



# **More Choices, More Chances Strategy Paper**

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# Executive summary

This strategy paper is designed to support SQA's approach and response to the changing landscape within the More Choices, More Chances agenda.

It highlights opportunities for developing and implementing a targeted approach that would support the use of both new and existing qualifications aimed at increasing choices and opportunities for the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner.

Those consulted as part of the external engagement exercise responded positively to the role that SQA has adopted within More Choices, More Chances and expressed a willingness to support activities and on-going dialogue aimed at broadening choice, access and opportunity. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of partnership working and continued dialogue with other agencies, organisations and bodies across all sectors, ie public, private and voluntary.

The More Choices, More Chances agenda has a range of stakeholders in various sectors — eg employment, training, education, economic development, and social inclusion — with no one sector having sole ownership or responsibility. SQA's strategy for More Choices, More Chances makes explicit the role that a national awarding body can have in meeting the needs of the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner while retaining a focus on assessment and the recognition of learning and achievement.

SQA has a vital role to play to ensure there is equality of opportunity when recognising skills, knowledge, abilities and experience through qualifications and assessment. It is critical that SQA qualifications offer increased choice and opportunity that support progress to education, employment and training.

The key areas covered by the strategy are:

- ◆ Communication and engagement
- ◆ Areas for immediate action
- ◆ Longer-term issues

There are a number of principal factors that SQA needs to consider in terms of future-proofing, business development, product reach, and corporate and social responsibility. Including that:

- ◆ SQA can respond quickly to new funding streams targeted at supporting young people
- ◆ SQA is aware of and recognises the reasons why alternative awarding bodies are increasingly being used to support vulnerable and hard-to-reach learners
- ◆ SQA is able to respond quickly and efficiently to emerging learner and provider needs
- ◆ SQA maintains the ability to engage with, support and work in partnership with, various sectors and communities
- ◆ SQA ensures the development of qualifications is not based solely on the amount of uptake and source of income generation

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Recommendations include:

- ◆ Increase external engagement and partnership work
- ◆ Encourage innovative use of existing qualifications
- ◆ Improve support for existing qualifications
- ◆ Introduce smaller Units with more opportunity for activity-based learning
- ◆ Introduce smaller, flexible Group Awards that facilitate progression and opportunity
- ◆ Improve choice in certificated vocational activities
- ◆ Develop more flexible, and less intrusive, assessment
- ◆ Embrace technology as a support to learning and engagement with vulnerable and hard-to-reach learners

SQA's More Choices More Chances strategy cannot be considered in isolation as there are collective efforts at both local and national level aimed at ensuring that all children and young people are offered greater choice and opportunity. A priority is to ensure that we do not replicate existing activities, including consultation exercises.

## **Introduction**

If SQA can successfully offer more choice in qualifications, then providers will be able to offer more chances to learners. Through the innovative use of existing qualifications, the development of new qualifications, increased partnership working and greater organisational flexibility, this 'More Choices, More Chances' strategy proposes that SQA can offer greater choices in meeting the needs of children and young people identified in the More Choices, More Chances agenda, both in terms of attainment and achievement.

SQA's More Choices, More Chances strategy is designed to increase choice and opportunity and to further support learning through existing qualifications that can provide clear progression routes. The paper takes account of various research reports, engagement exercises and government policies. It is intended to complement the work of SQA partners and stakeholders, and outlines areas where SQA can extend the reach of existing qualifications, develop new qualifications to meet the emerging needs of both learners and providers, and engage in partnership working.

*More Choices, More Chances; A strategy to reduce the proportion of young people in Scotland not in education, employment or training* was launched by the Scottish Executive in June 2006 and endorsed by the Scottish Government following the May 2007 election. Increasing the number of school leavers with positive and sustainable destinations remains a top-level indicator of success under the present strategic objectives of the Scottish Government, as does an increased focus on early intervention for vulnerable children and young people. The importance of destination indicators were outlined in a recent Scottish Government paper exploring More Choices, More Chances and Outcome Agreements — there will now be a 'requirement to monitor the direction of travel in order to increase the proportion of school leavers (from Scotland's publicly-funded sector) in positive and sustained destinations'.

It is widely recognised that too many young people in Scotland do not have appropriate opportunities or choices to actively participate in education, employment or training. Of the 30 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Scotland has the highest percentage of young people aged 16–19, who are disengaged from education, employment or training. The most recent figures estimate this to be 32,000 — of which 18,000 are deemed to be in need of support before they are able to access and sustain opportunities in the labour market. This prevents many young people from playing an active role in society and the economy — and has significant cost implications for the government and taxpayer.

Government policies that may influence longer-term strategy include:

- ◆ More Choices, More Chances
- ◆ Skills for Scotland: A Lifelong Skills Strategy
- ◆ Missing Out
- ◆ Getting it Right for Every Child
- ◆ Determined to Succeed and Young People at Risk of Becoming NEET
- ◆ Education (Additional Support for Learning) Act

## **Feedback from stakeholders**

Two reports were commissioned in 2007 to help SQA decide on an approach to current and future qualifications provision for More Choices, More Chances:

- ◆ Pre-NEET Group Report, March 2007
- ◆ Review of the Implications of the Scottish Executive's 'NEET' Strategy for SQA, June 2007

### **Pre-NEET Group Report, March 2007**

This initial report on the pre-NEET group was a research exercise to investigate what programmes were available to support pupils regarded as being at risk of NEET (More Choices, More Chances) post-16, and what programmes were available that offered young people recognition of achievement and attainment. Information was sourced in a number of ways including web-based activity. To ensure a wide geographical coverage, four of the education authorities in the seven 'More Choices, More Chances hotspots' were contacted, as were a number of other educational authorities. The report also covered engagement with organisations, agencies and training providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

