

Scottish Qualifications Authority

**Reviewing the qualifications
portfolio**

***Consultation report
February 2005***

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Executive summary

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.

1 Terms of reference

In 2002, SQA initiated a review of its portfolio of qualifications. At around the same time, the Scottish Executive initiated a review of Scottish Group Awards (SGAs) and Project-based National Courses (PBNs), which were widely perceived as failing to fulfil their objectives. These two strands of work were brought together into a single portfolio review project.

Proposals were developed on the design of a revised system of qualifications, and a consultation exercise was carried out to gather views on these proposals. (See Appendix 1 for an overview of the proposals.)

The external environment

This review is being undertaken in close co-operation with the Scottish Executive and aims to take account of environmental factors.

For example, in March 2004, the Scottish Executive convened a working group to take action on the proposals and recommendations arising from *Educating for Excellence*, the Executive's response to the National Debate on Education. The most significant of these were to:

- ◆ increase pupil choice
- ◆ support pupils who are academically able as well as those who are not
- ◆ increase access to vocational qualifications and strengthen the links between schools, colleges and workplaces

It was agreed that SQA's work in reviewing the portfolio would take these points into account, as part of a wider partnership with the Executive in working towards these targets. The portfolio review would also take account of the wider policy agenda in education and training, including:

- ◆ the lifelong learning strategy for Scotland — *Learning for Life, Life for Learning*
- ◆ the recommendations of the review of Enterprise in Education, *Determined to Succeed*
- ◆ the on-going school-college review and 3–18 curriculum review
- ◆ implementation of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- ◆ the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's consultation on a Framework for Achievement for England, and the proposed UK-wide review of S/NVQs.

The context within SQA

There are also significant developments within SQA which are part of, or impact on, this review. For example, the HNC/D review is well underway and will continue, and SQA will use the lessons learned from that to help inform the portfolio review. Other areas of work also impact on or are part of portfolio review work. As well as the review of SGAs and PBNs already mentioned, these strands of work include:

- ◆ Implementation of the low uptake policy for National Courses
- ◆ Development and evaluation of Scottish Progression Awards

The portfolio review aims to take account of the external and internal environment in making significant changes to qualifications. These changes should take the 'long view'. They should make the portfolio easier for users to understand and give SQA the stability to plan ahead in shaping qualifications over the coming years. 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

2 Methodology

After informal discussion with key stakeholder groups, draft proposals were developed and presented to SQA's Qualifications Committee and Advisory Council during the summer of 2004. The proposals were refined before being approved for consultation.

A consultation process then took place, during autumn 2004. In summary, this consisted of:

- ◆ five main consultation events, involving around 160 external stakeholders, discussing the proposals through more than 40 separate focus group discussions. (Appendix 2 gives details and summarises the feedback gathered.)
- ◆ presentations and discussions at other conferences, meetings and events. (Appendix 3 gives details and summarises the feedback gathered.)

The consultation papers were also made available on the SQA website. (Responses are summarised in Appendix 3.)

Delegates at all consultation events were asked to comment on how the proposals might work as an overall system. (Appendix 1 shows the proposals presented for comment.) Delegates were also asked to provide feedback on the purpose and design of each of the four proposed new or revised qualifications:

- ◆ new Skills for Work Courses for 14 – 16 year-olds
- ◆ revised Group Awards:
 - new National Certificates (NCs) to replace existing Scottish Group Awards
 - revised Scottish Progression Awards (SPAs)
 - a consolidated system of Professional Development Awards (PDAs) to replace existing Certificates, Advanced Certificates, Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas.

3 Findings and conclusions

3.1a Overview of the proposed system of qualifications: findings

Fitness for purpose of the proposals — gaps and overlaps in the system

Though there was general support for the proposals at each of the consultation events, focus groups participants provided a large number of constructive suggestions on key issues which will affect how successful the proposals are. Discussions were wide-ranging, and there were few comments which were made by more than one focus group.

One concern which was raised by three focus groups was that the proposed system does not address the difficulties for candidates in progressing from or to the SVQ stream from National or Higher National Qualifications. It was felt that the proposals still leave SVQs sitting rather separately, and that candidates may still have to step back a level when progressing into, or out of, SVQs.

Five focus groups thought that the proposals involved overlapping or unnecessary qualifications. Four groups were concerned about overlaps between proposed SPAs and other proposed qualifications. Two groups saw SPAs and new Skills for Work Courses as overlapping, and did not see a need for both of these qualifications. One group pointed out that SPAs overlap in level with both Standard Grade and Intermediate Courses. One group suggested that it may not be necessary to develop both SPAs and NCs, while a further group suggested that a single Group Award title might be all that is necessary.

A further question asked if all of the Group Awards are necessary. There was a clear feeling from respondents in 9 out of 14 groups that there are too many levels of NC in the proposals.

Coherence and simplicity of the proposed system

In general, there appeared to be agreement that the proposed system makes sense and is as 'simple' as it can be. Again, focus groups tended to concentrate on providing helpful pointers to issues which will need to be addressed. In the main, these related to how easy the system will be for users to understand.

It was pointed out by two groups that since the current system is not particularly well-understood, any change is likely to lead to further confusion. Six groups suggested that the SCQF is not well-understood, and work is needed to raise awareness of what it is and what it means. This point was reiterated in an e-mail response from a Standards Setting Council, who pointed out that in their sector, few employers are even aware of the SCQF. Two focus groups pointed out that the mismatch between SCQF credit points and SQA credits is especially confusing and needs to be sorted out.

Three groups felt that the proposals for NCs would be confusing, as did staff of Learning Teaching Scotland. At present, 'National Certificate' is understood as a level; but if SQA uses the term as a qualification title, available at five levels, it will be confusing, especially for employers. Two further groups suggested that using the term 'NC' would be confusing (for example, school candidates pointed out that their teachers commonly call National Courses 'NCs'). Delegates at the Scottish Executive 'Determined to Succeed – Strategic Leaders' Conference' also expressed concern about whether the title 'National Certificate' would be confusing.

Across groups, there was a high level of consensus that marketing of, and communication about, the new system will be vital if candidates, parents and employers

are to understand and value the qualifications — 11 of the 14 overview groups mentioned this issue, as did one college in an e-mail response. There were also comments about the need for marketing of each of the new/revised qualifications.

Cost-effectiveness of the proposals

There was some concern about funding issues in general (five groups). There was also some concern that some centres would not be able to offer a large choice to candidates — two focus groups made this point and it was reiterated in an e-mail response from staff at Learning Teaching Scotland. There were many concerns about the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of school-college partnerships — these are reported in section 3.2a.

Validation mechanisms for Group Awards

Within groups, there seemed to be clear views on whether centres should be able to validate their own Group Awards, but these views varied from group to group. Four groups felt it was important that colleges should be allowed to validate their own Group Awards, while six groups were strongly against this proposal, citing resources, ‘pain’, and the danger of proliferation. However, all groups pointed out that whatever the validation mechanism, Group Award development must take account of local needs. Two of SQA’s key stakeholder committees, the FE Strategic Forum, and the HN Key Partners Group, both felt that centres should be able to validate their own Group Awards. There was some support for local validation by delegates at the Scottish Executive ‘Determined to Succeed – Strategic Leaders’ Conference’.

Other general issues raised

Some groups took the opportunity to point out that the new qualifications will only succeed if they are represented in targets/ Performance Indicators (six groups raised this issue). A few stakeholders were concerned about the emphasis on age of candidates – one focus group and one e-mail respondent raised this issue. This issue was also picked up in discussions of individual qualifications, especially Skills for Work Courses. There was some support for the principle of credit transfer (three groups), but there were also some concerns about how this would work in practice (one focus group and one e-mail response). Many of these general concerns were reiterated in discussions on particular qualifications

3.1b Overview of the proposed system of qualifications: conclusions

Fitness for purpose of the proposals – gaps and overlaps in the system

In general, there is support for the proposals and they are felt to be fit for purpose. The place and purpose of SPAs needs to be clarified in order to avoid perceptions of overlap. Ways in which the proposed qualifications can bridge the gap between SVQs and other qualifications need to be worked out. The proposal to develop NCs at SCQF levels 2 – 6 needs to be explored further with the appropriate stakeholder groups.

