

Public Services (Scotland) Reform Act 2010

Sustainable economic growth

The following statement sets out the activities undertaken by SQA in 2011-12 in the exercise of its functions, which contribute to sustainable economic growth. Further information can be found in the 2011-12 Annual Report & Accounts, which is available on the website www.sqa.org.uk.

SQA is the national body in Scotland for the development, accreditation, validation, assessment and certification of qualifications (other than degrees and some professional qualifications). Its main functions are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. SQA is a non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Scottish Government's Learning Directorate.

The core purpose of SQA is to set and maintain standards in education and training through the qualifications and assessment it provides that are delivered in schools, in colleges, and in workplace learning. In addition, SQA's accreditation function sets and maintains standards for awarding bodies and accredited qualifications, such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications.

In 2011-12, SQA contributed to sustainable economic growth in a number of ways:

1. SQA continues to develop and provide an extensive and comprehensive portfolio of qualifications that supports skills development, training and education at all levels of the SCQF. Qualifications cover a vast range of occupational sectors that are important to continued economic growth in Scotland. This includes public sector areas such as the NHS; niche sectors often found in rural economies such as fish farming; the small and medium enterprise sector; emerging sectors such as renewables; and priority sectors identified by the Scottish Government such as energy, tourism, and creative industries. Our qualifications are developed in close partnership with sector skills councils, employers, industry, colleges and other key agencies to ensure the needs of business and industry are met, thus contributing to sustained economic growth.
2. In addition to our vast range of vocational and academic qualifications, SQA continued to develop new qualifications to support the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence in schools. These qualifications have a focus on skills needed for the world of work and further study and will develop the qualities and characteristics that will allow young people to contribute to future economic growth.
3. We also continue to develop and provide qualifications with a specific business focus. Different types of qualifications are available across a range of SCQF levels and these are offered by colleges, training providers and schools. These include:
 - Business Courses at Access level – SCQF levels 2 and 3;
 - National Progression Awards in Business with Information Technology, and in Business Improvement Techniques
 - National Certificates in Business at SCQF 4 and 5
 - Higher National Certificates and Diplomas in Business; Business with HR; Business with Accounting; International Business and Trade; and Rural Business Management
 - Professional Development Awards in Information Technology & Business, and Managing Projects & Business Processes

- SVQs in Business Administration (SVQ 1 – 4), Business Improvement Techniques (SVQ 2 – 4), Business Information (SVQ 3), Business Advice (SVQ 4), Business Development (SVQ 4)
 - Standard Grade, Intermediate 1, 2, Higher and AH in Business Management
4. Sustainable economic growth is also predicated on the current and future workforce having wider, generic skills such as core skills and employability, entrepreneurial and enterprise skills. SQA continues to develop and provide a wide range of qualifications that develop employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise skills. These include:
- Core Skills –Communication; Numeracy; ICT; Problem Solving; and Working with Others – either as stand-alone Units or signposted within subject Units
 - Awards in Employability SCQF levels 3 and 4
 - National Progression Awards in Enterprise and Employability at SCQF 4 & 5
 - Units at SCQF 4 – 8 on Entrepreneurship
 - Personal Development Planning Units relating to work and work skills that help learners develop the skills needed to be gain, and be effective in, employment. These range from SCQF level 1 to SCQF level 9.
 - Work Experience Units, which give learners experience of work, are offered as stand-alone qualifications or are incorporated into many Group Awards such as NCs, HNCs and HNDs.
 - Skills for Work courses – designed to encourage engagement with work and develop skills needed for work
 - New Baccalaureates, which encourage ties with business, employers, industry through the Interdisciplinary Project

For the first time in 2011-12, SQA has also published a Sustainability Report on its website setting out its commitment to environmental sustainability and progress in this area during 2011-12. This is included in the Audit papers as PFN1. .

Economy, efficiency and effectiveness

The following statement sets out the steps taken by SQA in 2011-12 in the exercise of its functions to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Further information can be found in the 2011-12 Annual Report & Accounts, which is available on the website www.sqa.org.uk

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SQA is committed to ensuring that arrangements are in place which will lead to the economic, efficient and effective use of the organisation's resources. The efficiency agenda forms part of SQA's annual planning and budgeting process and efficiency savings that are measurable and sustainable are identified, budgeted and monitored throughout the financial year. By continuing to embed a culture of efficiency, continuous improvement and best value across the organisation SQA achieved efficiency savings of £1.444m for 2011-12 equivalent to 9% of previous year's total Grant-in-Aid drawn down.

The activities that contributed to achievement of these savings included:

- £0.719m from a reduction in staff payroll costs mainly from a Voluntary Early Release scheme in March 2011 and shared service of some staff.
- £0.086m saving in other staff costs (staff expenses and temporary staff) from continuous improvement initiatives.
- £0.286m saving in appointee costs from process improvements.
- £0.083m saving in catering costs through close management of costs.
- £0.147m saving in IT costs through asset replacement management.
- £0.090m from improved management of external venue costs by utilising and managing internal accommodation effectively.
- £0.033m saving from assessment materials through using internal resources.

SQA's outsourced internal auditors were commissioned to carry out a programme of process improvement reviews during 2011-12 including:

- Relocation to Shawfair Park,
- National Qualifications Certification Process,
- Payments to Appointees,
- Financial Planning and Reporting, Workforce Planning,
- Progress Against Efficiency Targets,
- Financial Systems Healthcheck, Accounts Receivable,
- Curriculum for Excellence, Infrastructure Developments – project management,
- Managing and Executing Verification Activity,
- Product Development Process and
- Information Management

Timely implementation of agreed recommendations for improvements noted by both internal and external auditors is tracked by SQA's Management Team and Audit Committee.

SQA is also implementing a portfolio of programmes aiming to improve delivery of services to customers through reviewing processes and making increased use of technology. A number of these programmes will generate cash and time releasing savings. The Corporate Plan also includes actions aimed at generating surpluses from some aspects of SQA's activity - for example work in the rest of the UK or international markets - and using those surpluses to reinvest to support the continued provision of a sustainable portfolio of high quality, relevant qualifications and services for Scotland.

In relation to shared services, SQA has arrangements in place to share good practice and resources which are fundamental to delivery of SQA services, for example:

- Shared facilities management services (cleaning, security, mail, print and light maintenance) linked to SQA's co-location with Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) in the Optima building in 2005.
- Active participation in benchmarking exercises led by Scottish Government for corporate services.
- Supporting another organisation in HR activities, for which SQA received a fee, in order to promote efficiency across public bodies.

More information about steps taken by SQA to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness is available in the 2011-12 Annual Report and Accounts available on the website www.sqa.org.uk