

Reviewing the qualifications portfolio: Group Award design

***Consultation report
May 2005***

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Executive summary

This report is the outcome of a consultation on the purpose and design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6, and the design of Professional Development Awards (PDAs) at SCQF levels 6 - 12. This is the second phase of consultation which forms part of SQA's review of its portfolio of qualifications. (The first consultation report can be found on our website, www.sqa.org.uk.)

The main findings and conclusions of the second consultation were:

- ◆ Most stakeholders preferred the option of having two types of Group Award at SCQF levels 2 – 6: small, flexible National Progression Awards (NPAs) and larger, fixed-credit National Certificates (NCs) (option 2 on the questionnaire).
- ◆ Of those who preferred option 2, most would prefer NCs to have a credit value of 72 SCQF credit points (12 Unit credits).
- ◆ The main issues for implementation are the place of Core Skills in the new NCs, the need for a marketing/communication plan to help stakeholders understand the new system, and a desire for SQA to work with stakeholders to decide on priorities/timescales for development in order to make the new system work.
- ◆ The proposed design of PDAs was supported. Respondents agreed that the new PDAs should be available at SCQF levels 6-12. Their purpose would be to assess and certificate candidates' progression in specialist occupational skills. The new PDAs would have a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points at level 6, and 16 credit points at levels 7-12.

This has resulted in a recommendation that the following work be carried out:

- ◆ Establish plans for the development of NCs and NPAs, working with colleges and other stakeholders. NCs at levels 4, 5 and 6 should have a credit value of 72 SCQF credit points, and NCs at levels 2 and 3 should have a credit value of 54 SCQF credit points. All other aspects of design should be in line with the design principles outlined in option 2 of the consultation documents.
- ◆ Establish plans for the development of PDAs to meet the new design principles, working with colleges and other stakeholders.
- ◆ Develop a communication/ marketing plan to raise awareness about the new NPAs, NCs and PDAs.

Please note that these recommendations are in addition to those of the first portfolio review consultation, carried out in autumn 2004. The recommendations of that round of consultation were:

- ◆ Given that there is broad overall support for the proposals, development work based on the qualification titles proposed should be planned and initiated.
- ◆ A further consultation with key stakeholders should be carried out to clarify the design principles for Group Awards.
- ◆ Further work should be carried out to provide guidance for Qualification Design Teams on how to incorporate Core Skills and link qualifications to National Occupational Standards.
- ◆ Further work should be carried out to support implementation and help users understand the revised system of qualifications.

1 Terms of reference

In late 2004, SQA carried out a review and consultation process. The aim of the review was to establish qualification titles and design principles which would fit together into a system of qualifications that is:

- ◆ fit for purpose
- ◆ simple to understand
- ◆ straightforward and cost-effective for centres and SQA to operate.

The main proposals for change were that SQA would:

- ◆ develop new Skills for Work Courses for 14 – 16 year olds
- ◆ develop revised Group Awards
 - by tidying up the design principles for Scottish Progression Awards (SPAs) and Professional Development Awards (PDAs)
 - and creating a new suite of Group Awards called National Certificates (NCs) to replace Scottish Group Awards.

Overall, there was support for the proposals, and the proposed design principles for new Skills for Work Courses were accepted. There was also support for the development of National Certificates, Scottish Progression Awards and Professional Development Awards, but there were differing opinions on some aspects of the design of each of these Group Awards. This resulted in a recommendation that further consultation should be carried out to clarify the design principles for Group Awards.

The main issues to be resolved by the second round of consultation related to:

- ◆ The purpose and design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6
- ◆ The design of Professional Development Awards at SCQF levels 6 - 12.

More information on what consultation respondents said about these issues is given in the report of the first consultation, which can be found on SQA's website, www.sqa.org.uk. The Executive Summary of that first consultation report is attached to this report as Appendix 5.

2 Methodology

After informal discussion with key stakeholder groups, draft options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6, and a proposal for the design of PDAs at SCQF levels 6 - 12, were developed and agreed by senior officer groups in SQA. (More detail about the options and proposal can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.)