Those consulted suggested that a lack of certification was a disincentive for young people on supported learning and education programmes and that it was important that all programmes/courses had status and value. However, flexibility was critical within the process of engaging and assessing the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner. The feedback further suggested that certification should be broken down into 'small chunks' or 'bite-sized' Units so that there can be 'quick wins' and recognition of achievement that can support progress. The report made further reference to the importance of recognising wider achievement, with a number of education authorities seeking innovative ways to certificate achievement outwith the school environment. It was common for education authorities to refer to the role of sport, active citizenship and arts and culture in developing the softer skills often needed by this group, eg motivation and self-esteem. (The full report is available on request.)

### **Initial Review of Implications of the Scottish Executive's 'NEET' Strategy for SQA Qualifications' Structure, Design, Assessment, Certification**

The report aimed to identify the implications of More Choices, More Chances for SQA qualifications and assessment in the context of possible changes arising from: A Curriculum for Excellence; Assessment is for Learning; and recognition of wider achievement. The findings showed common characteristics in effective programmes and initiatives that successfully meet the needs of vulnerable young people — including one-to-one support, developing trust, purpose and relevance of activities, flexible delivery, appropriate language, and an understanding of what may be influencing the person at a particular stage in their life. There is already a wide range of existing innovative practice from which lessons can be learned. However, it also suggested 'that there is still a long way to go in raising

attainment levels of the lowest performing pupils and partners should work together to address these needs'. It was suggested SQA should explore:

- ◆ qualifications that recognise achievements outwith the school setting
- ◆ greater choice of vocational/pre-employment programmes
- ◆ flexible assessment
- ◆ increased partnership working and the accreditation of existing interventions that support learner needs

(The full report is available on request.)

## **Feedback gathered**

SQA staff subsequently took part in an engagement exercise to further assist with understanding where SQA could support learners, to discover any gaps in the current portfolio of qualifications, and to identify opportunities to extend the reach of existing qualifications (see Appendix 1). This involved visiting a number of SQA approved centres and other agencies and organisations whose remit includes supporting vulnerable young people and hard-to-reach learners.

Targeted engagement within the seven More Choices, More Chances hotspots (Glasgow, West Dunbartonshire, Inverclyde, Dundee, Clackmannanshire, East Ayrshire and North Ayrshire) enabled feedback from a wide range of sources including schools, colleges, voluntary sector organisations, Careers Scotland, and Jobcentre Plus. There were also a number of visits to providers and organisations outwith the hotspots including South Ayrshire, Renfrewshire, and Highlands and Islands.

Initially, some of those contacted were uncertain regarding what role SQA could play within the More Choices, More Chances agenda. However, there was extensive support for the exercise and a desire for continued dialogue. There was general support for SQA and its framework of qualifications and a willingness to use SQA as the awarding body in many alternative curriculum areas. It was recognised that the SQA brand was highly regarded within many sectors, most notably education and employment. However, there were a number of areas that were criticised and raised as factors which could lead to other awarding bodies being considered, including:

- ◆ lack of flexibility as an organisation
- ◆ too much administration
- ◆ too much formal assessment in qualifications
- ◆ existing qualifications that did not fully recognise the achievements or experiences of young people outside mainstream programmes in school
- ◆ timescales involved in developing new qualifications

However, feedback also suggested that there are areas of opportunity for SQA to consider, including:

- ◆ offering small 'bite-size' qualifications
- ◆ providing and catering for vocational experiences appropriate for this group

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- ◆ recognising wider achievement
- ◆ promoting the use of Core Skills
- ◆ developing further partnership working
- ◆ supporting the effective use of SQA qualifications through increased contact, eg effective practice forums and workshops, provider networks

It was proposed that SQA should consider a number of areas for qualifications development (see Appendix 1). Some of these exist within the present catalogue and may only require tailoring to meet the specific requirements suggested. The areas included:

- ◆ Leadership
- ◆ Mentoring
- ◆ Auto/Mechanics
- ◆ Employability/Pre-vocational skills
- ◆ Vocational tasters
- ◆ Skills for Work at a different level

## **Our vision**

As the national awarding body and a key stakeholder within the More Choices, More Chances agenda, SQA has a social responsibility to maximise our support to the vulnerable learner by providing greater flexibility, choice and opportunity within the qualifications system. This can be achieved by maximising the potential of the existing system which already offers support to centres; and by ensuring that we are innovative, pro-active and flexible in our response to the developing learning landscape and the changing economic, social and political climate. We will need to be able to positively, and appropriately, respond to challenges presented by More Choices, More Chances, and to demonstrate through flexible qualifications provision that we can broaden choice and opportunity for the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner.

As a public body, SQA has a responsibility to ensure that we support all learners to try to achieve their potential and to offer appropriate routes to progress. We need to ensure that our qualifications support the vulnerable, disaffected and hard-to-reach learner. This might involve more flexible, contextualised assessment, greater recognition of achievement, or more appropriate qualifications which support alternative learning programmes. We have a further responsibility alongside partner agencies to help address issues such as inequality, socio-economic disadvantage, low educational attainment, unemployment and poverty.