Coherence and simplicity of the proposed system

There is general acceptance that the proposed system is as coherent and simple as it can be, but that it would still be difficult for candidates and users to understand. Communication and marketing will need particular attention. Work to raise awareness of the qualifications system should also take account of the need to explain and market the SCQF, which is not currently well-understood.

Cost-effectiveness of the proposals

It will be important to ensure that design principles match with funding.

Validation mechanisms for Group Awards

There is support for a validation mechanism which takes account of local needs, but there is debate over whether centres should be allowed to validate their own Group Awards.

Other general issues raised

To be successful, new qualifications will have to contribute to achievement of targets/ Performance Indicators.

3.2a Proposals for the new Skills for Work Courses — findings

Place and purpose of the new Skills for Work Courses

There was general agreement in the focus groups that there is a place for these Courses in the qualifications system. Of the ten focus groups which concentrated on these new Courses, nine of these groups felt that they did have a place, and one group expressed concerns that there is already adequate provision to serve this market. Similarly, when the 14 focus groups looking at the overview of the system discussed the place of new Courses, there was general support for them. Five groups explicitly welcomed the development of vocational Courses, and a further two groups felt that these would provide recognition for programmes which are currently offered uncertificated. An e-mail response from a local authority currently piloting SPAs expressed strong support for development of new Courses to run alongside SPAs.

The most prevalent opinion was that these Courses should be for anyone who is interested in them (six groups), but there was concern that they may be targeted at, or offered to, the less able (five groups). Two groups suggested that these Courses could be used to engage the more able, or S6 candidates.

A variety of different purposes was suggested — the most common was as ‘tasters’ of an area, or to try out an area (four groups). A variety of progression routes was suggested, with most groups suggesting that a range of different progression routes would be possible — further education and employment were the most frequently mentioned progression routes.

Graded assessment

Graded assessment was the issue which resulted in most heated debate and disagreement. It was common for groups to have mixed views on this issue (seven groups in the overview session; three groups in the focused session), while those groups which did come to a conclusion were fairly evenly divided between those who supported graded assessment and those who felt it should not be used in these new Courses. Arguments were made both for and against grading. For example, three groups mentioned that it is unhelpful to create such a distinction between vocational and academic Courses. On the other hand, two groups argued that ‘taster’ Courses do not need to be graded.

Two key phrases cropped up in many of the overview discussions and focus groups on new Courses: parity of esteem (13 groups), and currency (eight groups). These issues were also raised at an FE Principals’ Forum, by delegates at the Scottish Executive ‘Determined to Succeed – Strategic Leaders’ Conference’, by delegates at the SFEU SQA co-ordinators conference, and in e-mail responses from the Learning and Teaching Scotland, from two colleges, from the Skills for Logistics Standards Setting Council,

and from a local authority currently piloting SPAs. This might suggest that many of the arguments are less about the worth/value of grading *per se*, but more about how these new Courses will be perceived. The Skills for Business network made a detailed submission in which it pointed out that there appear to be different attitudes to grading in different employment sectors, and that further investigation of this issue would be helpful.

Course design

Many groups did not record definite answers to questions on Course design — groups tended to discuss the issue and identify the advantages and disadvantages of each proposal. Amongst the few who did come to conclusions, there was general agreement about most aspects. The proposed credit value of 160 hours was felt to be appropriate, with only one group coming to the conclusion that 120 hours would be better than 160 hours.

Few groups commented on the proposal to retain the 120 hour structure at Access 2 and 3 — one group felt that Courses at this level should be 160 hours to match other levels. However, a small group of stakeholders with an interest in Access qualifications met separately, and welcomed the re-badging of ‘Clusters’ as ‘Courses’. They also welcomed the proposal to retain the 120-hour structure at these levels.

One group was against linking Courses to National Occupational Standards (NOS), but while six groups supported this proposal, there were few suggestions on what the nature of the link should be. SQA staff pointed out that if we base Courses too closely on National Occupational Standards, we will create a practical difficulty in that it would be difficult to co-ordinate the review cycles of Courses and NOS, especially since some Courses are likely to be linked to more than one set of NOS. The group of stakeholders with an interest in Access qualifications raised concerns regarding those candidates with significant additional support needs — it may be that they would be disbarred from some or all of these proposed Courses, and the suggestion was made that, following models used in some centres, there might be general Skills for Work Courses, which would be about skills surrounding work (and would not be directly based on National Occupational Standards).

There was general agreement that it is important for new Courses to develop Core Skills, with six groups suggesting that these should be ‘embedded’. This point was also made in an e-mail response from the Learning and Teaching Management Group of Stevenson College. Two groups suggested that the Courses should also develop other, ‘soft’, skills, but did not provide a clear definition of what skills they had in mind.

Other issues raised

Participants may have been reluctant to come to conclusions on detailed proposals for Course design because they were more concerned with issues surrounding the delivery or use of the proposed new Courses. There were many comments on school-college partnership issues, focusing on the practicalities for centres and candidates. The issues raised included:

- ◆ capacity and accommodation
- ◆ transport/travel – time and costs
- ◆ staffing/staff development/qualifications
- ◆ timetabling
- ◆ guidance/discipline/referral systems
- ◆ teaching methods
- ◆ insurance
- ◆ health and safety
- ◆ difficulties for young people adjusting to two different learning environments

3.2b Proposals for the new Skills for Work Courses — conclusions

Place and purpose of the new Skills for Work Courses

There was general agreement that there is a place for these new Courses and that they can be used for a range of purposes and will facilitate progression in a range of routes in further education and employment.

Graded assessment

There were mixed views on whether the new Courses should include graded assessment, and arguments were given both for and against graded assessment. Many of these arguments were about the perceived value of the new Courses in comparison to other qualifications at the same level.

Course design

While few groups came to definite conclusions on Course design issues, there was some support for each of the proposals.

Other issues raised

Consultation participants were more concerned about practical issues which will affect the success of the new Courses. The most important issues related to funding/resourcing, and to the practicalities of school/college partnerships. Many of these issues are being addressed by the Scottish Executive's school-college review.

3.3a National Certificates: findings

Place and purpose of new National Certificates

Ten focus groups discussed National Certificates. National Certificates were also a key area of interest in some of the discussions of the overview of the system.

There was general agreement that there is a place for new National Certificates (five groups). However, this has to be considered in conjunction with the concern expressed in overview sessions that too many levels of NC are proposed (nine groups). Two groups pointed out that most existing college-devised NCs tended to be at around SCQF level 5 in order to provide progression to HN programmes — this point was also made in an e-mail response from a college.

The group of stakeholders with an interest in Access qualifications welcomed the introduction of National Certificates. However, they had concerns that NCs at Access 1, 2 and 3 may not meet all the given design principles for NCs, and asked whether they could still be called NCs.

Few groups explicitly identified target markets for NCs, but in the variety of comments made, it is clear that the main target market is FE students (one schools' group felt that there is no place for NCs in school). As the proposals stand, there were suggestions that NCs would be suitable for full-time students but would not suit part-time students (three groups suggested the proposed credit values are too high for part-time students, while two groups pointed out that if full-time and part-time programmes are forced to diverge, this may make it difficult to achieve viable class sizes). The place of existing National Certificates in Engineering was a concern for some delegates.

While three groups felt that an important purpose of NCs will be to provide underpinning knowledge for SVQs/MAs, the most commonly identified progression route was to HN (6 groups) – indeed, it was clear from comments on the design of NCs that some people see their primary purpose as preparing candidates for HN programmes.

Design principles

This was the area in which there was most debate. In general, participants did not accept the proposed credit values. One key issue was the varying credit values at different levels — seven groups felt that this is inappropriate, and there should be more consistency. The majority of groups discussing NCs felt that the proposed credit values were too big (seven groups and one e-mail response). The most common credit value suggested was 12 SQA credits (5 groups). In a separate meeting, representatives of the Scottish Wider Access Programme also felt that the proposed credit value of 18 SQA credits at SCQF level 6 is too much – 16 or 12 SQA credits would be better for them. One group suggested that the proposed credit values are not big enough to prepare candidates for progression to HN programmes.