A consultation process then took place, during February – March 2005. In summary, this consisted of:

- ◆ One main consultation event, involving 42 external stakeholders, discussing the options and proposals in five focus groups. (Appendix 3 gives details and summarises the feedback gathered.)
- ◆ Presentations and discussions at other conferences, meetings and events. (Appendix 4 gives details and summarises the feedback gathered.)

The consultation papers were also made available on the SQA website. (Responses are summarised in Appendix 4.)

Respondents were asked to:

- ◆ Choose between the two options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 – 6 and give reasons for their choice.
- ◆ Provide advice on the key issues which would need to be addressed before and during implementation of the new system of Group Awards.
- ◆ Discuss and agree the proposed design of PDAs.

3 Findings and conclusions

3.1a Options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6 — findings

Options

Two options were proposed for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6. These are summarised below. More information is given in Appendix 1.

Option 1 – a single type of Group Award

All Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 – 6 would be called ‘National Certificates’. Developers would set a credit value for the Group Award which was determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this would be checked by SQA at validation. The minimum credit value would be 12 SCQF credit points (at least two Units).

Option 2 – two types of Group Award

There would be a combination of small, flexible Group Awards, possibly to be called National Progression Awards, and larger, fixed National Certificates. Both would be available at SCQF levels 2 – 6.

The purpose of NPAs would normally be to assess and certificate a defined set of skills in a specialist vocational area. The minimum credit value would be 12 SCQF credit points.

A National Certificate would normally be expected to certificate achievement equivalent to one year’s full-time study. The purpose of NCs would be to assess and certificate a range of knowledge and skills, including specialist subject or vocational skills, as well as broader, transferable skills. At SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, a National Certificate would have a credit value of 90 SCQF credit points (15 Units).

Preferred option

Option 2 (two types of Group Award at SCQF levels 2- 6) was the preferred option of the vast majority of consultation respondents. At the main consultation event, 38 out of 42 delegates preferred option 2. At the SFEU SQA Co-ordinators’ conference on 11 March, all four groups (20 delegates) unanimously preferred option 2. Of the ten responses submitted by e-mail or post, seven preferred option 2. SQA’s FE Strategic Forum, and Assessment Panel for Access 1 and 2, both preferred option 2.

In total (across events and e-mail /postal responses), four respondents preferred option 1; while three preferred neither, or suggested another option.

Of those who preferred option 2, the majority would prefer NCs to have a credit value of 72 SCQF credit points – this was supported by 18 delegates at the main consultation event; two out of four of the discussion groups at the SFEU SQA co-ordinators’ conference (two groups were split, with some members preferring 72 SCQF credit points), and three e-mail respondents. A credit value of 72 SCQF credit points (12 Units) was felt to be better because it leaves flexibility to meet local/individual needs; matches HNC; and is more achievable for candidates.

Fewer respondents would prefer NCs to have a credit value of 90 SCQF credit points — NCs of this size were supported by ten delegates at the main consultation event and by two e-mail respondents. Two of the groups at the SFEU SQA Co-ordinators’ conference

could not express a preference because some members of the group preferred 90 SCQF credit points while others preferred 72 SCQF credit points.

The Assessment Panel for Access 1 and 2 qualifications suggested that NCs at SCQF level 2 should have a credit value of 54 SCQF credit points.

Key advantages of the preferred option

The key advantages of option 2 were felt to be:

- ◆ It provides achievable qualifications for a range of candidates; provides ‘bite-size’ chunks (21 delegates at main event; three e-mail/ postal responses; two groups at SFEU co-ordinators’ conference)
- ◆ It is easier for employers and others to understand (19 delegates at main event; two groups at SFEU co-ordinators’ conference; one e-mail/postal response)
- ◆ A system with two types of Group Award offers more flexibility to centres and candidates (14 delegates at main event; four e-mail/ postal responses).
- ◆ The combination of small, flexible Group Awards and larger higher-stakes Group Awards makes progression routes clearer (10 delegates at main event; three e-mail responses).

Key implementation issues

The key issues for implementation appear to be:

- ◆ A need for clarity on the position of Core Skills (This comment was made by three groups at the main event, reiterated by four individual responses. Concerns about the place of Core Skills were also expressed in four of the ten e-mail/postal responses, and by two of the groups at the SFEU co-ordinators’ conference.)
- ◆ A wish for further information on timescales and a hope that stakeholders, especially colleges, will be involved in deciding priority areas for development (expressed by two groups at the main event, two groups at the SFEU co-ordinators’ conference, and one e-mail respondent). Two groups suggested that SSCs should be involved in the consultation/ development process.
- ◆ Marketing/communication of the new system will be vital (three groups at the main event, and two e-mail/ postal respondents).