In order to meet the needs of the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner, SQA needs to move towards a situation where:

- ◆ our qualifications are sufficiently flexible to support all children and young people identified as needing More Choices, More Chances
- ◆ through increased choice of qualifications, we can help vulnerable young people to be successful in terms of attainment and achievement in the school, college, workplace, social and community environment
- ◆ our assessment process is flexible enough to recognise various learning needs and styles, and is designed to aid learning
- ◆ our qualifications will support vulnerable and hard-to-reach young people to make positive progression during, and on leaving, school
- ◆ our qualifications support vulnerable young people to progress into further education, employment and training, and where they complement strategies designed to tackle poverty, inequality and social exclusion

## **Communication and engagement**

The clear and consistent message that underpins More Choices, More Chances is the need to work in partnership. This offers an opportunity to work in partnership with a number of agencies, organisations and providers in the public, private and voluntary sector in order to develop complementary and supporting strategies while pooling resources, lessening duplication and avoiding strategic cluttering.

The Scottish Government (initially) highlighted seven More Choices, More Chances hotspots where additional support, including NEET funding, has been targeted. In order to drive forward SQA's More Choices, More Chances strategy we need to establish a dedicated communication and information mechanism, possibly through a key partners' group. Participation would come from a range of external agencies, organisations and bodies including those in More Choices, More Chances hotspot areas. This would:

- ◆ enable information sharing
- ◆ ensure less duplication of activities, eg research, consultation
- ◆ provide greater opportunity for partnership working and resource pooling
- ◆ explore opportunities to support new and existing initiatives, programmes and qualifications
- ◆ enhance SQA's position as a key partner

In the context of More Choices, More Chances, SQA needs to formally engage with schools, colleges and community learning centres. However, there are a number of additional key organisations, agencies or specific sectors including:

### **Private training providers**

They have an increasing role to support young people in learning and employability both independently and in partnerships with schools and colleges.

### **Voluntary sector**

An increasing number of voluntary sector organisations are involved in the long-term learning and employment support of young people using alternative curriculum programmes. There are a number of local initiatives that demonstrate the effective delivery of both SQA and non-SQA qualifications, and which offer innovative ways to engage or re-engage young people.

### **Colleges**

The Scottish Funding Council announcement in 2007 — to allocate £3 million per annum till 2012 to the 15 colleges in the hotspot areas — opens up opportunities for SQA to be further involved in planning and delivery, and for colleges and SQA to dovetail their respective strategies.

### **Scottish Further Education Unit (SFEU)**

At present SQA is represented on the SFEU More Choices, More Chances Steering Group. SFEU is undertaking research into how they can contribute to the work within the hotspot colleges to support More Choices, More Chances.

## **Employers**

There is a need to engage more with employers and to ensure that the qualifications SQA offers are not only increasing choice and opportunity, but are meeting the needs of employers. It is critical that employers are made aware of any new qualifications, their employability value, and where they sit on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), if applicable.

## **More Choices, More Chances hotspots**

Continued dialogue has to take place with appropriate representatives within the hotspot areas to ensure that awareness of SQA qualifications is being raised, the needs of the vulnerable learner are being met within targeted areas, and opportunities for new qualifications are identified.

## **Community Planning Partnerships/local authorities**

Involvement and partnership at a local level is critical, particularly with the recent Concordat and Single Outcome Agreements.

A further challenge to SQA is how to ensure that vulnerable and hard-to-reach young people are actively involved in the engagement process. We need to fully acknowledge that their needs, aspirations and opinions are critical to supporting an effective and sustainable strategy. The importance of learner participation is increased when supporting disengaged young people as they have often been omitted from decision-making processes and have never had a platform to voice views or concerns.

In order to increase the level of effective communication and engagement, it is recommended that SQA:

- ◆ establishes a More Choices, More Chances Key Partners' Group at a strategic level
- ◆ establishes communication and engagement at a local level with community planning partnerships and local authorities
- ◆ continues formal and informal engagement with the voluntary sector, employers and training providers
- ◆ continues to engage with the identified More Choices, More Chances hotspots
- ◆ establishes a learner forum or focus group network that will enable ongoing feedback

## **Areas for immediate action**

### **Support for existing qualifications**

An increasing number of providers offer awards and bespoke activity and learning programmes in new and emerging areas, some of which are already covered by SQA's provision. During our engagement exercise it became evident that there was a perception by many of those contacted that SQA is unwilling or reluctant to develop new qualifications, particularly for activities that take place in non-traditional settings. There were also concerns regarding the timescale and the process involved in certification as highlighted earlier, but also that there would be too many formal assessment requirements and that these would detract from the flexibility and contextualised learning of an existing programme: often the key factors in successfully engaging a young person. Concerns were also raised about the timescales involved in exploring certification of existing programmes and initiatives particularly within the voluntary sector.

However, feedback from a number of voluntary sector organisations did suggest interest in exploring whether SQA could certificate or recognise the activities that they were currently undertaking with vulnerable young people. Those consulted stressed that there is great value and currency associated with SQA and that an SQA qualification would offer a vulnerable young person greater opportunities and assist their progress.

A number of existing SQA centres, as well as other non-approved organisations and agencies, seemed to be unaware of the extensiveness of the existing SQA portfolio of qualifications and of the flexibility that already exists regarding delivery, ie notional hours. A lack of time and resources within organisations was often cited as a reason for this. There are opportunities to increase the uptake of existing qualifications through further More Choices, More Chances engagement activities with organisations, agencies and providers currently not SQA approved. When discussing some of the non-certificated activities taking place and the outcomes achieved, it emerged that the use of existing SQA qualifications could be further explored.

