

2 June 2005

To: All Heads of Centres  
Local Education Authorities  
Directors of Education  
SQA Stakeholders

cc: SQA Co-ordinator

| Action by Recipient              |
|----------------------------------|
| Response required                |
| Note and pass on                 |
| ✓ None – update/information only |

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Dear Colleague

### **Portfolio Review Consultation**

I am delighted to be writing to you to tell you that we have reached agreement on the way forward with the review of our portfolio of qualifications. This will allow us to work with stakeholders to take development work forward.

In late 2004, we carried out a review and consultation on our portfolio of qualifications. The aim of the review was to establish a coherent system of qualifications which was fit for purpose for the range of Scottish learners. The consultation report was presented to our Qualifications Committee in December 2004. Overall, there was support for the proposals, but there were differing opinions on some aspects of the design of Group Awards. The Qualifications Committee agreed to a recommendation that there should be further consultation.

We consulted again in February and March of this year on the design of Group Awards. The main findings and conclusions of the 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 Professional Development Awards (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.

Appendix 1 summarises the results of consultation. The full consultation report will be made available on SQA's website in June 2005. A diagram outlining the shape of the revised portfolio is attached as Appendix 2. The design principles for new NPAs, NCs and PDAs are listed in Appendix 3.

In the autumn of this year, SQA will establish a new Key Partners' Group to provide a forum for stakeholders to provide us with strategic advice on National Qualifications developments. Membership will include stakeholders from colleges, schools, local authorities, training providers, Sector Skills Councils and other interested organisations.

A development programme will be put in place to develop the newer aspects of the portfolio including National Certificates and National Progression Awards. During the development programme, we will also develop Skills for Work Courses and update National Units. Appendix 4 outlines proposals for the process which will be used. We will start later this year on the first phase of development in six key areas. Consultation will take place with key stakeholders to establish which areas will be included in the first phase.

Information about the development process for new Professional Development Awards will be sent at a later date.

I hope you find this information useful. If you wish to discuss any aspect of the consultation or development plans, please contact me on 0141-242-2311.

Yours faithfully



John Young  
Director of Qualifications

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## **Appendix 1: Results of the 2005 consultation on Group Award design**

Draft options for the design of Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 - 6, and a proposal for the design of Professional Development Awards, were developed and agreed by senior officers after discussion with key stakeholder groups. A consultation process then took place during February – March 2005:

- ◆ One main consultation event, involving external stakeholders, discussed the options and proposals in focus groups.
- ◆ There were presentations and discussions at other conferences, meetings and events.
- ◆ The consultation papers were also made available on the SQA website.

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 at SCQF levels 2 – 6.
- ◆ Discuss and agree the proposed design of Professional Development Awards.

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.

## Appendix 2: Overview of the proposed revised portfolio of qualifications

|                    |          |                   | Group Awards             |                                 |     |     |   |          |                                 |  |
|--------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----|-----|---|----------|---------------------------------|--|
| SCQF level         | Units    | Courses           | NPA                      | NC                              | HNC | HND | PDA                                       | SVQ      | Customised Awards               |  |
| 12                 | ✓        |                   |                          |                                 |     |     | ✓   | ✓        | ✓                               |  |
| 11                 | ✓        |                   |                          |                                 |     |     | ✓   |          |                                 |  |
| 10                 | ✓        |                   |                          |                                 |     |     | ✓   |          |                                 |  |
| 9                  | ✓        |                   |                          |                                 |     |     | ✓   | ✓        |                                 |  |
| 8                  | ✓        |                   |                          |                                 |     | ✓   | ✓   |          |                                 |  |
| 7                  | ✓        | ✓                 |                          |                                 | ✓   |     | ✓   | ✓        |                                 |  |
| 6                  | ✓        | ✓                 | ✓                        | ✓                               |     |     | ✓   |          |                                 |  |
| 5                  | ✓        | ✓                 | ✓                        | ✓                               |     |     |   | ✓        |                                 |  |
| 4                  | ✓        | ✓                 | ✓                        | ✓                               |     |     |   | ✓        |                                 |  |
| 3                  | ✓        | ✓                 | ✓                        | ✓                               |     |     |   |          |                                 |  |
| 2                  | ✓        | ✓                 | ✓                        | ✓                               |     |     |   |          |                                 |  |
| 1                  | ✓        |                   |                          |                                 |     |     |   |          |                                 |  |
| SCQF credit points | Variable | Varies with level | Minimum 12 at all levels | 72 points at levels 4, 5 and 6* | 96  | 240 | Minimum 12 at level 6; 16 at other levels | Variable | Variable to meet customer needs |  |