3.1b Options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 – 6 — conclusions

Preferred option

Option 2 should be implemented.

At SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, NCs should have a credit value of 72 SCQF credit points.

At SCQF levels 2 and 3, NCs should have a credit value of 54 SCQF credit points, with double and triple awards continuing to be available, as they are with existing Scottish Group Awards.

Key advantages of the preferred option

Option 2 is felt to be more flexible, and to be easier for employers and others to understand. Respondents also felt that option 2 meets a greater range of candidate needs, and provides appropriate progression.

Key implementation issues

Consultation respondents suggested that, to make the new system work, SQA should:

- ◆ Clarify the place of Core Skills
- ◆ Provide further information on planned timescales and work with stakeholders to decide on priority areas for development
- ◆ Establish a marketing/communication plan.

3.2a Proposal for the design of Professional Development Awards: findings

The proposed design principles for PDAs were accepted by all groups at the main consultation event. One group expressed some concerns about the proposed flexibility in credit values. Seven out of the ten e-mail/postal respondents commented on the proposal for the design of PDAs — six of these supported the proposed design of PDAs. One respondent suggested that the minimum credit value was too low and expressed concerns about the place of Core Skills.

The key implementation issue raised was the need to establish a market/rationale for each PDA to avoid proliferation.

3.2b Proposal for the design of Professional Development Awards: conclusions

The proposed flexible design of PDAs was accepted, with the proviso that there must be safeguards in place in the development process to avoid proliferation.

4 Recommendations

SQA should:

- ◆ Establish plans for the development of NCs and NPAs, working with colleges and other stakeholders. NCs at levels 4, 5 and 6 should have a credit value of 72 SCQF credit points, and NCs at levels 2 and 3 should have a credit value of 54 SCQF credit points. All other aspects of design should be in line with the design principles outlined in option 2 of the consultation documents.
- ◆ Establish plans for the development of PDAs to meet the new design principles, working with colleges and other stakeholders.
- ◆ Develop a communication/ marketing plan to raise awareness about the new NPAs, NCs and PDAs.

Please note that these recommendations are in addition to those of the first portfolio review consultation, carried out in autumn 2004. The recommendations of that round of consultation were:

- ◆ Given that there is broad overall support for the proposals, development work based on the qualification titles proposed should be planned and initiated.
- ◆ A further consultation with key stakeholders should be carried out to clarify the design principles for Group Awards.
- ◆ Further work should be carried out to provide guidance for Qualification Design Teams on how to incorporate Core Skills and link qualifications to National Occupational Standards.
- ◆ Further work should be carried out to support implementation and help users understand the revised system of qualifications.

Appendix 1: Options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6

Two options were proposed.

Option 1 – a single type of Group Award

All Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 – 6 would be called ‘National Certificates’. Developers would set a credit value for the Group Award which was determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this would be checked by SQA at validation. The minimum credit value would be 12 SCQF credit points (at least two Units).

Option 2 – two types of Group Award

There would be a combination of small, flexible Group Awards, possibly to be called National Progression Awards (NPAs), and larger, fixed National Certificates (NCs).

National Progression Awards would build on the current system of Scottish Progression Awards. NPAs would be available at SCQF levels 2 – 6. Developers would set a credit value for the Group Award which was fit-for-purpose in terms of the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this would be checked by SQA at validation. The minimum credit value would be 12 SCQF credit points. The purpose of National Progression Awards would normally be to assess and certificate a defined set of skills in a specialist vocational area.

National Certificates would be available at SCQF levels 2 - 6. A National Certificate would normally be expected to certificate achievement equivalent to one year’s full-time study. The purpose of NCs (in line with the other large Group Awards, such as HNC/Ds) would be to assess and certificate a range of knowledge and skills, including specialist subject or vocational skills, as well as broader, transferable skills, such as Core Skills. This category would encompass current Scottish Group Awards and some current National Certificate Group Awards.