The effective and innovative use of the existing SQA portfolio of qualifications can help support the More Choices, More Chances strategy and as such should continue to be actively promoted. However, we have also initiated a project to explore how current qualifications can complement and further recognise current learner activities in order to counter the criticism that SQA qualifications don't fully recognise wider achievement, are too rigid in their assessment requirements, and don't offer sufficient choice to the vulnerable learner. As well as highlighting possible gaps in the current portfolio of qualifications, it is anticipated that the project will indicate the need for a degree of adaptation of existing qualifications (Units) as opposed to the development of new qualifications.

In order to further support existing qualifications it is recommended that SQA:

- ◆ continues to support qualifications in non-traditional and emerging markets within the context of More Choices, More Chances
- ◆ continues to support centres in their innovative and effective use and delivery of qualifications — including establishing effective practice networks and provider information networks
- ◆ explores where qualifications may need to be reviewed and/or revised in order to meet the needs of the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner and to support the More Choices, More Chances agenda
- ◆ ensures support materials are easy to access and navigate by the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner — and the provider

## **Possible new qualifications**

SQA needs to have a system that can adapt quickly to learner and employer needs. It is also recognised that other awarding bodies can respond to providers' needs over short timeframes.

*The Initial Review of Implications of the Scottish Executive's 'NEET' Strategy for SQA Qualifications' Structure, Design, Assessment, Certification* report recognised that 'although there may not be a need for large-scale development of new qualifications, there may be a need to consider the packaging/re-packaging of existing Units, qualifications, and modules to provide 'bespoke' cluster awards in order to meet individual needs'. The literature review of a range of national strategies relating to inclusive practice in the provision of education, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) thematic reports and independent evaluations of projects and programmes that reflect good practice, suggested that more vocational preparation/pre-employment programmes (eg Skills for Work and/or National Progression Awards) need to be developed in order to provide progression pathways to suit individual needs and for delivery in different settings, eg school/college/community/work experience.

In discussion with a number of organisations as part of the initial engagement exercise, it was suggested that offering small qualifications (small Unit sizes) or small Group Awards (awards comprising smaller Units or a smaller number of Units) would provide greater choice and opportunity for the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner — on the condition that the smaller Units would not result in a lessening of their credibility or worth. Some of the feedback focused on the fact that vulnerable young people who are being supported often find it difficult to sustain qualifications that are even 40 hours in length, or may only achieve or complete part of a qualification. Discussions revealed that vulnerable young people are often supported for a considerable length of time by numerous agencies and organisations, yet when they move on from that support, they are left with very few certificated experiences that can assist their progress into further learning, employment or training opportunities. This often results in the young person having very little to show for their effort and little evidence of what they have learned or achieved.

Areas for consideration are:

### **Small Units**

It is suggested that small Units (less than 40 hours) offer greater opportunity and choice for the vulnerable learner and a more accessible progress route to further participation. What is proposed is to further explore opportunities to develop small Units, some of which may be based on existing qualifications that have been adapted to suit the needs of the vulnerable or hard-to-reach learner.

Small Units are important if our aim is to support the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner, who for various reasons cannot participate in many of the existing Units. Increasing the number of small Units available will provide the opportunity to experience a wider range of activities within an achievable timescale and at an appropriate level. Small Units will also provide the vulnerable learner with the opportunity to build up a portfolio of experiences, enabling better informed choices and a clearer progression route to further learning, training or employment.

Many vulnerable and disengaged young people never have (or have very few) opportunities to experience, recognise or celebrate their achievements; small Units will offer an opportunity and platform for all three to take place.

### **Small Group Awards**

Offering small Group Awards would provide greater choice and opportunity for vulnerable learners who are unable to consider existing qualifications. In discussion with organisations, it was evident that there was an interest in small Group Awards in qualification areas such as mechanics, leadership, community involvement and volunteering, as well as generic vocational and employability skills. A small Group Award would enable the person to group together smaller Units in order to gain a qualification that may not have been achieved otherwise. Providing a vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner with an opportunity to gain a qualification based on their activities and achievement supports their self-esteem, confidence and motivation.

It is anticipated that any small Group Award developed would not solely be designed to support the vulnerable or hard-to-reach learner, but would be a suitable option for all young people.

### **Vocational Units**

Feedback from the engagement exercise suggests that practical vocational experiences prove to be highly successful at engaging and re-engaging young people who are regarded as vulnerable and hard to reach. They offer a platform for gaining employability skills through meaningful contextualised learning. Reasons given for the success are varied, but include the fact that there is less formal written assessment and the person can learn by doing tasks they have an active interest in.

Discussions with organisations and agencies suggested that small vocational Units, including vocational 'taster' Units, could be built up into a qualification

that would act as a positive stepping stone to further employment opportunities and other qualifications. It was further suggested that there is a need to recognise the importance of employability skills in the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner who may have little knowledge or understanding of the world of work or the needs of an employer. Equally important was the experience, knowledge and awareness of basic employability skills such as getting to work on time, attitude to employment, and how work can impact on your lifestyle. Vocational Units (including taster Units) will enable a young person, who may not be able to commit longer-term for a number of reasons, to experience the world of work and what is required to progress into and sustain employment. It will provide an opportunity to experience a number of workplace environments, enabling an informed choice as to what career path may be of interest or best suited. It is as much about finding out why you do not want to pursue the activity as to why you do.

A number of providers suggested that SQA should consider developing a certificated pre-vocational programme that would focus on basic employability skills. Presently, training and learning providers use a variety of awarding bodies to recognise these activities which combine areas of personal development, practical skills and employability.