The group of stakeholders with an interest in Access qualifications would like to see the current SGAs at Access 2 and 3 (Single, Double and Triple) being re-badged as NCs and continuing with their current credit values. The Triple SGA at Access 3 is 24 SQA credits. Members of this group also recommended that Skillstart Group Awards should continue although they may not be categorised as NCs. Skillstart, which has six SQA credits at Access 2 and nine at Access 3, doesn't fit in with the new NC framework. The group also strongly recommended that there should be a six-credit NC at Access 1.

Few groups commented separately on the need for flexibility in the design principles. Similarly, few groups commented on the proposed balance between mandatory and optional Units. Three groups thought that the proposed balance would be appropriate, but one group thought that 80% of the Group Award should be mandatory, and there were various comments suggesting that specifications should not allow too much flexibility in order to properly reflect the Group Award title and ensure that the Group Award certificates a national standard. (This may be at odds with the concern expressed in the overview session about retaining local flexibility.) Representatives of the three SWAP consortia would like to see Group Award specifications which cover a variety of subject areas, to allow flexibility for candidates and centres.

National Occupational Standards

There was a consensus that while National Occupational Standards are important, NCs should not be 'based' on them. Instead, NCs should be 'linked to', or 'reflect' or 'be underpinned by' National Occupational Standards. The Skills for Business Network felt that the relationship to NOS would vary from area to area.

Core Skills/soft skills

Many groups had lengthy and wide-ranging debates about the place of Core Skills in NCs. While two groups felt that Core Skills should be mandatory for all NCs, most were looking for a more flexible approach. Four groups suggested that Core Skills should be 'embedded' (as did representatives of SWAP consortia); while two groups felt that they should be included as appropriate and/or practical in the Group Award area. While two groups pointed out that Core Skills have been a barrier to completion of SGAs, there seemed to be general agreement that Core Skills are important. Some delegates at the SFEU SQA Co-ordinators' conference felt strongly that Core Skills should be mandatory, and pointed out that decisions on Core Skills in Group Awards should not be taken until the results of the Core Skills review/consultation are known. This point was also made strongly in an e-mail response from one college. Members of the group of stakeholders with an interest in Access qualifications welcomed the greater flexibility for including Core Skills in NCs.

Graded assessment

Few groups came to any conclusion on graded assessment. Instead, records of discussion suggest that the group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of its inclusion. It is a key design feature of SWAP programmes that they do not include graded assessment.

3.3b National Certificates: conclusions

Place and purpose of new National Certificates

There was general acceptance that there is a place for new National Certificates. While the majority questioned the need to develop National Certificates at five levels from Access 2 to Higher, there was strong support from Access stakeholders for NC provision at Access 1, 2 and 3.

Design principles

The key issue for focus groups was the lack of consistency between design principles for different levels of NCs. The majority of groups felt that the proposed credit values are too big, with 12 SQA credits being the most popular suggestion. There is not enough information to come to a conclusion on the balance of mandatory and optional Units – and this may depend on the number of credits of the NC. Access stakeholders pointed out that the design principles do not seem to take account of the current SGAs at Access level, and while use of the word ‘normally’ in design principles makes it possible for awards at this level to be developed more flexibly, it is not helpful to suggest that these awards would be outside the norm.

National Occupational Standards

While there was general agreement that National Occupational Standards are important, no-one wanted to see NCs ‘based’ on NOS – instead, NC should be ‘linked to’ or ‘reflect’ NOS.

Place of Core Skills/soft skills

Again, there seemed to be general agreement that Core Skills are important and should be included in NCs in some way. The most frequent suggestion was that Core Skills should be ‘embedded’.

Graded assessment

There were mixed views on the place of graded assessment in NCs.

3.4a Scottish Progression Awards: findings

Place and purpose of Scottish Progression Awards

Of the eight focus groups which discussed Scottish Progression Awards, four felt that there is a place for them, three groups had mixed views, and one group felt that there is no place for them. One group was strongly in favour of having Scottish Progression Awards instead of Skills for Work Courses. In additional meetings, two schools currently offering SPAs expressed support for them and had found them useful. Delegates at the Scottish Executive’s ‘Determined to Succeed – Strategic Leaders’ Conference’ were also keen to make sure that good work already done in schools with SPAs should not be lost.

Groups appeared to have difficulty working out the purpose of Scottish Progression Awards — five groups spent a considerable time discussing the overlap between Scottish Progression Awards and other qualifications (Skills for Work Courses or National Certificates). Four groups felt that they would be suitable for school pupils. While two groups mentioned their value as a stepping stone to other qualifications, two groups also pointed out that some candidates will not want to progress and will take an SPA as an end in itself.

The main progression routes identified were to employment (three groups) and SVQs (three groups).

Credit values

Only four groups came to a conclusion on this issue, and all of them felt that the proposed credit values are too large. Two groups suggested that between five and eight SQA credits would be more appropriate than the proposed five – 12 SQA credits and two other variations were suggested. One group suggested that the proposed variation is not helpful, and there should be a fixed credit value at each level.

National Occupational Standards

Few groups discussed this issue. One group (made up of employers and training providers) felt that SPAs should be closely based on National Occupational Standards, but the other three groups who recorded a conclusion felt that the relationship should not be as close as the word ‘base’ suggests, with one group pointing out that since National Occupational Standards need to be reviewed frequently, it might be impractical to base SPAs directly on NOS.

Graded assessment

All of the eight groups came to a conclusion on this issue. Four groups felt that grading would not be appropriate, with one of these suggesting that grading is not needed in a vocational context. Two groups felt that graded assessment should be included, with one group expressing the opinion that grading would be useful to employers and should be included to ensure parity of esteem. One group suggested that grading could be included if appropriate to the Group Award area. One group which did not support grading suggested that some form of integrative assessment would be useful. In separate meetings, two schools currently offering SPAs expressed support for the inclusion of graded assessment.

Title

There was no consensus on the title for this suite of Group Awards. One group supported ‘Scottish Progression Award’, but two groups suggested that ‘Scottish’ is out of line with other qualifications, and ‘National’ should be used instead. Two groups felt that use of the word ‘Progression’ would devalue the Group Awards for those who take one as an end in itself. SQA’s Higher National Key Partners Group suggested the title ‘Work Skills Development Award’.

Other issues raised

One group suggested that Core Skills should be embedded in SPAs. Two groups expressed some concern about the levels at which SPAs will be available.

3.4b Scottish Progression Awards: conclusions

Place and purpose of Scottish Progression Awards

There were mixed views about the place and purpose of SPAs within SQA’s qualifications framework.

Credit values

While few groups commented on this, it can be concluded from the comments which were made that the proposed credit values may be too large.

National Occupational Standards

There appears to be support for linking SPAs to National Occupational Standards, but there is no support for basing SPAs closely on NOS.

Graded assessment

There were mixed views on the place of graded assessment in SPAs.

Other issues raised

While there were no other issues raised by more than one group, it would be worth further investigating comments made about the place of Core Skills, and about the levels of SPAs.

3.5a Professional Development Awards: findings

Place and purpose of Professional Development Awards

There was clear support for Professional Development Awards — six of the eight groups who discussed PDAs stated that there is a clear place for them. The other two groups expressed no opinion on this.

A variety of target groups and purposes were identified. Professional development was a key theme in these. Progression routes were not identified, perhaps because they are implicit in the acceptance of their purpose in professional development.

Credit values

There was some support for widening the range of credit values – one group suggested there should be no maximum, and another group suggested that the normal range should begin at three SQA credits, but there should be no hard and fast minimum. A further group suggested that the minimum credit value should be lowered to two SQA credits. A consortium of colleges currently making proposals for revised PDAs in Computing have proposed that their revised PDAs are between three and eight SQA credits, to fit with what can be offered through evening classes one evening per week.

However, the majority (four groups) suggested that the proposed credit values are too large. Each of these groups suggested a different range of possible credit values.

National Occupational Standards

There were no strong feelings on this issue. Two groups wanted PDAs to be based on National Occupational Standards, while two groups suggested that the link should be looser than that. Two groups had no firm views. One group pointed out that there are a limited number of NOS at appropriate levels, and another group suggested that some PDAs may be linked to more than one set of NOS.