At SCQF levels 2 and 3, the design would build on the design of existing successful Scottish Group Awards at Access 2 and 3. At SCQF level 2, an NC would have a credit value of 36 SCQF credit points (six Units); at SCQF level 3, an NC would have a credit value of 54 SCQF credit points (nine Units). As at present, at both of these levels, double and triple awards would be available.

At SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, a National Certificate would have a credit value of 90 SCQF credit points (15 Units). This would give centres scope to add additional credits to the candidate’s programme to meet individual and/or local needs.

More details about the proposed options are given below.

More about option 1 - a single type of Group Award

Overview

The proposal is that all Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 – 6 would be called ‘National Certificates’.

National Certificates

Purposes and target groups

National Certificates would serve a variety of different purposes. National Certificates would be used to assess and certificate:

- ◆ short programmes of learning which cover a defined set of skills in a specialist area and
- ◆ longer programmes of learning (the equivalent of one year’s full-time study) which cover a range of knowledge and skills, including specialist subject or vocational skills, as well as broader, transferable skills, such as Core Skills.

NCs would be aimed at a wide variety of target groups, including candidates in full-time education or training, and those taking vocational training programmes on a part-time basis.

The SCQF level would be used to indicate the level/degree of difficulty of the Group Award and SCQF credit points would be used to indicate the size/weight of the Group Award.

Design principles

The proposal is that National Certificates would:

- ◆ Be available at SCQF levels 2 – 6
- ◆ Be made up of Units with a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points. Developers would set a credit value for the Group Award which was fit-for-purpose in terms of the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this would be checked by SQA at validation. The Group Award would be made up of at least two Units.
- Be made up of mandatory and/or optional Units which reflect the title of the Group Award.
- ◆ Be linked to National Occupational Standards, if appropriate to the Group Award area.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for candidates to develop Core Skills and other soft skills and/or be credited with Core Skills attainment, if appropriate to the Group Award area.
- ◆ Include a maximum of three graded Course assessments in the optional section of the Group Award specification, if appropriate to the Group Award area.

More about option 2 - two types of Group Award

Overview

There would be a combination of small, flexible Group Awards, possibly to be called National Progression Awards, and larger, fixed National Certificates. Both National Progression Awards and National Certificates would be available at SCQF levels 2 – 6.

National Progression Awards

Purposes and target groups

National Progression Awards would build on the current system of Scottish Progression Awards.

The purpose of National Progression Awards would normally be to assess and certificate a defined set of skills and knowledge in a specialist vocational area.

It is envisaged that NPAs would mainly be used in post-compulsory education. NPAs would be designed to certificate training programmes, including return to work programmes for the unemployed, and short programmes of learning designed to be followed part-time by those already in work – ie programmes of continuing work skills development.

Design principles

The proposal is that National Progression Awards would:

- ◆ Be available at SCQF levels 2 - 6
- ◆ Be made up of Units with a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points. Developers would set a credit value for the Group Award which was fit-for-purpose in terms of the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this would be checked by SQA at validation. The Group Award would be made up of at least two Units.
- ◆ Be made up of mandatory and/ or optional Units which reflect the title of the Group Award
- ◆ Be linked to National Occupational Standards, as appropriate to the Group Award area.

NPAs will not include graded assessment or have any requirement for Core Skills.

National Certificates

Purposes and target groups

NCs (along with the other large Group Awards, such as HNC/Ds) would normally aim to develop a range of knowledge and skills, including transferable skills, such as Core Skills. Each NC would also have specific aims relating to the subject or occupational area – usually, they would be designed to prepare candidates for further progression while certificating vocational skills and knowledge.

NCs would be principally aimed at 16-18 year olds and adults in full-time education, usually in a further education college.

Design principles

The proposal is that National Certificates would:

- ◆ Be available at SCQF levels 2 – 6.
- ◆ At SCQF level 2, a National Certificate would be made up of Units with a total credit value of 36 SCQF credit points. At SCQF level 3, a National Certificate

would be made up of Units with a total credit value of 54 SCQF credit points.¹ At SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, a National Certificate would be made up of Units with a total credit value of 90 SCQF credit points. At least half of the credit points would be at the level of the Group Award.

