is acceptable.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 1**.

3 Outstanding approval and accreditation conditions

A condition will be recorded at the time of approval of the awarding body or at the time of accreditation for an SQA-accredited qualification. A condition is recorded when SQA Accreditation's Co-ordination Group (ACG) finds evidence that the awarding body does not fully meet the requirements under SQA Accreditation's *Regulatory Principles (2011)*, Regulatory Principles Directives, the requirements of the clauses within and any conditions attached to the Approved Awarding Body agreement and the Criteria for Accredited Qualifications.

Principle no.	Condition	Date due
No outstanding conditions		

4 Risk rating of Requirements

SQA Accreditation assigns a risk rating to each Requirement recorded as a result of awarding body quality assurance activity. The table below illustrates how the rating for a Requirement is assigned. A weighting is applied that depends on the risk identified and the possible impact on qualifications and/or the learner of failure to implement that Requirement.

The assignment of a risk rating allows an awarding body to assign their resources to areas which have been identified as having a major impact on the qualifications and/or the learner. The risk rating also allows SQA Accreditation to assign its resources to support awarding bodies in improving their performance.

Risk	Impact of Requirements identified through quality assurance activity
Very Low	The Requirement has been identified as likely to cause minimal concern and would not threaten the integrity of the qualification or impact adversely on the learner. Any overall effect is likely to be small scale and/or localised, rather than widespread. The identified Requirement is unlikely to recur once resolved and no long lasting damage would be anticipated.
Low	The Requirement has been identified as low impact but is of sufficient importance to merit intervention, with a low threat to the systems or procedures associated with the qualification and/or impact on the learner. Disruption may not just be localised but more widespread and would possibly cause residual damage; however, this could be easily corrected without further consequence.
Medium	The Requirement has been identified as having the potential to damage the credibility of the qualification and/or be detrimental to the learner. There may be some impact to the systems or procedures that support the qualification or the operational effectiveness of the awarding body.
High	The Requirement has been identified as having a potentially high impact on the integrity and reliability of the qualification, or the effective operation of the awarding body as a whole, if corrective action is not quickly taken. There is a high probability that the qualification and/or learner will be negatively affected.
Very High	The Requirement has been identified as having a serious impact on the integrity and reliability of the qualification or the effective operation of the awarding body if corrective action is not immediately taken. There is a very high probability that the qualification and/or learner will be negatively affected.

In assigning a risk rating, each Requirement is considered on its own merit, taking account of the context in which it was identified.

5 Table of awards

Accredited qualifications currently offered by Skillsfirst Awards.

SQA-accredited qualification title	Level	Code	Accreditation date	Re-accreditation date
SVQ 2 Customer Service at SCQF Level 5	SCQF Level 5	GG2N 22	16.01.2013	31.12.15

6 List of documents reviewed pre- and post-audit

Document title	Date of issue	Version number
Centre Handbook	May 2013	
Operations Manual	August 2012	V7
Handbook SVQ 2 Customer Service at SCQF Level 5	April 2013	V2
Centre Recognition Form	November 2012	
Qualification Approval Form		
Skillsfirst Awards Strategic Plan 2009		
Skillsfirst Awards Strategic Plan 2011–16		
Performance Review Group Minutes	Various	
Quarterly KPI achievements	Various	
Board Meeting Minutes	Various	
SMT Minutes	Various	
Equality and Accessibility Policy	January 2013	V2

Document title	Date of issue	Version number
Complaints Policy	January 2013	V3
Skillsfirst Awards Sample Certificate		
Malpractice and Maladministration Policy	January 2013	V2
Customer Service Policy	January 2013	V2
Organisational Chart		
Job Descriptions	Various	
External Verification Quality Assurance Guidance	May 2013	
Appeals Policy	January 2013	V2
Reasonable Adjustment and Special Considerations Policy	January 2013	V2
EV Report Form		
Business Continuity Plan	November 2012	V2
Skillsfirst Awards Risk and Issue Management Policy		
Glossary of Terms for Technical Certificates		

Document title	Date of issue	Version number
Unit/Qualification Development and Review Process — Qualifications offered in Scotland	November 2012	
Digital Certificates Overview		

7 Action plan



A separate document in Microsoft Word has been forwarded with this Audit Report.

Areas of concern	Requirement	Risk rating	Proposed action (Please include a description of your intended methodology and details of the evidence that will be provided.)	Target date for completion
Principle 14	The awarding body's Equality and Accessibility Policy must cover Scotland.	Low		

Signatures of agreement of Action Plan

For and on behalf of Skillsfirst Awards:

Signature

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Date

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For and on behalf of SQA Accreditation:

Signature

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Date

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8 Acceptance of audit findings

For and on behalf of Skillsfirst Awards:

Signature

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Designation

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Date

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For and on behalf of SQA Accreditation:

Signature

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Designation

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Date

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