Graded assessment

There were mixed views on this issue. One group thought that graded assessment should not normally be included, but should be possible if appropriate to the area. Two groups felt that graded assessment should not be included, while a further two groups recorded mixed views. One group suggested that it should be possible for a design team

to include graded assessment if this is appropriate to the area, but if included, it should be mandatory for all candidates.

Other issues raised

There were many other issues raised, but few issues raised by more than one group. An important point is that four groups made explicit reference to welcoming the use of 'Professional' in the title. Two groups suggested that the relationship between PDAs and HNC/Ds needs to be clarified.

3.5b Professional Development Awards: conclusions

Place and purpose of Professional Development Awards

There was agreement that Professional Development Awards serve a useful purpose in certificating skills development at a professional level.

Credit values

While there was no clear consensus on this, a majority of groups felt that the proposed credit values are too large, and that the majority of PDAs would be smaller than 12 SQA Unit credits.

National Occupational Standards

There appear to be no firm views on this issue, although there is some support for linking PDAs to National Occupational Standards, without basing them on NOS too directly.

Graded assessment

There was no consensus on the place of graded assessment in PDAs.

Other issues raised

The move to emphasise, in title and design, the professional nature of these awards, was welcomed. Further work is needed to clarify the relationship between PDAs and HNC/Ds.

4 Recommendations

In summary, it is proposed that:

- ◆ Given that there is broad overall support for the proposals, development work based on the qualification titles proposed should be planned and initiated.
- ◆ Further consultation 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.
- ◆ Further work should be carried out to support implementation and help users understand the revised system of qualifications.

Further detail is given below.

Skills for Work Courses

SQA should:

- ◆ Use the proposed design principles to develop pilot Skills for Work Courses.
- ◆ Working with the Vocational Education Development Steering Group, investigate ways to support implementation of Skills for Work Courses, perhaps by providing materials and/or support mechanisms which help centres to address the management issues involved in offering these Courses.

Group Awards: National Certificates, Scottish Progression Awards and Professional Development Awards

SQA should:

- ◆ Carry out a further consultation with key stakeholders to confirm design principles for National Certificates, Scottish Profession Awards and Professional Development Awards. For each qualification, this consultation should establish:
 - levels available
 - credit values
 - the place of graded assessment

Guidance for Qualification Design Teams

SQA should:

- ◆ Investigate ways to ‘link’ Skills for Work Courses, NCs, SPAs and PDAs to National Occupational Standards, and provide guidance for Qualification Design Teams.
- ◆ Investigate ways to include Core Skills in Skills for Work Courses, NCs, SPAs and PDAs, and provide guidance for Qualification Design Teams. This work should be carried out in parallel with the review of Core Skills and will be dependent on recommendations arising from planned consultation on Core Skills.

General issues

SQA should:

- ◆ Develop a validation system for non-advanced Group Awards which ensures that specifications have national value while taking account of local needs.

- ◆ Develop a communication and marketing plan which addresses the following issues:
 - The need to clarify terminology and the purpose of each of the qualification titles.
 - Perceptions about possible lack of parity of esteem for qualifications which do not include graded assessment.
 - Current lack of understanding of progression routes through the system, including the meaning and value of SCQF levels and credit points.

Appendix 1: Overview of the proposed portfolio of qualifications

Figure 1: Qualification titles and levels

<i>SCQF level</i>	Units	Courses	Group Awards		
12	✓			PDA	SVQ 5
11	✓			PDA	
10	✓			PDA	
9	✓			PDA	SVQ 4
8	✓		HND	PDA	
7	✓	AH	HNC	PDA	SVQ 3
6	✓	H	NC	SPA	
5	✓	Int 2 S Grade Credit	NC	SPA	SVQ 2
4	✓	Int 1 S Grade General	NC	SPA	SVQ 1
3	✓	Acc 3 S Grade Foundation	NC	SPA	
2	✓	Acc 2	NC		
1	✓				

Key

Acc – Access

Int - Intermediate

H – Higher

AH – Advanced Higher

NC – National Certificate

HNC – Higher National Certificate

HND – Higher National Diploma

SPA – Scottish Progression Award

PDA – Professional Development Award

SVQ – Scottish Vocational Qualification

Figure 2: Qualification design

			Group Awards					
SCQF level	Units	Courses	SPA	NC	HNC	HND	PDA	SVQ
12	✓						✓	✓
11	✓						✓	
10	✓						✓	
9	✓						✓	
8	✓					✓	✓	✓
7	✓	4 credits			✓		✓	
6	✓	4 credits	✓	18 credits				✓
5	✓	4 credits	✓	16 credits				
4	✓	4 credits	✓	12 credits				
3	✓	3 credits	✓	12-18 credits				
2	✓	3 credits		9 –18 credits				
1	✓							
SQA Credits	0.25 – 3*	3 or 4	May be between 5-12	Different credit values at different levels	12	30	May be between 5-12	Variable
Includes graded assessment?	No	May be included	No	May be included – if included, will be in the optional section	Mandatory	Mandatory	May be included	No

* Single credit (40 hour) Units are the most common.

Appendix 2: Feedback from consultation focus groups

Summary of those consulted

The following stakeholders took part in focus groups:

Main focus group event, November 3 and 4:

Total no of stakeholders attending: 79

No attending only on Nov 3: 33

No attending only on Nov 4: 21

No attending both days: 25

November 3 2004

Type of organisation represented	Number of representatives
Secondary schools	10
FE colleges and FE organisations	8
Standard Setting Councils	3
Training providers	4
School candidates	10
Secondary sector organisations (including local authorities and teacher associations)	9
Other national organisations	7
Adult candidates	2
Scottish Executive	3
Other	2
Total	58

November 4 2004

Type of organisation represented	Number of representatives
Secondary schools	6
FE colleges	7
Standard Setting Councils	6
Training providers	3
Employers	2
School candidates	6
Secondary sector organisations (including local authorities and teacher associations)	6
Other national organisations	5
Adult candidates	1
Scottish Executive	1
HEIs	1
Other	2
Total	46

November 8 2004

Type of organisation represented: FE colleges

Number of representatives: 34

November 16 2004

Type of organisation represented: FE colleges

Number of representatives: 31

November 17 2004

Type of organisation represented: SSDA and individual Standards Setting Councils
Number of representatives: 20

November 29 2004

Type of organisation represented: HN Key Partners Group (FE college representatives)
Number of representatives: 10

Focus group discussion topics

At each event, participants were divided in focus groups of between 8 and 20 members. There were five focus group discussion topics. Across the five days of consultation events, the total number of focus group discussions of each topic were as follows:

Overview of proposals: 14
New Skills for Work Courses: 12
National Certificates: 10
Scottish Progression Awards: 8
Professional Development Awards: 7

Focus group methodology

Each focus group had between 6 and 20 members, with most having around 12 members. An SQA officer was assigned as facilitator to each group. Their role was not to express any of their own opinions or feelings on the new qualifications, but instead to help the group form and give their own feedback.

Facilitators were asked to structure discussion into three broad parts:

- ◆ looking at the factsheets and case studies
- ◆ general discussion
- ◆ discussion of the consultation questions.

A member of the group recorded the group's responses, allowing the groups themselves to control the note-taking and feedback. Facilitators were asked to ensure that final recording happened after a period of clarifying and agreeing between the group, the opinions and comments they wished to feed back.

Responses completed by group recorders have formed the basis of this collation of comments. Note: the nature of the consultation and the way the feedback was recorded means that any 'coding' and counting of answers can only be approximate, and number should be taken as indicative rather than definitive.

Summary of focus group feedback

Overview of proposals

The first focus group session asked participants to look at the overview of the proposals and comment on the proposed overall system. Discussion was wide-ranging. Comments made by more than one focus group are noted below.

Fitness for purpose

Does the proposed system meet all needs?

Are there any gaps?

Are there any overlaps?

Are any of the proposed qualifications unnecessary?

Comment	No of groups
Support the proposals	4
Concerns about progression to/from SVQ	3
Overlaps between qualifications:	5
- SPA and new Skills for Work Courses	2
- SPA and other qualification	2
- Only need one Group Award title	1

Coherence and simplicity

Does the system make sense?

Will the system be easier for users to understand?

