

SPIRIT LEVEL

A 'Not So Traditional' Industry

Every year thousands of tourists visit Scotland and take a tour of at least one Scotch whisky distillery. Other UK destinations also offer a range of distillery tours or product experiences for drinks enthusiasts from all over the world. Whether taking a site tour or a 'virtual tour' on a website, there is always a part which allows producers to explain exactly how the drink is made. Customers marvel at the scale of the processes; the subtle craft of producing such consistent quality and wonder at the 'secret' methods and ingredients which deliver the unique flavour of any particular drink.

Whether a drinks product has a quaint and traditional image or a contemporary one, the modern spirits industry is a dynamic one producing innovative new products and employing creative marketing to attract new customers and emerging markets.

With a history stretching back over 500 years, Scotch whisky is the original sustainable industry - economically, socially and environmentally. Scotch can only be made in Scotland, a competitive edge which means international sales success, revenue and employment. The Gin and Vodka industry is now one of the UK's fastest growing export industries of recent years. Gin has long been a high quality product associated with the UK; now over 70% of UK produced gin is exported to over 200 countries around the globe.

While tradition and heritage are cherished, distillers are successful modern businesses, innovating, investing in technology, and developing skilled workforces.

An Award for the Whole Spirits Industry

Spirits industry employers wanted a customised qualification which would not only set a new standard for the industry, but be flexible enough for individual companies to adapt the awards to suit their unique methods and processes.

"We wanted a qualification which would represent a better fit to our processes and in a language which is understandable and relevant to our industry." Bill Crilly (Edrington Group)

Representatives from spirits and spirit based drink producers from all over the UK joined together to form The Distilling Industry Working Group (DISWG).

"The Industry was clear about what it wanted to achieve and this was defined at the start, i.e. project objectives, scope, timescale, budget, and project roles and responsibilities."

"It was clear that the Industry didn't have the resources, expertise or time internally to facilitate the review process. This meant choosing a consultant to do this for us. We treated this like a recruitment process and a recruitment team was set up to make up a 'specification' for the role"

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and help us make an objective selection. I believe that choosing the right facilitator was key to the success of the project.” (Chairman DISWG)

Therefore with the help of a specialist consultant they set about producing a customised award which would meet the needs of operatives engaged in every aspect of the industry. This meant that the awards would need to be applicable to the production of a range of drinks (malt and grain whisky, gin, vodka, blended whisky and ready-to-drink beverages) AND to a range of jobs such as distilling, malting, warehousing, bottling, packaging and more. The standard set by the new qualification would need to be high enough to challenge employers and employees to achieve the award, but not so high that smaller, rising organisations would be excluded.

Getting the Industry to Design the Award

With the help of facilitators, the employers initially discussed what they wanted to achieve from a customised award for their workforce. They proposed that a customised award would:

- increase employee's skills and qualifications
- demonstrate competence in the work place
- motivate those taking the qualifications
- catalyse a review and update work instructions and procedures
- improve standards and consistency between departments and between sites
- improve training by giving a goal to achieve
- provide a standard recognised qualification for all staff
- establish a base line of process and product knowledge across all the staff

Employers were adamant that to achieve this, the customised awards would need to be:

- immediately relevant to spirits industry processes
- concise and simple in layout
- instantly recognisable & easy to apply to a site

The Process

The first step was to send round a questionnaire to a large proportion of employers asking them to describe what they wanted from an award. The consultant also asked the opinion of employer's who had previously provided qualifications for their workforce and asked them what they believed they had achieved. They were also keen to consult with those who had previously rejected the idea; keen to know what had put them off and why. The response to the questionnaire was excellent and as a direct result representatives from all sectors of the industry then attended a series of one day workshops.

“One of the factors that made the project such a success was the importance placed on getting as many stakeholders involved in the process as possible - from front line operators, line managers, specialists, assessors, verifiers and of course SQA” Glyn Cave (North British Distillery)

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A series of units eventually emerged and these were circulated around interested parties, edited and re-edited until there was a draft qualification that everyone was happy with.

“Some of the most valuable contributions we had came from people who actually worked at the sharp end of the industry, they knew their work be it bottling line or warehouse, and they knew about best practice.” Jane Spurgeon(Facilitator)

Other useful contributions came from those who had already tried using qualifications in the workplace.

“My companies views were well received and due to our experience in other qualifications our opinion was often sought out” Alexander Tweedie (Edrington Group)

The SIVQ

The customised award developed was called the SIVQ or Spirits Industry Vocational Qualification. The qualification represents a choice of 44 separate units, each one describing a succinct activity relevant to the industry. The working group and the employers consulted wanted to have a pick-’n-mix approach to the award, which meant that they could ‘custom build’ an award to suit their needs. There are 2 compulsory units which describe essential skills in health & safety and working with other people, 12 general units which represent transferable skills such as quality, security, materials movements and finally 30 process units which describe every spirits industry related process including distilling, bottling, effluent treatment, warehousing and many more. Candidates will be able to achieve an SIVQ certificate by completing 8 units; including the 2 compulsory units and at least 1 process unit.

Finding a Level

Once the units were completed, the next stage was to conduct an exercise which compared the new spirits industry units with other qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

“The Scotch Whisky Association feels confident that, by being positioned on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the SIVQ will be respected as an industry standard with a national status. Employers will be able to recognise exactly what holders of the qualification have achieved and candidates will have a qualification with real weight and value” (Alison Galbraith SWA)

SQA provided guidance for this process which concentrated on the breadth and complexity of each unit, instead of just looking at the number of training hours. Units were levelled at either level 4, 5 or 6 with the result that overall the qualification was levelled at SCQF level 5, which is comparable to the level of an SVQ level 2.

Going Forward

.....and what did the industry think of the new qualification. ?:

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“We feel the new SIVQ better meets the needs of our organisation compared to other more generic qualifications and we are currently planning a pilot with some of our employees.” (Morag Mathieson, The Glenmorangie Company)

‘A very workable and industry relevant qualification, which enables Companies to robustly assess the competence of their workforce’

‘This qualification will give us credibility with HSE and SEPA in employing competent people’

‘It will give us something to help introduce changes and up-skill our staff.’

‘Now we can recognise the important jobs that everyone in our company does.’