The success of Skills for Work was referred to in the engagement exercise, as was the need for SQA to recognise and certificate more vocational activities in a wider variety of settings, eg community based or the voluntary sector. Feedback suggested that there was an opportunity to offer Skills for Work at a level that would be more engaging and achievable for the vulnerable or hard-to-reach learner. At present only one Skills for Work Course 'Practical Experiences: Construction and Engineering' has been developed at Access 3. A scoping exercise is currently underway to determine opportunities for offering additional Skills for Work Courses at Access 3.

It is recommended that SQA further establishes the need for:

- ◆ small Units
- ◆ small Group Awards
- ◆ vocational taster Units
- ◆ employability Units
- ◆ further Skills for Work Courses at Access 3

### **Assessment**

Evidence from the engagement exercise and the report on the pre-NEET group suggested that vulnerable young people and hard-to-reach learners do want some form of certification to recognise their achievement and effort. It was further suggested that many aspects of the present assessment process need to be more flexible in order to aid and support vulnerable learners and to take greater account of individual needs.

The voluntary sector supports an increasing number of young people and there exists a common view amongst voluntary sector providers that they work effectively at engaging, supporting and enriching a young person's learning

experience, very often without the need for layers of assessment. Assessment does exist, but in a less explicit and intrusive form, embracing contextual and experiential learning with a clear vision and aim for the learner, and rarely with a traditional written assessment. As one organisation highlighted, it is important to be flexible to the learning style and needs of the individual:

‘when delivering activities for other awarding bodies it [assessment] is carried out in “stealth mode” via contextual activities and with the person building up a portfolio of evidence that is blended into the award criteria — do you realise what you have already achieved!’

This is not designed to detract from the fact that it is important for the learner to know what they are achieving and the process they have used to go about it. It is also not designed to eliminate assessment but to see assessment as complementary to the learning experience.

Currently, various forms of learning and assessment tools such as online assessment, video, blogs and text are used in innovative ways to support and sustain vulnerable, disengaged young people in learning. SQA should consider further use of these in a wider range of settings to support qualifications.

It is recommended that SQA:

- ◆ engages with and (where possible) supports agencies, organisations and learning providers to use and develop innovative and flexible assessment arrangements that assist the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner
- ◆ identifies how best to increase choice and opportunity through the current portfolio of qualifications by introducing more flexible, less prescriptive assessment arrangements

# Longer-term issues

## Harnessing technology

It is evident that e-portfolios, e-assessment and ICT are becoming a fundamental and integral part of engagement, learning and modern teaching. It is also important to ensure that we recognise and include the hardest to reach and vulnerable learner in the advancements of the digital age.

Although the success of new technologies in re-engaging young people does depend to some degree on offering accessible, creative and engaging software packages, (if appropriate) new technologies can offer a safe, motivating environment for the collecting, reviewing, reflecting and sharing of information relating to learning and progression.

Our initial engagement exercise with a number of voluntary sector organisations offered many examples of how ICT and technology had been used to successfully engage with young people, eg gaming formats, online activities. These formats are often used to engage with the hard-to-reach learner and to assist with their sustained participation in activities, as well as complementing a more flexible assessment process.

Opportunities exist to develop tools that can re-engage vulnerable young people in learning and which support the learning provider. If small Units or Group Awards are to be developed, there is an opportunity to ensure, if appropriate, that they can be delivered and assessed via innovative ICT techniques, eg animation, interactive gaming, online activities, video. Any new technology used would need to be both accessible and sustainable for the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner and not act as a further barrier to learning. There would also be a requirement to recognise, and source, future funding streams and resources.

There are many opportunities to further embrace technology and explore the innovative use of ICT in order to extend the reach and accessibility of SQA qualifications to the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner. In the context of this More Choices, More Chances strategy it is proposed that the development of a 'vending machine' portal is explored. Such an online facility would be used to support access to, and the use of, both existing and new qualifications. It would be designed to be an accessible and interactive way of showing what is available and what is involved in the learning process, as well as what outcomes are expected. It is also anticipated that the vending machine portal would be available via the SQA website with options to pick, choose or surf for small Units or Group Awards in your own time or with your peers.

To ensure that SQA embraces new technological advances to assist learners, it is recommended that SQA:

- ◆ investigates the positive use of new, innovative and accessible advances in technology as an aid to engagement, participation, learning and progression for the vulnerable learner
- ◆ ensures that any use of technology or ICT is accessible and will not act as a barrier to learning, eg use of language, cost
- ◆ explores external funding streams to assist with supporting and developing new technology as a means to re-engage the vulnerable learner and support the use of SQA qualifications
- ◆ further explores the use of the proposed 'vending machine' portal

## **Wider achievement**

Recognition of wider achievement is a central theme to the Scottish Government's More Choices, More Chances policy and, within the context of Skills for Scotland, the Scottish Government aims to 'work with colleges, universities, community learning and development providers, employers, SQA and other relevant awarding bodies, and the SCQF Partnership to explore means of promoting and recognising achievements of young people additional to qualifications'. This was further evidenced in the *Initial Review of Implications of the Scottish Executive's 'NEET' Strategy for SQA Qualifications' Structure, Design, Assessment, Certification* report when it suggested that: 'the way that achievement and attainment are reported may need to be different, eg based on pupil profiling, self assessment, evidence of achievement in informal and extra-curricular settings such as in the community, sports, arts, etc'.