Comment	No of groups
Current system is not well-understood and any change will not help	2
SCQF is not well-understood:	6
- Mismatch between SCQF credit points and SQA credits is confusing	2
Terminology is confusing:	2
- National Courses commonly called 'NCs'	1
- Use of term 'NCs' will be confusing to employers	1
Too many levels of NC will confuse – currently used to refer to a single level	4
The proposals need to be communicated/marketed to candidates, parents and end-users	11

Cost-effectiveness

Will the system be straightforward to implement?

Comment	No of groups
Concern about funding issues	5
Concern that candidates won't have equal access to a range of qualifications	2

Courses

Do we need both of the proposed types of National Courses?

Is it appropriate to have Courses at the same level, some of which have graded assessment, and some of which don't?

Feedback on these questions is reported at the start of feedback from focus groups concentrating on new Courses

Group Awards

Do we need all of the proposed titles?

Comment	No of groups
No – move to one category of Group Award	2
There are too many levels of NCs	9

Centres can validate locally-devised HNCs and HNDs, subject to quality controls and national systems to prevent unnecessary proliferation. Should centres be allowed to develop and validate their own SPAs, PDAs and NCs, as they do for HNCs and HNDs?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	4
No	6
Danger of proliferation	2
Local needs could be met through options	2
Validation systems should take account of college specialist provision	1

General –any other comments

Comment	No of groups
Issue of league tables/targets/performance indicators/reporting	6
Too much emphasis on differentiation by age	1
Support for principle of credit transfer	3
Concern about practicalities of credit transfer	1

New Skills for Work Courses

Twelve focus groups discussed the proposals for new, practical, ‘Skills for Work’ Courses. (Note: although all groups had constructive discussions on all of the issues, they did not always explicitly answer the questions, and so the total number of responses varies.) There were also two questions in the overview session which asked participants to discuss how well these Courses fit into the system as a whole. Responses to those questions are also reported below.

Place of these Courses**Overview session:**

Do we need both of the proposed types of Courses?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	3
Welcome development of vocational Courses	4
Good to get recognition for programmes which are currently uncertificated	2

New Courses discussion:

Is there a place for these new Courses in SQA’s qualifications framework?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	9
Should be no differentiation in title	2
Concern that there is already adequate provision	1

Who might take these Courses?

Comment	No of groups
Anyone	6
There should be a selection process for candidates wishing to do these	2
Could be used to engage the more able, or S6 candidates	2

And for what purposes?

Comment	No of groups
As a ‘taster’/ to try things out	4

In your opinion, what will be the main progression routes from these Courses?

Comment	No of groups
FE	5
Employment	4

Grading

Overview session: Is it appropriate to have Courses at the same level, some of which have graded assessment, and some of which don't?

Comment	No of groups
No	2
Mixed feelings in group	7
Comments made in support of grading:	7
- Should use the same system as Standard Grade	2
- Division between academic and vocational is unhelpful	3
Comments made against grading:	4
- 'Tasters' don't need to be graded	2
Currency is the critical aspect	6
Parity of esteem is the big issue	9

New Courses discussion: Is it appropriate that these Courses will have no graded assessment?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	3
No	1
Mixed views in group	3
No grading sends the wrong message	2
Need to investigate employer attitudes to grading – it is seen as a barrier to completion of the qualification by some, while others view it as providing useful information to help differentiate candidates	1 (Skills for Business network)

Course design

Is the proposed credit value/length of the Courses appropriate?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	4
No – 120 hours would be better	1
Mixed views in group	1

In particular, is it appropriate to retain the existing three-Unit structure at levels 2 and 3 (Access 2 and 3)?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	2
No – make them 160 hours same as other levels	1

Is it appropriate to link Courses for school pupils to National Occupational Standards?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	4
No	1

If so, what should the nature of that 'link' be?

Comment	No of groups
A good match	1
Not too direct	1
Will vary in different areas	1

In what ways should the Courses develop and/or certificate Core Skills and other soft skills?

Comment	No of groups
Core Skills are important	4
Should be embedded	5

Should be more than just the five defined Core Skills	2
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General issues – the following comments were raised in both overview and new Course focus groups

Any other comments

Comment	No of groups
Concern that they may be targeted at the less able	5
Concern about school-college partnership issues. Issues raised included: - Capacity and accommodation - Transport/travel – time and costs - Staffing/staff development/qualifications - Timetabling - Guidance/discipline/referral systems - Teaching methods - Insurance - Health and safety - Difficulties for young people adjusting to two different learning environments	12
Concern about placement issues	2
Retain focus on the practical – not too much simulation or ‘theory’	2
Key is to ensure that parents value vocational education/new Courses	2

National Certificates

Is there a place for these new National Certificates in SQA’s qualifications framework? (See also the question in the overview session which asked if there is a need for all types of Group Award)

Comment	No of groups
Yes	5

Who might take these National Certificates?

A variety of suggestions were made, but none were made by more than one group.

And for what purposes?

Comment	No of groups
To provide the underpinning knowledge for and SVQ/ MA	3

In your opinion, what will be the main progression routes from these National Certificates?

Comment	No of groups
To other levels of NC	2
To HN	6
To employment	2

Are the proposed credit values appropriate?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	1
The credit values should be more consistent across levels	7
Too big: - Should be 16 - Should be 15 - Should be 12 - Suggested credit value is too much for	7 1 1 5 3

part-time candidates	
Too small – more credits needed to prepare candidates to progress to HN	1

In particular, is there enough flexibility in the proposed credit values?

There was very little explicit comment in answer to this question. One group supported using minimum and maximum values at each level.

Is the proposed balance between mandatory and optional Units appropriate?

Very few groups answered this question. Three groups felt that the proposed balance is appropriate. Others expressed varying views about whether/how flexibility should be included in the award specification.

Is it appropriate to base National Certificates on National Occupational Standards?

Comment	No of groups
Not to 'base', but to 'link/ reflect/underpin'	5

In what ways should National Certificates develop and/or certificate Core Skills and other soft skills?

Comment	No of groups
Core Skills should be embedded	4
Core Skills should be mandatory for all NCs	2
Should be included as appropriate/practical in the area	2
Core Skills are a barrier to achievement	2

Is it appropriate for graded assessment to be optional within National Certificates?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	2
Experience of graded assessment would be useful for those progressing to HN	2

In general, groups had wide-ranging discussions about the advantages and disadvantages of graded assessment. Few groups were able to record a conclusion.

Any other comments?

Comment	No of groups
Most college-based NCs are around Int 2 level	2
Concern about place of existing NC programmes	2
If part-time and full-time programmes diverse, or there are too many different levels, some colleges may find it difficult to achieve viable class sizes	2

There was a wide variety of different comments about the proposed introduction and design of NCs. Many of these comments related to practical issues – group members used the opportunity to work through the issues and how they might deal with them.

Scottish Progression Awards

Eight focus groups discussed Scottish Progression Awards. Five of the groups spent some time discussing the relationship between SPAs and other qualifications (Skills for Work Courses or NCs), and so did not answer all of the key questions on the design of SPAs. Because of the low number of responses, comments made by one or more group are recorded below.

Is there a place for SPAs in SQA's qualifications framework?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	4
No	1
Not sure/mixed views	3
Would prefer to have SPAs than Skills for Work Courses	1

Who might take SPAs?

For several groups, discussion of this question formed part of their discussion of how SPAs would fit with other qualifications, and they reached no conclusions.

Comment	No of groups
School pupils	4

And for what purposes?

Comment	No of groups
As a stepping stone	2
As an end in itself	2
To meet employment needs	1
To add value to an NC programme	1
To develop soft skills	1
Taking two SPAs together to form a full-time programme	1

In your opinion, what will be the main progression routes from SPAs?

Comment	No of groups
To SVQ	3
To employment	3
To NC	2
To PDA	1

Are the proposed credit values appropriate?

Comment	No of groups
No, the awards are too big:	4
- Should be 5 – 8 credits	2
- Should normally be 3 – 6 credits (but could go down to 1)	1
- Should be 4 – 10 credits	1
Should be the same at a given level – no variation	1

Is it appropriate to base Scottish Progression Awards on National Occupational Standards?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	1
Yes, but don't base too closely	3
NOS change too frequently for this to be practical	1

If so, what should the nature of the link be?