- ◆ Have a mandatory section which makes up a minimum of half of the Group Award. There may be alternatives within this mandatory section, but all alternatives must be shown to reflect the title of the Group Award.
- ◆ Have an optional section which makes up no more than half of the Group Award. The optional section may include Core Skills Units, and other broadening Units.
- ◆ Be linked to National Occupational Standards, as appropriate to the Group Award area.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for candidates to develop all five Core Skills.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for candidates to be credited with Core Skills attainment, if appropriate to the Group Award area.
- ◆ Include a maximum of three graded Course assessments if this is appropriate to the Group Award area.

¹ At SCQF levels 2 and 3, double and triple awards would also be available

Appendix 2: Proposal for the design of Professional Development Awards

Overview

We proposed that there should be a new type of Group Award at SCQF levels 6-12. These should be called Professional Development Awards (PDAs). Their purpose would be to assess and certificate candidates' progression in specialist occupational skills.

The new PDAs would have a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points at level 6, and 16 SCQF credit points at levels 7-12. The actual credit value of each PDA would be determined by the PDA's development team, and would be checked by SQA during validation.

Purposes and target groups

PDAs would be for those already in a career or vocation who wish to extend or broaden their skills base, usually after completing a degree or vocational qualification relevant to their area of interest. PDAs would assess and certificate progression in a defined set of specialist occupational skills.

Design principles

The proposal is that Professional Development Awards would:

- ◆ Be available at SCQF levels 6 - 12²
- ◆ Be made up of Units with a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points at level 6, and 16 SCQF credit points at levels 7 - 12. Developers would set a credit value for the Group Award which was determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this would be checked by SQA at validation. The Group Award would be made up of at least two Units.
- ◆ Be made up of mandatory and/or optional Units which reflect the title of the Group Award
- ◆ Be based on National Occupational Standards, or other professional body standards, as appropriate to the Group Award area.

PDAs will not include graded assessment or have any requirement for Core Skills.

² Most existing PDAs are at levels 7 – 10.

Appendix 3: Feedback from consultation focus groups

Summary of those consulted

The following stakeholders took part in focus groups:

Main focus group event, March 16, 2005:

Total number of stakeholders attending: 42

Type of organisation represented	Number of representatives
FE colleges	17
Standard Setting Councils and employer bodies	10
National organisations	8
Other (including local authorities, HMIE, Scottish Executive)	7
Total	42

Focus group methodology

Each focus group had between 9 and 12 members. A facilitator and record-keeper were assigned to each group. Their role was not to express any of their own opinions or feelings on the options and proposals, but instead to help the group form and give their own feedback.

Facilitators were asked to structure discussion into four broad parts:

- ◆ Firstly, each group member was asked to assign a score to each option, and to justify their score to the rest of the group.
- ◆ After opportunity to discuss each other's viewpoints, group members were asked to complete a form on which they
 - selected an option
 - stated their preferred credit value for NCs (if they had chosen option 2)
 - identified what they saw as the key advantages of their preferred option.
- ◆ Group members were then asked to discuss and agree the key issues which would need to be addressed before and during implementation of the new system.
- ◆ Finally, group members were asked to discuss and agree the proposal for the design of PDAs.

Summary of focus group feedback

Options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2- 6

42 delegates completed an individual response form.

Q1. Two options for Group Award design are proposed. Which option do you prefer?

Option 1	Option 2	Neither
3	38	1

Q2. If you have chosen option 2, please confirm whether 15 Unit credits is the right size for an NC.

Yes – 15 credits	No – 12 credits*	No – alternative suggested**	No answer
10	18	4	6

* Two respondents said that they would only choose option 2 if the NC had a credit value of 12 credits (Units).

**The four alternatives suggested were:
12-18 credits
to be decided with the SSC
10 upwards
10 – 12 credits

Reasons for choosing 12 credits	No of responses
Leaves flexibility to meet local/individual needs	7
Matches HNC	5
12 is more achievable for candidates	4
Effect on Performance Indicators	2
Allows part-time students to complete NC in two years	2

Reasons for choosing 15 credits	No of responses
15 needed for the Group Award to have currency	2
12 is too few for a Group Award at this level	1

Q3. Please identify the key advantages of your preferred option

Key advantages of option 2	No of responses
Provides achievable qualifications for a range of candidates/ provides 'bite-size' chunks	21
Easier for employers and others to understand	19
Flexibility	14
Progression	10
NC brand already recognised	8
Consistency	6
Clarity	5
More structured	5
Credibility/currency	4

The three delegates who preferred option 1 each gave different reasons – these are summarised below.