SQA, particularly in the context of More Choices, More Chances, should recognise the importance of wider achievements to the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner, and the increasing number of programmes and initiatives offered by organisations, agencies and providers aimed at supporting young people in these areas. Those consulted in the engagement exercise suggested that SQA should further explore how to recognise wider achievement either through existing qualifications or by developing new qualifications.

In order to explore and support ways of recognising wider achievement it is recommended that SQA:

- ◆ continues to engage with those organisations, agencies and providers offering programmes and initiatives that are supporting vulnerable young people in the areas of wider achievement
- ◆ explores ways of assisting the certification of existing programmes and initiatives through the use of existing and new qualifications

## **Support**

SQA's increased role in More Choices, More Chances and supporting the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner will require greater dialogue and partnership working with a range of organisations, agencies and providers in the public, private and voluntary sector — including social work, youth justice, community-based initiatives, youth agencies, and regeneration agencies. It is also anticipated that a number of these providers will not be familiar with SQA and will have limited awareness of the processes involved in becoming an SQA centre and offering SQA qualifications. Consequently, these providers will need support to enable them to be approved as SQA centres, to select appropriate qualifications, and to prepare adequately to offer them. As there is often little formal assessment expertise within these providers, additional support would also be required to assist in building their assessment capacity.

To ensure the successful and effective delivery of appropriate qualifications within the context of More Choices, More Chances, there will need to be a point of contact for advice, guidance and information for those supporting the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner. It is important that all schools, colleges, training providers, voluntary organisations and other agencies are confident about what qualifications are available, what support materials to use and what assessment tools are available. It is important that SQA has the capacity within the context of More Choices, More Chances to collect, collate and disseminate the appropriate information regarding policy, practice and emerging learner needs, and to ensure that SQA qualifications are meeting the needs of the vulnerable and hard-to-reach learner at a national and local level.

In order to further support existing as well as new centres within the context of More Choices, More Chances, it is recommended that SQA:

- ◆ continues to develop dialogue with a range of organisations, agencies and providers in the public, private and voluntary sector
- ◆ supports future funding for a More Choices, More Chances Development Manager in order to assist with the development of qualifications, explore effective and innovative ways of delivering qualifications, and support a range of organisations and agencies in emerging qualification areas

# Appendix 1

## Feedback from engagement exercise

The information contained in the table below is a summary of feedback from the initial engagement exercise. It is designed to reflect the content of the discussions that took place and to highlight areas of specific reference for the SQA More Choices, More Chances (MCMC) strategy.

This engagement exercise included visits to a wide range of organisations, agencies and providers, including those within the original seven More Choices, More Chances hotspots. As well as seeking information and feedback, it was an opportunity to establish dialogue and to explore future developments.

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b> | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Auchenharvie School<br>(Pupil Support)    | North Ayrshire               | <p>The voluntary sector increasingly has role in supporting vulnerable young people via school referral and with those young people not attending school.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Smaller Units or Group Awards</li> <li>◆ Opportunities for certificating alternative courses that cover areas such as softer skills, capacity building</li> <li>◆ Life skills courses</li> <li>◆ Financial management</li> </ul> |
| Careers Scotland                          | National                     | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Certificating early intervention strategies</li> <li>◆ Opportunities to work in partnership</li> <li>◆ Increased dialogue is beneficial</li> <li>◆ Accrediting the employability planning and development process</li> </ul>   |
| Childcare Works                           | Glasgow City                 | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Opportunities to recognise wider achievement and softer skills</li> <li>◆ Opportunities to offer more courses that assist young females into sustainable learning and employment</li> <li>◆ Smaller Units to support young people, including young mothers, who find it difficult to use longer Units</li> </ul>   |

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b> | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Clackmannanshire Council                  | Clackmannanshire             | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Softening of language and the assessment process</li> <li>◆ Greater focus on employability skills</li> <li>◆ It is critical to have partnerships with parents and employers</li> <li>◆ Recognise the vocational skills and experiences gained in part-time work</li> <li>◆ Offering vocational and pre-vocational courses (ie basics of how to get to work, timekeeping, sustaining a job) that are certificated and offer a progress route</li> <li>◆ A portfolio of achievements that can be used by the young person</li> <li>◆ Recognising the wider achievements</li> </ul>   |
| Dundee City Council<br>MCMC Hotspot       | Dundee                       | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Developing vocational activities including taster courses in health and care</li> <li>◆ Focusing on the importance of employability and learning and concentrating on earlier intervention</li> <li>◆ Building employability into the curriculum</li> <li>◆ Considering other awarding bodies to support their vocational activities</li> <li>◆ Opportunity to certificate vocational activities</li> <li>◆ Opportunity to explore the certification of peer mentoring</li> </ul>  |
| East Ayrshire Council                     | East Ayrshire                | <p>The East Ayrshire NEET conference suggested three main areas to consider when supporting vulnerable learners: attainment, achievement and accreditation.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Opportunity to explore leadership and mentoring qualifications</li> <li>◆ Opportunities to support vulnerable young people involved in charitable activities, community based work and outdoor activities</li> <li>◆ Willingness and desire among the schools to deliver alternative curriculum activities and to look at recognising areas of wider achievement as long as there are tangible outcomes</li> </ul> |