Comment	No of groups
Reflect/ underpin	2
Don't dilute NOS	1

Should it be possible to include graded assessment, if this is appropriate to the area?

Comment	No of groups
No	4
If appropriate in area	1
Yes	2
Grading not needed in a vocational context	1
Should be graded for parity of esteem	1
Integrative assessment could be used	1

SPAs will encompass the purposes currently served by Scottish Progression Awards (SPAs) and Professional Development Awards (PDAs) at the lower levels. Should we: a use the title Scottish Progression Award?

OR

b any other suggestion?

Comment	No of groups
Use Scottish Progression Award	1
Don't use 'Scottish' – use 'National' instead	2
Don't use 'Progression'	2
Work Skills Development Award	1
Support use of different titles to differentiate purpose/ place on the continuum	1

Any other comments?

Comment	No of groups
Core Skills should be embedded in SPAs	1
Should not go up to SCQF level 6	1
Leaves a gap below SCQF level 3 – use Skillstart to bridge this gap and address social inclusion issues	1

Professional Development Awards

Eight focus groups discussed Professional Development Awards. However, few of the groups had much experience/knowledge of qualifications at this level, and feedback was limited. Because of the low number of responses, comments made by one or more group are recorded below.

Is there a place for these new PDAs in SQA's qualifications framework?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	6
Should start at SCQF level 6	1

Who might take these Professional Development Awards?

Comment	No of groups
Part- time students	1
Graduates	1
Those in employment	1

And for what purposes?

Comment	No of groups
CPD	1
To top up skills	1
To develop in a profession	1
To progress part-time from HNC	1

In your opinion, what will be the main progression routes from these Awards?

No group identified any particular progression route.

Are the proposed credit values appropriate?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	1
No, too big:	4
- Should be 3 – 6	1
- Should be 5 – 7	1
- Should be 5 – 8	1
- Should be 4 – 10	1
Should be appropriate to area – with no maximum	1
Should be 2 – 12 credits	1

Is it appropriate to base Professional Development Awards on National Occupational Standards? If so, what should the nature of the link be?

Comment	No of groups
Yes	2
No firm view	2
Don't base too closely/ reflect	2
There are a limited number of NOS at these levels	1
Some PDAs may be linked to more than one set of NOS	1

Should it be possible to include graded assessment, if this is appropriate to the Group Award area?

Comment	No of groups
No	2
Mixed views	2
Not normally, but should be possible if appropriate to area	1
Should be optional for design team, but mandatory for candidates if included	1

Any other comments?

Comment	No of groups
The reference to 'Professional' in the title and design principles is helpful	4
Need to clarify relationship with HNC/D	2
Concern about lack of optional Units	1
Core Skills should be included if appropriate to area	1
Any proposals/ comments on PDAs are dependant on existence of SPAs – if design of SPAs changes, then design of PDAs will need to be reviewed	1

Appendix 3: Feedback from consultation at other events and submitted by e-mail or post

Consultation at other events

FE Principals' Forum, 8 September 2004

Around 30 FE Principals attended this meeting, and heard a 20 minute presentation on the portfolio review, followed by 40 minutes for discussion. Key issues raised during the discussion included:

- ◆ Support for the flexibility of the proposed system
- ◆ Whether validation of locally devised Group Awards would be possible
- ◆ Whether new practical Courses should include graded assessment
- ◆ A warning that it will be important not to water down vocational education
- ◆ A feeling that the proposals place too much emphasis on the age of candidates.

Determined to Succeed Strategic Leaders Conference, 13 September 2004

This conference, which was attended mainly by Education Authority advisors or Quality Improvement Officers, included a presentation on the portfolio review, with particular emphasis on new practical Courses. Delegates had an opportunity to discuss the proposals. Their concerns were:

- ◆ Recognition of industry is very important, as is recording of practical Courses on the SQC
- ◆ On the other hand, innovative out-of-school work should not be stifled by any new development, and there should be a way of recording and reporting out-of-school activity without entering candidates for a Course
- ◆ Education authorities should be able to retain a degree of flexibility to adapt to local needs
- ◆ Concern about the place of SPAs, which are well-established in some authorities.

SASScot conference, 21 September 2004

This conference was attended by approximately 70 delegates involved in education and training. There was a fifteen minute presentation on the portfolio review, followed by an opportunity for a small group of delegates to discuss the proposals in detail. Those who attended the workshop raised the following points:

- ◆ Some concern about the titles 'Scottish Progression Award' and 'National Certificate'
- ◆ There was a concern that the lack of grading in new, practical Courses, would affect parity of esteem
- ◆ Delegates suggested that the areas for development should be based on sound needs analysis
- ◆ There may be a need for National Certificates to be locally developed to meet labour market needs
- ◆ Possible purposes of, and progression routes from, SPAs, were debated.

Meeting between Customer Account Manager and DHT, St Thomas Aquinas Secondary, Glasgow, 6 October 2004

This school, which offers SPAs, took the opportunity of a planned meeting to discuss the proposals. Key points made were:

- ◆ The school is happy with SPAs, and like the title
- ◆ SPAs are aimed at pupils with a range of abilities, although not those planning to progress to university
- ◆ He is happy with the proposed credit values of SPAs, and the proposal to base them on National Occupational Standards – they should relate directly to SVQs. It should be possible to include graded assessment.
- ◆ The main progression route will be to college or a Modern Apprenticeship.

Meeting between Customer Account Manager and DHT, Springburn Academy, Glasgow, 6 October 2004

This school, which offers SPAs to a small number of pupils, took the opportunity of a planned meeting to discuss the proposals. Key points made were:

- ◆ The school is happy with SPAs, and like the title
- ◆ SPAs are aimed at pupils who are 'less academic'
- ◆ He is happy with the proposed credit values of SPAs, and the proposal to base them on National Occupational Standards. He feels that it should be possible to include graded assessment.

SFEU SQA Co-ordinators' Conference, 26 October 2004

Sixteen SQA co-ordinators from colleges across Scotland attended this conference. A detailed presentation on the proposals was made, followed by around 40 minutes for discussion. The main issues raised were:

- ◆ Concern that Courses with no grading will be seen as of lesser value and concern that candidates doing practical Courses would not be given an opportunity to gain credit for the quality of what they are doing
- ◆ Difficulty in timetabling 160 hours for school pupils in colleges, because of travelling time
- ◆ The proposals for PDAs were thought to be too flexible
- ◆ Core Skills should not be optional in NCs – the findings of the Core Skills review/ consultation should be considered before making any decisions about Core Skills.

Concerns were expressed by one or two delegates. Others expressed strong overall support for the proposals.

SQA staff seminar, 27 October 2004

Seventeen SQA officers from across the organisation responded to an invitation to hear a presentation about the portfolio review and have a chance to discuss the proposals. The seminar lasted around 2 hours 30 minutes in total. Staff provided detailed feedback. Key points raised included:

New Courses

- ◆ Whether there would be Courses at Access 1
- ◆ Support for three-credit Courses at Access 2 and 3
- ◆ Concern that timetabling 160 hours may be a difficulty at other levels
- ◆ Strong concerns about the lack of grading: issue of UCAS points; creation of an academic/ vocational divide
- ◆ The need for marketing of the new Courses to parents, education authorities, and Careers staff – and to emphasise that although their primary purpose is to provide skills for work, they will also be of benefit/ use to those intended to progress to higher education
- ◆ The need for clear mapping to National Occupational Standards and soft skills so that Arrangements documents can give an overview of what each Course covers
- ◆ The issue was raised of the practicality of linking Courses to NOS, and the need for a system which would respond when NOS are revised/ updated. Since some Courses may be linked to more than one set of NOS, there would be a potentially difficult tracking job to do
- ◆ Assessment and quality assurance issues were also seen as keys to the success of new qualifications

NCs

- ◆ Issues were raised about the design principles for NCs, and there was some debate over whether these are simple enough. Proposed credit values were questioned.
- ◆ The place of Access Group Awards will need to be clarified
- ◆ Marketing/communication will be very important.

