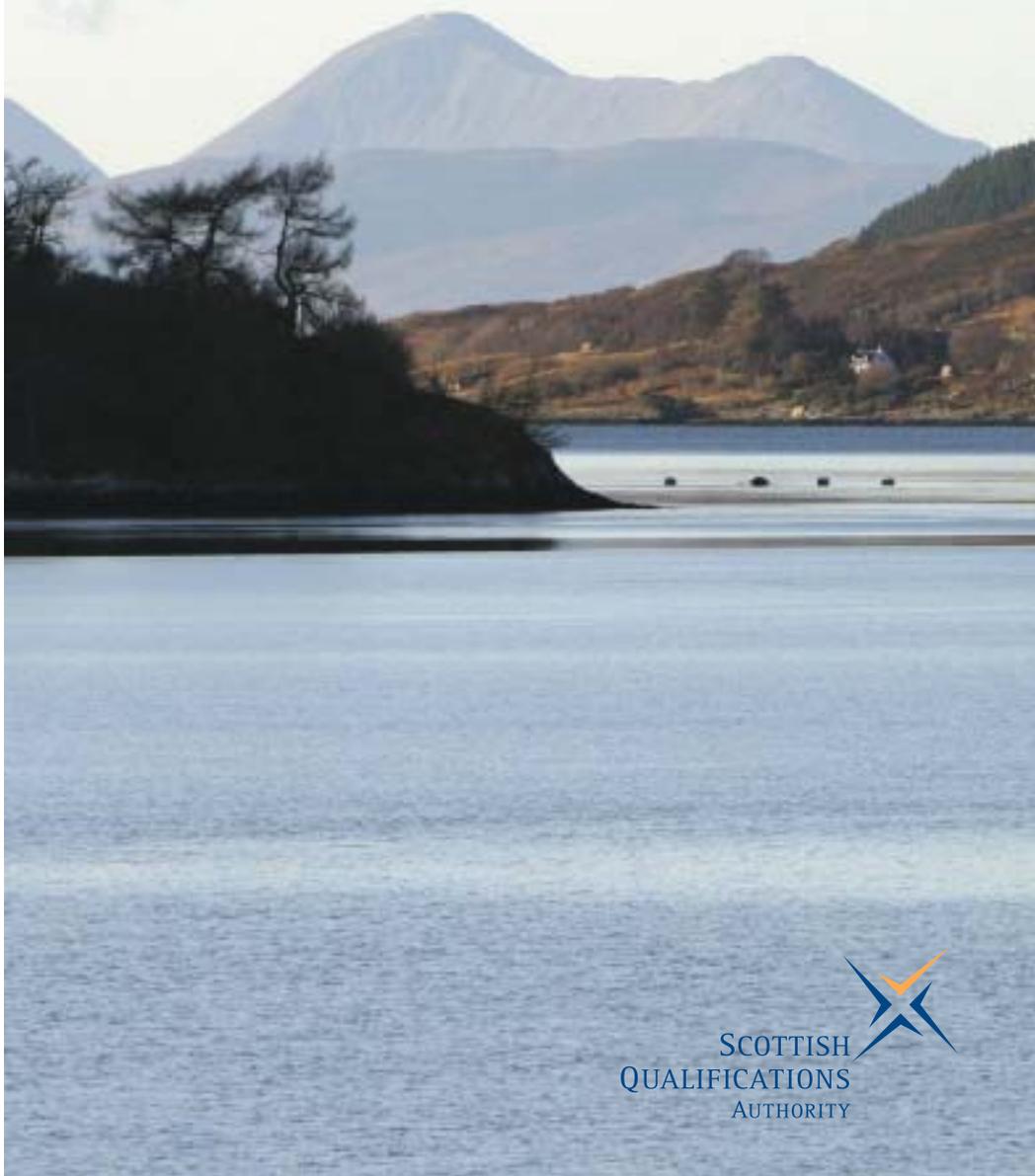


SQA in the Highlands and Islands





Diversity

Scotland may be a small country, but it is diverse. Some parts of the country have their own particular set of needs, as well as their own individual strengths. The Highlands and Islands are a prime example of this.

