

Computer-aided assessment

The Forum discussed a draft strategy which SQA intended to finalise for publication in summer 2003. At present it is being discussed with a range of stakeholders and working groups, including SFEU, Scottish Enterprise, Coleg and 11 colleges.

The strategy has five strategic aims relating to:

- flexibility
- accessibility
- cost effectiveness and practicability
- enhanced validity and reliability
- supporting learners through feedback and reporting

and is developed in four strands:

- item-banking
- applications of scanning and computer technology to marking and quality assurance
- e-moderation using e-portfolios
- online assessment.

Members of the Forum raised issues concerning:

- the need for the strategy to take account of the pace of change in FE
- the advantages and disadvantages of assessment banks – they need to be responsive to change and to local needs
- credibility of computer-aided assessment as against marker/examiner judgement
- the need to ensure that computer-aided assessment did not distort the intrinsic values of specific qualifications
- the need for partnership and piloting
- the extent to which computer-aided assessment could be used to enhance the quality of learning

Members were particularly enthusiastic about an approach which would encourage colleges to join in pilot activity, either as individual institutions or as part of a consortium.

The Forum felt that there was a need for a national steering group to link up initiatives and for joined up thinking on matters such as investment.

New SQA General Manager for HNs and SVQs

Neil Robertson, formerly of SFEU and CGLI has been appointed General Manager for vocational qualifications.

HN Update

The ASC/SQA Forums and the October conference went well. The feeling which emerged was that SQA should concentrate on good design principles and keep design rules to the minimum compatible with maintaining a recognisable brand identity.

The Forum discussed costs for development and implementation, which could be substantial. SEELLD has agreed to meet the sums requested by SQA for marketing and staff development in 2002-3, 2003-4.

FE Statistics

A number of collaborative SFEU-SQA activities are taking place between October 2002-March 2003. These include research into attainment in National Courses in FE, gathering unit achievement benchmarking data and a consultation exercise with the FE sector to identify additional sectoral data and services that SQA should consider making available to support quality improvement.

Review of Core skills

At present core skills certification is based on a single framework but involves different means of delivery:

- dedicated core skills units
- embedded core skills
- signposting opportunities for core skills development

There are difficulties associated with each of these approaches, and it is not clear at present which of these is most effective in improving core skills, however, SQA is currently researching the situation and considering the way forward for core skills certification.

Separate investigations are currently being undertaken into the attitudes of employers, HE, and candidates to help re-establish the purpose and aims of certificating core skills and the certification mechanisms which would meet these.

This research will be completed in early March and proposals for certification will be brought forward at that time for discussion with the Scottish Executive and other stakeholders. It is planned to undertake formal consultation in Autumn 2003.

Sector Skills Councils

A new network of Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) has been charged to lead the skills and productivity drive in industry of business sectors throughout the UK. Their work will be underpinned by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). In Scotland SCOTTO will continue under the new name of the Sector Skills Alliance, Scotland (SSAScot).

Five trailblazer SSCs have been established. They are:

- Skillfast UK – apparel, footwear and textiles
- Skillsmart – retail
- Skillset – audio-visual industries
- Lantra – the environment and land-based sector
- Cogent – oil and gas extraction, chemicals manufacturing and petroleum industries

The next five potential SSCs are in

- Constuction
- Process and manufacturing
- IT, telecommunications and contact centres
- Hospitality, leisure and travel & tourism
- Technology, engineering and science

Together these 10 areas cover 50% of the workforce.

Although the bodies formerly known as NTOs were no longer licensed, the network is still in place and can be consulted. There will not be a direct correlation between NTOs and the new SSCs and for some generic, cross-sectoral areas, such as administration and customer service, there will not be an SSC – SSDA would act on their behalf.

FENTO is still functioning as a company in its own right and negotiations are continuing on its replacement body. The establishment of a post-16 SSC, which would take in FE, HE, community education and private training providers, is being investigated.

The college sector continues to account for a high proportion of SVQ entries – 21,000 out of 51,000 and 3,500 out of 5,500 workplace-assessed PDAs.

From FE to the OU

Members' attention was drawn to a recent Open University publication, *Routes to a degree*. This encouraged students to build on HNCs and HNDs and set out clearly and in very positive terms what credit will be offered to holders of HNCs and HNDs.

Copies of this are available from The Open University in Scotland, 10 Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh EH3 7QJ and shorter versions of the information appear on the OU website – www.open.ac.uk.

Lifelong learning report

The Forum discussed the recommendations in the final report of the Parliamentary Committee on Enterprise and Lifelong Learning published on 28 October. Members commented that:

- the report had lost the clarity and focus of the interim report, but there was more on part-time learners
- the language of lifelong learning would be SCQF levels and credits, but these were not yet widely understood
- if the entitlement proposals were accepted, there would be a need for urgent debate on prioritisation and the intervening milestones
- the report put too much emphasis on full qualifications – in future SQA and FE would be developing a system which took account of shorter episodes of learning
- SQA should consider developing a general award based on a set number of credits

SCQF

In future information about changes relating to the SCQF will appear on a new website which should be in operation in January 2003.

Review of the SQC

A review of the SQC had originally been planned as part of the NQ Review but it had been re-scoped to take in wider issues.

Members considered a number of areas which the review would touch on, including:

- the importance of reporting unit achievement
- the relationship between National Clusters and National Courses
- recording SCQF information on the SQC
- the form of the SQC and the role of the cumulative certificate
- the possible future use of smartcard technology and web access

Future business

In addition to matters carried forward from earlier meetings, the following matters will be discussed at future meetings: Arrangements for SQA's Advisory Council, FE engagement in the implementation of the SCQF and SQA's preparations for diet 2003.

The next meeting of the Forum will be on 7 February 2003