Meeting with representatives of the Scottish Wider Access Programme (SWAP), 19 November 2004

An SQA officer met with one representative from each of the three SWAP consortia and one representative who works for both SWAP (West) and a college delivering SWAP programmes, to discuss how the proposed design principles for NCs could be applied to SWAP programmes. (Note: this was the third discussion on this topic, and representatives had investigated possibilities and developed proposals between meetings). The key issues for SWAP are:

- ◆ They see a real place for NCs providing a national, over-arching certificate for SWAP programmes. This would be especially useful for candidates who do not immediately take up their guaranteed university place.
- ◆ SWAP would prefer NC at Higher to be 16 credits, but 12 credits would be OK - would prefer not to have an 18 credit NC.
- ◆ The Group Award should encompass various levels, but have a high level exit point, and cover a variety of subject areas, to allow flexibility for candidates and centres.
- ◆ SWAP candidates do not complete any graded or external assessment
- ◆ Core Skills would be very important, but would largely be embedded

FE Strategic Forum, 23 November 2004

The FE Strategic Forum is a key stakeholder group for SQA. At their meeting on 23 November, they were provided with an update on the consultation and given an opportunity to comment on the proposals. There were seven members present. Members commented on a range of issues including:

- ◆ the need for Units for use with employed students
- ◆ progression out of , and routes to, awards are varied and diverse.
- ◆ titles of Courses and SPAs.

Members reported that the college sector were supportive of the consultations to date.

Meeting with Access stakeholders, 30 November 2004

A meeting was held between SQA officers and stakeholder offering qualifications at Access level. Two representatives from schools (including the Convenor of the Access Assessment Panel) and one representative from an FE college attended the meeting. Two further school representatives submitted written comments which were incorporated into the discussion and the note of the meeting.

A 20 minute presentation on the portfolio review was delivered, followed by approximately 40 minutes each to discuss on Skills for Work Courses and National Certificates. The following points were made:

Courses

- ◆ Members welcomed the re-badging of 'Clusters' as 'Courses' - still 3 credits and no external assessment at Access 2 and 3
- ◆ Members welcomed the Skills for Work Courses but felt that the information on them must make clear that they would also be very suitable for students in colleges working at Access level
- ◆ There were certain concerns regarding those candidates with significant needs – it may be that they would be disbarred from some or all of these proposed Courses, and the suggestion was made that, following models used in some centres, there might be general Skills for Work Courses about skills surrounding work
- ◆ Would it be possible to create Access courses which retain the existing elements, but are largely general with specialization coming in at a later stage?

NCs

- ◆ National Certificates were welcomed

- ◆ Members felt that information on NCs must make clear that NCs at Access level will be offered widely in special schools, secondary schools and colleges.
- ◆ Members welcomed the greater flexibility for including Core Skills in NCs.
- ◆ Members would like to see the current SGAs at Access 2 and 3 (Single, Double and Triple) continuing with their current credit values as general NCs. The Triple SGA at Access 3 is 24 credits
- ◆ Members of the group also felt that the design principle that NCs should ‘normally be based on National Occupational Standards’ is not helpful. Since, at Access 1 and 2, National Occupational Standards are going to be difficult, if not impossible to incorporate, could the awards exist without such a requirement?
- ◆ Members recommended that Skillstart Group Awards should continue although they may not be categorised as NCs. Skillstart, which has 6 credits at Access 2 and 9 at Access 3, doesn’t fit in with the new NC framework.
- ◆ Members strongly recommended that there should be a 6 credit NC at Access 1 comprising Access 1 Independent units and possibly some Access 1 Derived units.
- ◆ Overall there are some concerns that NCs at Access 1, 2 and 3 may not meet all the given design principles for NCs which seem to be pitched at a more vocational level – can they still be called NCs?

General issues

- ◆ Communicating messages about the new provision to students, practitioners and parents and employers must be effective.
- ◆ How would the public keep track of the number of new, similar names?
- ◆ Core Skills seem to be embedded or signposted – this is good.
- ◆ Is it possible to avoid the use of words such as ‘normally,’ when describing qualifications, since this is likely to suggest that those which do not conform to such a ‘norm’ – generally Access qualifications - are ‘abnormal’?

Feedback submitted by e-mail

Nine stakeholder group submitted feedback by e-mail.

Consortium of colleges offering PDAs in Computing – submitted 25 October 2004

The consortia’s proposals for revised PDAs in Computing were offered as comment on the proposed design principles. The proposed revised PDAs in Computing are:

- ◆ between 3 and 8 credits to fit with part-time programmes, delivered one evening per week
- ◆ at SCQF levels 7 and above
- ◆ subsets of HNC/Ds.

Dean of Faculty, Glasgow College of Building and Printing – submitted 10 November 2004

Comments related to proposals for Core Skills in new qualifications:

- ◆ Strong concern about major change to Core Skills philosophy and dilution of Core Skills development without detailed consultation with stakeholders
- ◆ May have a knock-on effect on HNs, where the assumption is that candidates will enter programmes with fairly well-developed Core Skills
- ◆ Core Skills are key to employability

Learning Teaching Scotland – submitted 12 November 2004

- ◆ The responses of LTS staff to the proposals were generally positive
- ◆ There were concerns about the complexity of the proposals for Group Awards, and about use of the title ‘National Certificate’
- ◆ Some concerns about lack of grading in National Certificates
- ◆ Concern that candidates may not have equal access to the range of qualifications

Learning and Teaching Management Group, Stevenson College – submitted 26 November 2004

Group Awards

- ◆ Proposals for new and revised NCs, SPAs and PDAs endorsed as desirable and leading to a more coherent and understandable structure
- ◆ Will National Certificates mean colleges incur additional certification charges?

New Courses

- ◆ Target market would be 14 – 16 year olds, probably the less academic, mainly in school-college partnerships
- ◆ Danger of loss of parity of esteem, but a positive step to offer certificated achievement to this group
- ◆ Purpose would be to give opportunity to sample a variety of practical areas
- ◆ Progression would be to SPAs, and/or employment/training
- ◆ Important to embed Core Skills

Principal, Stevenson College, member of HNKPG

- ◆ Questions re whether employers will understand system; use of SCQF levels; mixture of Courses with grading and Courses without grading
- ◆ Suggestion that using one title for different levels of National Certificate will be confusing
- ◆ Would like to see a move away from categorising provision by age

Skills for Logistics Standards Setting Council – submitted 26 November 2004

Overview

- ◆ General support for the principles and proposals
- ◆ Concern that understanding of the system would depend on understanding of the SCQF – few employers in the logistics sector are aware of the SCQF
- ◆ When the revisions are made, there should be no major changes to qualification titles for some time
- ◆ Concern about principle of ‘nesting’ of qualifications within each other – the needs of different target groups might make this impractical
- ◆ SQA should work with SSCs to ensure that qualifications are appropriate and meet sectoral needs
- ◆ Welcome increased emphasis on designing qualifications to ensure progression in a sector

New Courses

- ◆ Support for development of two types of National Course
- ◆ Not sure how employers would feel about lack of grading – suspect that employers would want grading – also parity of esteem issue

Group Awards

- ◆ Would prefer to see a central validation system for NCs, SPAs and PDAs in order to avoid proliferation of similar awards, which would make the system more confusing for employers

Assistant Adviser 14+, Shetland Education Service – submitted 29 November 2004

New Courses

- ◆ There is a place for the proposed new Courses – a need to provide vocationally focussed choices in the curriculum. They will be a welcome addition to the curriculum, and will probably be offered as well as SPAs, which have been very successful and would still have a market in schools in Shetland
- ◆ Important that the Courses are not targeted at the less able, therefore should be available up to SCQF level 6
- ◆ In Shetland, SPAs are being piloted with candidates doing Standard Grades at General/Credit level

- ◆ Currently run an uncertificated programme for pupils at risk of exclusion – new Courses might be useful for this group, as well as for candidates with Additional Support Needs working at Access level
- ◆ The main progression routes will be into further education or Modern Apprenticeships, but the Courses will also be useful for those progressing in other routes – e.g. a practical Course in Aquaculture could be useful for further study of the sciences
- ◆ For some pupils, taking the Course will help them to decide a career choice – perhaps deciding not to pursue a career in a particular sector
- ◆ The proposed credit values are appropriate
- ◆ The Courses should reflect National Occupational Standards