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b> | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Edinburgh City Council                    | Edinburgh City               | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Developing smaller Group Awards as a lead into further opportunities</li> <li>◆ Smaller Group Awards based around competencies</li> <li>◆ Need for greater flexibility in assessment in the school setting</li> <li>◆ Use smaller Group Awards in order to stitch together an employability programme for those farthest from learning</li> <li>◆ Consider accreditation and recognition from S1 to ensure that all achievements are captured</li> <li>◆ Core Skills as smaller separate blocks or Units</li> </ul>  |
| Fairbridge (Scotland)                     | National                     | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Experiences need to be easy to certificate but not necessarily easy to complete</li> <li>◆ If certificating activities, it is important to not change how services are delivered</li> <li>◆ Units or Group Awards need to be valued by the young person and external bodies such as employers</li> <li>◆ New qualifications should not be merely an opportunity for the person to fail</li> <li>◆ There is a concern that if we introduce SQA certification then it's a chance for the person to fail</li> <li>◆ At the moment there seems to be no visible pathway to progress if using SQA qualifications</li> <li>◆ It is important to celebrate any achievement or progress the person has made</li> <li>◆ Employability is critical but not explicit at start — it's about recognising the journey to employability</li> <li>◆ There is a concern that an organisation such as Fairbridge would not be able to meet the needs of the SQA as the awarding body. There is also a concern that it would result in greater bureaucracy</li> <li>◆ Participants like the fact that currently they can add things into their portfolio</li> <li>◆ Utilising other awarding bodies at present</li> <li>◆ It is important to involve employers</li> </ul> |

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b>       | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>   |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector (GCVS) | Greater Glasgow              | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Interested in an entry level Skills for Work programme</li> <li>◆ Smaller Units that person can add into a portfolio</li> <li>◆ Important to include the voluntary sector in consultations and developments</li> <li>◆ There could be greater awareness of what is available from the SQA</li> </ul>  |
| Glasgow West Regeneration Agency                | Glasgow (West)               | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Linking into the voluntary sector including GCVS and Scottish Council for Voluntary Sector</li> <li>◆ Involved with a wide network of learners both formal and informal</li> <li>◆ Recognising the importance of engaging and developing partnerships with the voluntary sector, particularly youth agencies</li> <li>◆ Engaging with the hardest to reach via ICT and digital centres, ie cyber zone models</li> </ul> |
| GOALS Project                                   | National                     | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Developing links with agencies outwith the school setting</li> <li>◆ Offering smaller Units would further support vulnerable learners</li> <li>◆ Greater support and recognition for volunteers</li> <li>◆ Must recognise the importance of informal learning</li> <li>◆ Must recognise that there are gender issues</li> <li>◆ Important to recognise prior learning</li> </ul>  |
| Highland Council                                | Highlands and Islands        | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Greater links with the FE and HE sector</li> <li>◆ Developing opportunities in Get Ready for Work Programmes</li> <li>◆ Developing a new programme focusing on behavioural and attitudinal skills</li> <li>◆ Certificating or supporting career planning</li> <li>◆ Certificating or supporting what we learn from part-time employment</li> </ul>  |

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b> | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>   |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| Includem                                  | National                     | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Need for more flexible assessment</li> <li>◆ Certification and support for employability programmes</li> <li>◆ Certification and support for softer skills</li> <li>◆ Certification of employability skills, eg time keeping</li> </ul>   |
| Inverclyde Community Planning Partnership | Inverclyde                   | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Need to ‘de-clutter’ as there are so many agencies and organisations offering a range of activities and interventions. If confusing for staff in the field then how can a young person not privy to all the available information navigate through the system?</li> <li>◆ Recognising the ‘distance travelled’ is crucial for engagement and positive progression</li> <li>◆ It would be of great benefit if training providers and employers had greater awareness of the SCQF and its relevance</li> <li>◆ Programmes for employability should be introduced at an earlier age with an accessible ‘menu’</li> <li>◆ Better partnership</li> </ul> |
| James Watt College                        | Inverclyde                   | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Smaller Units or Group Awards</li> <li>◆ Would like an increased role to be played by the SQA in MCMC</li> <li>◆ Opportunity to develop and pilot new Units</li> <li>◆ Develop smaller flexible Group Awards in Care and Health</li> <li>◆ More scope in what is offered in smaller Units</li> <li>◆ More opportunity in Skills for Work at different levels and in more vocational areas</li> </ul>  |

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b> | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>  |
|---|------------------------------|--|
| Kibble Education and Care Centre          | National (Renfrewshire)      | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Young person could be supported for up to a year and end up with nothing tangible despite being involved in many activities</li> <li>◆ Qualifications need to have currency with employers</li> <li>◆ Mechanics courses offered by SQA do not seem to cover all the areas offered via Kibble</li> <li>◆ Presently considering other awarding bodies</li> <li>◆ Qualifications in work ethics, punctuality, social skills, customer skills, initiative</li> <li>◆ Recognition of social and vocational skills</li> <li>◆ Recognise specific vocational activities</li> </ul> <p><b>Youthbuild:</b> Kibble is in negotiations with Youthbuild who want to develop social enterprise activities in Scotland focusing on house-building and social/affordable housing. This would focus on the learning context and process.</p> <p><b>Kibble Works:</b> potential for using existing or new Units for certificating activities and achievements in the Social Enterprise Works Programme.</p> |
| Kilmarnock College                        | Ayrshire                     | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ At present the college is considering using other awarding bodies for a number of reasons</li> <li>◆ The present SQA Construction descriptors are out-dated</li> <li>◆ Smaller Units are more suited</li> <li>◆ Leadership courses</li> <li>◆ Vocational tasters and courses for school leavers</li> </ul>   |
| North Ayrshire Council                    | North Ayrshire               | <p>The community animator scheme helps young people to stay on programmes such as Get Ready For Work.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Progression opportunities are needed once local initiatives and programmes are completed</li> <li>◆ Formality in certain SQA assessment</li> <li>◆ Certificate alternative experiences</li> <li>◆ Change to teaching approach</li> </ul>   |

