

MORE CHOICES, MORE CHANCES AND ASSESSMENT

We need to explore and actively promote flexible assessment within the framework of qualifications.

In developing qualifications to meet the needs of the vulnerable, disengaged and hard to reach learner SQA is keen to work with Scotland's colleges to identify effective approaches aimed at supporting vulnerable and disengaged learners to be successful.

To determine how best to complement the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda and to be proactive in furthering our support to the vulnerable, disengaged and hard to reach learner SQA has undertaken a number of activities including commissioning research, and engaging with a range of stakeholders.

Assessment issues are central to the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda. There is a widely held belief that methods and approaches to assessment contribute to the volume of young people not engaging in learning or having low attainment.

SQA has undertaken an initial engagement exercise with a range of stakeholders. Feedback from the engagement exercise suggested that assessment approaches need to be more flexible in order to support vulnerable, disengaged and hard to reach learners and to take greater account of individual needs.

However, there was also clear confirmation that assessment itself is not a bad thing. Indeed assessment can complement learning if it is engaging, less intrusive and more embracing of contextual and experiential learning.

If we want to successfully increase choice and opportunity for the young, vulnerable and disengaged learner then we must be able to engage with the person in a purposeful and meaningful manner and offer a system that nurtures and supports sustainable learning experiences. We need to explore and actively promote flexible assessment within the framework of qualifications.

One area where opportunities currently exist is the ability to harness advances in new technology as a vehicle for engaging and re-engaging the hard to reach learner and as a platform for increasing flexibility within assessment. It is evident that e-portfolios, e-assessment, animation, interactive gaming, online activities, video and ICT are becoming a fundamental and integral part of learning, engagement, and modern teaching. It is key that we ensure that we include the vulnerable disengaged learner in the advancements and benefits of the digital age.

The next phase of SQA activities designed to support *More Choices, More Chances* and increase choice and opportunity for the vulnerable, disengaged and hard to reach learner includes continued communication and engagement with stakeholders, supporting centres in their delivery of SQA qualifications within the context of *More Choices, More Chances*, exploring partnership opportunities, exploring where SQA qualifications can be further used within the voluntary sector and community-based setting, and how we can further extend the reach of our current qualifications.



Chris Sutherland joined SQA as Project Manager for *More Choices, More Chances* in September 2007 having previously been Regeneration Manager with a large Housing Association in the West of Scotland involved in community consultation and engagement and developing a community led regeneration centre. After completing a degree in 1992 Chris worked in the field of dual sensory impairment for seven years, latterly as a Residential Manager. After completion of an MSc. in Social Work he moved on to manage an employability project within North Glasgow supporting disabled people into employment, education and training opportunities.

The work currently being undertaken by SQA to support *More Choices, More Chances* and explore ways of increasing choice and opportunity is an ongoing process and has involved a great deal of communication and engagement in various sectors. It has been important to ensure that we work alongside as many key partners and stakeholders as possible to ensure that there is the foundation for an effective yet flexible partnership approach.

It is widely recognised that currently there are too many young people in Scotland who for various reasons have not had the appropriate opportunity to actively participate in education, employment or training. SQA as the national awarding body has an important role to play within the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for recognising a wide range of skills, knowledge, abilities and experiences through our framework of qualifications and assessment process. It is critical that SQA qualifications support progression to further study, employment and training.