Langside College, centre response – submitted 30 November 2004

- ◆ Generally welcome proposals, especially the increase in school links, the increase in subjects, and the NCs
- ◆ Concern about parity of esteem for Courses which do not have grading
- ◆ System is not yet simple enough, and will need a publicity exercise to explain it to people
- ◆ There are too many levels of NCs – NCs should lead to HNCs, so the lower levels are not appropriate
- ◆ The credit value of NCs should be smaller

Appendix 4: Overview of the current portfolio of qualifications

Currently, SQA offers a range of qualifications:

'Tier'	Qualification types/ titles/ categories available	Notes on design
Units	National Units	Available at levels 1 – 7 (a very small number of unlevelled Units remain) Can be 10, 20, 40, 60, 80 or 120 hours in length
	Higher National Units	Normally at levels 5 – 9, but can be at higher or lower levels Normally 40 hours in length (or multiples of 40)
	Group award Graded Units	Normally at levels 7 and 8 Can be 40 or 80 hours in length
	Workplace Units	No credit value or notional design length at present
Courses and clusters	Standard Grade	Available at levels 3, 4 and 5 Designed for a two year programme in S3-4 – usually 180-240 hours in length Made up of assessable elements – usually 3 of these – each element graded (1 – 7) and overall grade given
	National Courses	Available at levels 3 – 7 3 Unit credits + 1 graded Course assessment (question paper, project, coursework, etc)
	Project-based National Courses	Available at levels 4 - 6 3 Unit credits + 1 graded Course assessment (project, assignment or case study)
	National Clusters	Available at levels 2 and 3 3 Unit credits
	National Certificate Clusters	Can be at a variety of levels 3 Unit credits
Group Awards	Skillstart	Access 2 – 6 credits Access 3 – 9 credits

Scottish Progression Awards	Can use National or SVQ Units Vary in design length Currently available at levels 4, 5 and 6
National Certificate Group Awards	No fixed design rules
Scottish Group Awards	Use National Units, but credit transfer from other qualifications possible See table below for details of design
General Scottish Vocational Qualifications	These were the predecessor qualifications of SGAs, and are still available. Their design varies depending on level.
Higher National Certificates and Diplomas	Normally use HN Units - include Units and group award Graded Units HNC – Group Award at level 7, 12 credits HND – Group Award at level 8, 30 credits
Professional Development Awards	No rules on level of Group Award Known as: Certificates (can use any Unit, no rules on credit value) Diplomas (use HN Units, normally 6-12 credits) Advanced Certificates (use HN Units, normally 10 or more credits) Advanced Diplomas (use HN Units, normally 12 or more credits)
Workplace Professional Development Awards	Can use any Unit No rules on credit value or level
SVQs	Use workplace Units - Units have no notional length/defined credit value Vary in design rules, eg number of Units, size of mandatory and optional sections
Customised Awards	Designed for an individual customer No fixed design rules

Summary of minimum requirements for SGAs

Level of SGA	Credits	Courses	Core Skills*
Advanced Higher	20 credits, inc 8 at Higher	3 AH Courses (12 credits)	3 at Higher, and 2 may be at Int 2**
Higher	20 credits, inc 8 at Int 2	3 Higher Courses (12 credits)	All at Int 2
Int 2	16 credits, inc 8 at Int 1	2 Int 2 Courses (8 credits)	All at Int 1
Int 1	16 credits, inc 8 at Access 3	2 Int 1 Courses (8 credits)	All at Access 3
Access 3	Single: 12 credits - 6 at Access 3 +6 at Access 2 Double: 18 credits - 12 at Access 3 + 6 at Access 2 Triple: 24 credits - 18 at Access 3 + 6 at Access 2	Not applicable	All at Access 2
Access 2	Single: 9 credits at Access 2 Double : 14 credits at Access 2 Triple: 18 credits at Access 2	Not applicable	All at Access 2

*This column gives the requirement of general SGAs. Named SGAs may need specific Core Skills to be achieved at higher levels.

**These cannot count towards the full 20 credits, as SGAs cannot be composed of more than 2 levels

Appendix 5: Uptake

Overall uptake for each qualification type

(Source: SQA Statistical Digest 2003)

Table 1: Entries for National Units and Group Awards, 2003

Qualification	Entries
National Units	1,461,605
General Scottish Vocational Qualifications (GSVQ)	843
National Certificate Group Awards (NCGA)	2,893
National Certificate Clusters (NCC)	81
Scottish Group Awards (SGA)	3,973
Scottish Progression Awards (SPA)	642

- ◆ SPA – Although numbers remain relatively low, there was a significant rise in entries (up by 50%).

Table 2: Entries for Access Clusters, 2002 and 2003

Qualification	Entries	
	2002	2003
Access 2 Clusters	1,687	2,264
Access 3 Clusters	3,567	9,154

- ◆ There was a 34% increase in Access 2 entries in 2003
- ◆ There was an even greater increase in Access 3 entries in 2003 (157%).

Table 3: Entries and number of candidates entered for Standard Grade and National Courses, 2003

Qualification	Entries		No. of Candidates 2003
	2002	2003	
Standard Grade*	456,288	453,450	63,416
Intermediate 1	20,352	24,613	17,693
Intermediate 2	67,509	72,327	38,698
Higher	164,004	166,885	59,298
Advanced Higher	15,749	16,998	10,937

* Entries exclude the Writing options of Modern Languages and Gaelic (Learners)

Table 4: Entries for Higher National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications, 2003

Qualification	Entries
Higher National Units	377,412
Higher National Certificates	18,168
Higher National Diplomas	12,727
Professional Development Awards	2,178
Scottish Vocational Qualifications	39,816
Workplace- Professional Development Awards	9,498

- ◆ PDA entries increased by 6%

Uptake of Scottish Group Awards

Table 5: SGA entries for session 2002–03

SGA title	Level	No of entries
– Single	Acc 2	126
– Double	Acc 2	42
– Triple	Acc 2	30
– Single	Acc 3	50
– Double	Acc 3	14
– Triple	Acc 3	16
General	Int 1	214
General	Int 2	72
General	Higher	89
Art and Design	Int 2	10
Art and Design	Higher	4
Arts	Higher	103
Arts – Creative Arts	Higher	19
Arts – Modern Languages	Higher	9
Arts – Social Sciences	Higher	63
Business	Int 2	258
Business	Higher	52
Care	Int 2	619
Care – Health Care	Higher	190
Care – Social Care	Higher	118
Communication and Media	Int 2	14
Communication and Media	Higher	25
Computing and Information Technology	Int 2	596
Computing and Information Technology	Higher	17
Construction	Int 2	51
Engineering	Int 2	167
Hospitality	Int 2	200
Hospitality	Higher	2
Hospitality – Professional Cookery	Higher	3
Land and Environment	Int 2	38
Science	Int 2	107
Science	Higher	161
Social Sciences	Int 2	76
Sport and Leisure	Int 2	1
Sport and Leisure	Higher	59
Technology	Int 2	25
Technology	Higher	81
Travel and Tourism	Int 2	90
Travel and Tourism – Retail Travel	Higher	26

Uptake of Project-based National Courses

Table 6: Entries for Project-based National Courses at Intermediate 2, 2002-03

Course title	No of entries
Care Issues for Society	405
Construction Industry Practice	25
Crop Establishment	0
Electrical Installation Fundamentals	0
Fish Husbandry	0
Fitness and Exercise	21
Forestry Practice	0
Health and Safety in Care Settings	2,156
Investigating Fish Rearing Systems	0
Investigating the Natural Environment	0
Leading Sports Activities	9
Livestock Production	0
Plant Propagation	6
Selling Overseas Tourist Destinations	77

Table 7: Entries for Project-based National Courses at Higher, 2002-03

Course title	No of entries
Advertising, Marketing and Public Relations	11
Beauty: Beauty Care	0
Care Practice	438
Dance Practice	31
Design	51
Early Years Care and Education	272
Experiential Approaches to Early Years Care and Education	11
Fitness and Exercise	60
Food Production Supervision	1
Hairdressing: Principles of Colouring Hair	11
Media Literacy	0
Mental Health Care	282
Photography for the Media	50
Professional Patisserie	42
Quantity Surveying	27
Retail Travel	26
Selling Scheduled Air Travel	14
Sports Coaching Studies	45
Sports Organisation	14
Structural Engineering	5
Visual Arts	20