Key advantages of option 1
Option 1 more flexible/Demand for NPA unclear
If appropriately labelled, one Group Award title could meet all needs
As a service provider would prefer option 2, but having consulted with employers/external clients, prefer option 1

The delegate who preferred neither option questioned whether NPA certification would add value over Unit certification, and expressed a preference for a single type of Group Award, but with a fixed credit value.

Other comments on Group Award design

Comments made by more than two people are reported in the table below.

Comment	No of responses
Place of Core Skills needs to be clarified/strengthened	4
Option 2 provides appropriate coverage of Core Skills	4
Graded assessment should be optional*	4

*1 respondent explicitly supported the proposal that graded assessment in NCs can be mandatory or optional, to meet the needs of the sector

Implementation issues

Group record-keepers were asked to record the most important implementation issues the group thought would need to be addressed before a new system of Group Awards could be implemented. A wide variety of different issues were mentioned. Those which were mentioned by more than one group are recorded below

Issue	No of groups
Concerns about timescales/ priority areas for development	3
Marketing/communication issues	3
Need clarity on Core Skills	3
Consultation with SSCs needed	2

Professional Development Awards

Group record keepers were asked to record whether the group supported the proposed design of PDAs.

Key points made
All five groups supported the proposed design of PDAs.
Two groups were happy with the proposed flexibility in credit values, and one expressed a concern that if they were too big, PDAs would not be suitable for those in work. One group did not come to a conclusion on this issue, and one group offered no comment.
Three groups suggested that it would be important to establish a market/rationale for each PDA in order to avoid proliferation.

Appendix 4: Feedback from consultation at other events and submitted by e-mail or post

Consultation at other events

SFEU SQA Co-ordinators' Conference, 11 March 2005

Twenty SQA co-ordinators from colleges across Scotland attended this conference. A detailed presentation was made, outlining the options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6. Delegates split into four groups to discuss the proposals. Each group provided oral and written feedback on the consultation questions. The key points were:

- ◆ All four groups reported unanimous support for option 2
- ◆ Two groups preferred NCs of 72 SCQF credit points; two groups were split, with some members preferring 72 and some preferring 90 SCQF credit points
- ◆ Option 2 was felt to be easier for employers and other to understand (recorded by two groups), and to provide qualifications for a wider range of candidates (recorded by two groups)
- ◆ The main implementation issue was the timescale for development, (recorded by two groups, with one group recording a request for Computing/IS to be among the first areas to be developed)
- ◆ Two groups expressed concerns about the place of Core Skills.

Delegates were not asked to comment on the proposal for the design of PDAs.

FE Strategic Forum, 22 February 2005

The FE Strategic Forum is a key stakeholder group for SQA. At their meeting on 22 February 2005, they were provided with an update on the consultation and given an opportunity to comment on the proposals. The nine members present preferred option 2, with NCs of 12 Unit credits (72 SCQF credit points) – this was felt to allow colleges to tailor programmes to meet individual needs.

Meeting with SQA's Assessment Panel for Access 1 and 2, 8 March 2005

Members of the Assessment Panel discussed the options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6. There were nine members of the Panel present – all are practising assessors of qualifications at Access 1 and 2. The following points were made:

- ◆ The group preferred option 2
- ◆ The group would prefer NCs at SCQF level 2 to be 54 SCQF credit points, building on existing successful Scottish Group Awards at this level; double and triple awards should continue to be available.
- ◆ Existing 36 credit point Skillstart awards should become NPAs.
- ◆ Members would like to see all five Core Skills continuing to have a place in NCs at this level, but this would require development of some 'core skills' type Units at SCQF level 1.
- ◆ There were some concerns about the title 'National Certificate' – 'National Group Award' was suggested.

Feedback submitted by post or e-mail

Ten stakeholders submitted feedback by post or e-mail. Responses were received from six further education colleges, one school, one education authority, one Sector Skills Council, and the SFEU Core Skills Steering Group.