\* At levels 2 and 3, NCs would have a credit value of 54 SCQF credit points. At levels 2 and 3, National Certificates would continue to offer the flexibility currently offered by Scottish Group Awards at Access 2 and 3, and double and triple awards would also be possible.

## **Appendix 3: Design principles for new Group Awards**

### ***National Progression Awards***

#### **Purposes and target groups**

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

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

It is envisaged that NPAs will mainly be used in post-compulsory education. NPAs will 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**

National Progression Awards will:

- ◆ Be available at SCQF levels 2 – 6.
- ◆ Be made up of Units with a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points. Developers will set a credit value for the Group Award which is determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this will be checked by SQA at validation. The Group Award will 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.

## *National Certificates*

### **Purposes and target groups**

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

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

### **Design principles**

National Certificates will:

- ◆ Be available at SCQF levels 2 – 6:
  - At SCQF levels 2 and 3, a National Certificate will be made up of Units with a total credit value of 54 SCQF credit points\*.
  - At SCQF levels 4, 5 and 6, a National Certificate will be made up of Units with a total credit value of 72 SCQF credit points. At least half of the credit points will 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.
- ◆ 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.

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\* At SCQF levels 2 and 3, double and triple awards would also be available.

## ***Professional Development Awards***

### **Purposes and target groups**

PDA's will 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. PDA's will assess and certificate progression in a defined set of specialist occupational skills.

### **Design principles**

Professional Development Awards will:

- ◆ Be available at SCQF levels 6 - 12\* .
- ◆ 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 will set a credit value for the Group Award which is determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award, and this will be checked by SQA at validation. The Group Award will 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.

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\* Most existing PDA's are at levels 7 – 10.

#### ***Appendix 4: The proposed development process for new Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 – 6***

The development process for new Group Awards at SCQF levels 2 – 6 will have to take account of a number of ongoing and emerging development programmes, including:

- ◆ Completion of the NQ Review, including review, rationalisation and revision of Project-based National Courses (PBNCS) and other practical/ vocational Courses.
- ◆ Implementation of the low uptake policy (agreed by the Scottish Executive in October 2003).
- ◆ Developments arising from *A Curriculum for Excellence*, including development of Skills for Work Courses.
- ◆ The long-standing need for review, rationalisation and revision of freestanding Units in the National Certificate catalogue.

A key issue will be the need to avoid proliferation of similar qualifications, and ensure that the qualifications within a sector link with each other and provide progression routes.

A new Key Partners' Group will be established to provide a forum for stakeholders to provide strategic advice on National Qualifications development work. Membership will include stakeholders from schools, colleges, local authorities, training providers, Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other interested organisations.

The new Sector Panels, which are currently being piloted, will also have a role to play in ensuring coherence in the qualifications 'map' for each area. In each area, the Sector Panel will take an overview of developments in the area, and will be asked to provide advice on which qualifications need to be revised, which need to be removed from the catalogue, and which new qualifications need to be developed. The Panel will be asked to take account of the relevant Sector Skills Council's Sector Qualifications Strategy, where one exists. The Sector Panel's advice will form the basis of consultation. It will also be used to develop a plan for development of qualifications in the sector.

When plans have been established, and funding agreed, Qualifications Design Teams will be established to carry out the development work.