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b> | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>   |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| Princes Trust                             | National                     | <p>What is offered is driven by providing the young person with a choice and delivered both formally and informally — not driven by curriculum and folios.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ There seems to be a certain rigidity within the present system</li> <li>◆ Interested in joint future activities</li> </ul>   |
| Renfrewshire Council                      | Renfrewshire                 | <p>Curriculum for Excellence should recognise more than one career path in a lifetime and that forms of achievement may vary.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Any new certificate should be valued by employers</li> </ul>  |
| Right Track                               | Greater Glasgow              | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ It is crucial for the young person to have something they can ‘fall back on’. Normally a young person would have Standard Grades, etc but a disengaged young person would have very little as nothing has been measured or certificated</li> <li>◆ Distance travelled agenda and how this can be brought forward is critical</li> <li>◆ Greater emphasis on Core Skills being integrated</li> <li>◆ There is a desire to offer specific qualifications as opposed to generic</li> <li>◆ Vocational tasters</li> <li>◆ Recognise and certificate softer skills via alternative activities, eg Outward Bound courses</li> </ul> |
| Scottish Enterprise<br>Renfrewshire       | National<br>(Renfrewshire)   | <p>There needs to be more involvement outwith the hotspot areas and better communication between SQA and the organisations working within the MCMC area.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ SQA should be the collection point for activities such as Get Ready for Work and mentoring</li> <li>◆ The assessment process needs to be more appropriate to the person’s learning needs and experiences</li> <li>◆ Localised vocational qualifications</li> <li>◆ Workplace mentoring</li> </ul>  |

| Centre/Organisation/<br>Authority | Geographical<br>Area     | Feedback  |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Shirlie Project                   | Highlands and<br>Islands | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Accrediting the link between personal development, Core Skills and employability</li> <li>◆ Complement reflective learning presently used</li> <li>◆ Develop smaller Units or Group Awards</li> <li>◆ Certificate or accredit softer skills</li> <li>◆ Employers wanting the basic computer skills</li> <li>◆ Person may struggle with elements of a qualification. However, if it focused solely on the skill required then they may achieve it, particularly if over a shorter time frame, eg 10 hours as opposed to 40 hours</li> <li>◆ Interested in developing smaller Units or Group Awards, ie web surfing, responsibility, working as a team, handling information</li> <li>◆ Recognise part qualification</li> </ul> |
| South East Regeneration Agency    | Glasgow<br>(South/East)  | <p>They have developed a number of partnerships with various agencies and programmes. Working with young people regarded as the hardest to reach via the 'Stop Shop'.</p> <p>Small courses are still utilised as they add value but unfortunately they are unrecognised.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Access foundation courses being offered</li> <li>◆ Utilise ICT</li> <li>◆ Certification and recognition of other skills that are valuable, eg people skills, softer skills</li> <li>◆ Young people are interested in getting a certificate, especially if it leads to further opportunities</li> <li>◆ Small courses</li> <li>◆ Linking in more with employers that work with the younger people with lower attainment</li> </ul>                |
| Three Towns Motor Project         | Ayrshire                 | <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Offering smaller Group Awards or courses</li> <li>◆ Literacy and numeracy skills gained through map reading, engine assembly/parts, oil gauges, tyre pressures etc</li> <li>◆ Certification of their existing course</li> <li>◆ Opportunities to develop qualifications</li> </ul>  |

| <b>Centre/Organisation/<br/>Authority</b> | <b>Geographical<br/>Area</b> | <b>Feedback</b>   |
|---|------------------------------|---|
| West Dunbartonshire Council               | West Dunbartonshire          | <p>It is important to celebrate learning.</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Offer smaller recognised Units or Group Awards</li> <li>◆ Certificating smaller generic courses</li> <li>◆ Employers are involved in the learning process</li> <li>◆ Presently utilising other awarding bodies</li> <li>◆ The approval system is too rigorous</li> <li>◆ There is a need to recognise the journey</li> <li>◆ There is a need to soften the impact of assessment</li> <li>◆ Community based or volunteering certificates</li> <li>◆ Recognising the world of work, eg part-time jobs</li> <li>◆ Establish a framework for dialogue with SQA on MCMC</li> <li>◆ Certificate a pre-Get Ready for Work programme that recognises the basic skills, eg getting to your work</li> </ul> |
| Youth Link                                | National                     | <p>Positive feedback from SQA engagement</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Have an accessible one-stop-shop for SQA products with links to other courses</li> <li>◆ Leadership courses</li> <li>◆ Recognition that a great deal of support and alternative courses already exists</li> <li>◆ Smaller Units</li> <li>◆ Volunteering certification</li> </ul>   |
| Y Sort It                                 | West Dunbartonshire          | <p>There are presently ‘Satellite Points’ within eight local schools. This involves a ‘Y Sort It’ stall with information on health, housing, emotional, leisure. This is seen as a partnership with the schools as opposed to a way of distancing the young person from the traditional learning environment.</p> <p>A number of learning experiences take place that are not recognised and regarded by some as non-academic activities, ie presentation skills, working in a team, negotiating skills</p> <p><b>Discussion points for noting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Sport leadership courses at accessible level</li> <li>◆ Youth Committee skills</li> <li>◆ Smaller achievable Units and Group Awards</li> </ul>  |