A summary of the comments made is given below.

Q1. Two options for Group Award design are proposed. Which option do you prefer?

Option 1	Option 2	Neither
1	7	2

Q2. Please identify the key advantages of your preferred option

Comments made by more than one respondent are recorded below.

Key advantages of option 2	No of responses
Flexibility	4
Progression	3
Consistency	2
Meets the needs of a greater range of candidates	3
Clarity	2
Importance of marketing	2

The respondent who preferred option 1 argued that this option is simpler, and noted that there are already many different Courses available.

The two respondents who preferred neither option had different reasons for doing so. One respondent was concerned about the place of Core Skills in both options and wanted to see the place of Core Skills strengthened. (One respondent who supported option 2 also expressed concerns about the place of Core Skills.) One respondent would prefer a version of option 2, but with National Certificates only available at SCQF levels 5 and 6. (A similar comment was made by another respondent who nevertheless selected option 2.)

The postal questionnaire did not include a separate question on the credit value of NC in option 2, but five respondents expressed a view on this issue – three of them would prefer NCs to be 12 Unit credits (72 SCQF credit points), while two would prefer 15 Unit credits (90 SCQF credit points).

Q3. Please identify the most important issues you think would need to be addressed before your preferred option could be implemented

The ten respondents raised a variety of implementation issues. The only issue which was raised by more than one respondent was concern about the place of Core Skills. Four respondents suggested that this should be clarified/strengthened, with two providing detailed comment on Core Skills issues. One respondent expressed support for NCs at SCQF levels 2 and 3.

Professional Development Awards

Seven out of the ten respondents commented on the proposal for the design of PDAs. Six respondents supported the proposed design of PDAs. One respondent suggested that the minimum credit value was too low and expressed concerns about the place of Core Skills.

There were few additional comments about PDAs. One respondent questioned the need for PDAs at level 12. One respondent commented that the clarification and rationalisation of nomenclature is a major step forward, and suggested that the clear relationship between NPAs and PDAs is a good feature of the model.

Appendix 5: Executive summary of the first portfolio review consultation report

This report is the outcome of an investigation into the proposals of SQA's portfolio review. The portfolio review aims to take account of the external and internal environment in making significant changes to qualifications. The aim is to create a system of qualifications that is:

- ◆ fit for purpose
- ◆ simple to understand
- ◆ straightforward and cost-effective for centres and SQA to operate

The key issues to be addressed include the need to:

- ◆ tidy up some of the anomalies in the current system
- ◆ make qualifications easier for users to understand
- ◆ clarify progression routes through the qualifications system
- ◆ review design principles for some qualifications to increase the coherence of the qualification while enhancing the flexibility of the current system

A review and consultation process took place during autumn 2004. It consisted of:

- ◆ informal discussion with key stakeholder groups
- ◆ development of draft proposals
- ◆ five main consultation events, involving more than 40 separate focus group discussions
- ◆ presentations and discussions at other conferences, meetings and events
- ◆ the consultation papers were also made available on the SQA website

The main findings and conclusions of the consultation were:

- ◆ Overall, there was support for the proposals.
- ◆ The proposed design principles for new Skills for Work Courses were accepted.
- ◆ There was support for the development of National Certificates, Scottish Progression Awards and Professional Development Awards, but there were differing opinions on some aspects of the design of each of these Group Awards.
- ◆ There was support for including Core Skills in qualifications, and for linking qualifications to National Occupational Standards. However, feedback gave no strong steer on how to include Core Skills in new qualifications, or how to link the qualifications to National Occupational Standards.
- ◆ It was generally accepted that the proposed system is as simple and coherent as possible, but there was a consensus that marketing and communication of the new system will be vital.

This has resulted in a recommendation that the following further work should be carried out:

- ◆ Given that there is broad overall support for the proposals, development work based on the qualification titles proposed should be planned and initiated.
- ◆ A further consultation with key stakeholders should be carried out to clarify the design principles for Group Awards.
- ◆ Further work should be carried out to provide guidance for Qualification Design Teams on how to incorporate Core Skills and link qualifications to National Occupational Standards.
- ◆ Further work should be carried out to support implementation and help users understand the revised system of qualifications.