We recognise this complexity, and that we cannot assume that one size fits all in terms of the products and services we offer – Scotland isn't just the central belt. That's why we are developing a strategy for SQA's activities in the Highlands and Islands.



Strategy

Our strategy asks two basic questions:

- How can we deliver a better, more 'joined-up' service to the Highlands and Islands?
- Do the Highlands and Islands have any special priorities that aren't being taken care of by the qualifications we offer at the moment?

We've already done a lot of the work, but we haven't come up with all the answers yet – that's where you come in. Over the next few months, we'll be consulting more and making more proposals for the future. Look out for our communications about this, and get involved.



Context

These are the special circumstances that face the Highlands and Islands more than any other part of Scotland. Many of them can be seen as strengths as well as challenges to overcome:

- **Population.** There is a need to increase the number of people living, working and studying in the Highlands and Islands. The economic and social future of the region depends on this.
- **Place.** This is an outstandingly beautiful area – which is important in attracting newcomers – but remoteness brings its own challenges.
- **Productivity.** There are particular challenges for the Highlands and Islands given higher input costs and lower volume of outputs.

Hence, the region aspires to create more businesses of scale, as well as exploiting key industry sectors (eg science, technology, and media) where these realities can be combated through internet-based marketing and e-commerce.

- **Pay.** There have been some improvements over the past 25 years, but the region is below national and EU pay averages.
- **Prospects.** The people of the region must believe in the area's prospects for success.

Scottish qualifications – how can they help?

Qualifications can help in many ways, as part of a wider solution. These include:

- helping members of the workforce to feel greater confidence in the future
- making sure people have sufficient, up-to-date skills in areas that are important to the region's economy
- helping to attract incomers and to retain the existing population – by having the infrastructure to support career development, and making the region a pleasant and attractive place to study and work in
- attracting investment by fostering public confidence in workers' competence

What we've done already:

Partnerships

SQA has formed a strategic alliance with the University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute. A Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations is due to be signed in the second half of 2006.

We're also exploring closer and more focused links with Highland and Islands Enterprise, and with the education departments of the region's local authorities, all of which have distinct needs.



What we've done already:

Qualifications



Much of the work to be done can be achieved through harnessing existing qualifications. Examples include:

- **Skills for Work:** If more young people take Skills for Work Courses in areas that are relevant to the Highlands and Islands' economic priorities – through partnerships – this will help them to see the opportunities for education, training and employment that are available in the local area. For example we are developing Skills for Work Courses in Hospitality, which will support the tourism industry.
- **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) qualifications:** Ensuring that we work with the Highlands and Islands to develop Units for migrant workers, and providing ESOL Courses in schools, should help to encourage incoming talent to stay in the area.

- **Piloting of Citizenship materials** with the Highlands and Islands in partnership with Workers' Educational Association (WEA) Inverness.
- **Supporting the recognition of migrant workers' qualifications** – we will be starting this initiative off with Polish qualifications, working with Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

We're also keen to investigate the possibility of developing new qualifications in areas that are of particular importance to the Highlands and Islands. Areas we can focus on include:

- **Creative Industries:** This is one of the strengths of the region – and recognised nationally and internationally.

- **Science and Technology** (including sustainable energy and waste recycling): There is plenty of scope to expand on the already thriving technology sector in the Highlands and Islands – a workforce that is not just competent, but seen to be competent, can only help.
- **Health Care:** SQA is currently developing a Skills for Work Course in Health Care at Higher – further Courses could be developed at Intermediate levels including Courses related to medical and laboratory technicians. It might also be possible to develop a qualification to prepare people to work in professions linked to health care.

- **Construction:** This is a priority – the workforce needs to grow to deal with big building projects, including new public and private partnerships for school builds. SQA, local authorities and Careers Scotland will work together to ensure appropriate qualification progression pathways are in place to develop a pool of labour.
- **Traditional Culture and Music:** There is potential to develop specific qualifications which promote the cultural skills and traditions of the Highlands and Islands, eg through bespoke qualifications linked to music, dance and language.

More information

If you'd like to know more about SQA's strategy for the Highlands and Islands, please contact Jacqui Murray:

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