

Audit Meeting Report

Awarding body:

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)

Date of audit:

24, 25 and 28 March 2011



Note:

Confidential or commercially sensitive information gathered during SQA Accreditation monitoring activities is treated in the strictest confidence. However:

- ◆ The findings of this report will be presented to SQA's Accreditation Committee and made available to colleagues from the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS), the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), with a view to the contents informing future accreditation and re-accreditation submissions by the awarding body.
- ◆ The report will be published on SQA Accreditation's website.

Please note that SQA Accreditation monitoring activity is conducted on a sampling basis. As a consequence, not all aspects of an awarding body's performance in quality assurance, contract compliance, implementation, awarding of certificates, and fee arrangements have been considered in this report to the same depth.

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Executive summary

Purpose and scope of audit

This was the eleventh audit of SQA since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation. The audit was designed to review and evaluate SQA's strategies, policies and procedures and ensure compliance with SQA's Accreditation's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*.

As this was a full audit of SQA all criteria were included within the scope of the audit.

Background

SQA was approved by SQA Accreditation as an awarding body during 1999. SQA is a nationally recognised awarding body dealing with qualifications spanning all industries in Scotland.

SQA has specific registration to ISO27001:2005 (restricted to Information Systems, Question Paper Unit and Human Resources).

Audit outcome

As a result of the audit and post audit activities, 3 non-compliances have been recorded and 4 observations noted.

The 3 non-compliance and 4 observations form SQA's action plan: March 2011.

Awarding body feedback

The awarding body representatives commented that:

- SQA Accreditation's forms for qualification approval have areas of duplication

SQA Accreditation will review its qualification approval forms and identify areas of unnecessary duplication and remove them.

- SQA Accreditation's document management could be improved. SQA Accreditation retains a large amount of redundant documentation on SQA

SQA Accreditation will review its systems and process for document retention with the view to identifying and removing redundant information from its archives.

Discussion

Areas of good practice

The following areas of good practice were noted:

Centre risk management

SQA is currently piloting a centre risk management model. The model is designed to allow for the identification, assessment, and prioritization of risks at centre level and allow the targeting of resources where they are most needed.

The project team aim to complete the pilot by August 2012 after which the process will be rolled out across all centres. There is a slightly different model for colleges and it is the project team's intention that the college model will go live during 2013.

The model adopts a risk based approach, is intelligence led and is underpinned by quality assurance criteria. Individual quality assurance criteria have been rated to show the potential impact of non-compliance. A range of supporting documentation has been developed. The documents include process maps, guidance for centres and guidance for External Verifiers.

The project is an example of good practice on a number of levels, including project management.

Standardisation

SQA offers a large number of qualifications of all types; it has several hundred approved centres and certificates over 80,000 competency based qualifications and over 100,000 competency based units annually. Due to the high number of qualifications, centres and certifications standardisation is a major concern for the awarding body.

SQA carries out a number of standardisation activities such as sector fora, development of additional guidance documentation designed to ensure standardisation, external verifier standardisation meetings. Standardisation activities are overseen by a number of different departments within SQA the effectiveness of this system can be evidenced from the low number of issues reflecting this area listed within this report.

SQA is to be commended on the work carried out to date in regards to risk management and standardisation efforts.

Areas of non-compliance

During the course of the centre monitoring visits it was found that the awarding body was not in compliance with:

Key Goal 10: The awarding body has an effective system for the registration and certification of candidates.

Specifically criterion:

10.1 Ensure that all candidates when presenting themselves for assessment are registered with the awarding body.

It was noted while reviewing an external verification visit report that the External Verifier had recorded seeing the record of achievements for ten candidates for an Emergency First Aid at Work course delivered on 30 November 2010. At the time of the audit a review of SQA's database showed no entries, registration or certification, for these ten candidates from this centre.

It was further noted that another external verification visit report recorded that a centre had delivered the Emergency First Aid at Work qualification on the 10 June 2010, though the centre had not been approved by SQA awarding body to deliver the qualification until the 13 July 2010.

This has been recorded as a non-compliance, non-compliance 1 refers.

Key Goal 21: The awarding body has systems and processes for monitoring the quality and consistency of assessment provided at any location.

These systems must ensure that assessment is uniformly systematic, valid and to the defined standard.

Specifically criterion:

21.2 Have a policy on the number of external verification visits, which will be undertaken for each qualification.

SQA's *Centre Handbook* for GA2J 46 Award in Door Supervision (Scotland) states that 'All active centres will be subject to external verification at least once per calendar year' There have been no external verification visits to centres delivering Door Supervision qualifications.

This has been recorded as a non-compliance, non-compliance 2 refers.

Key Goal 21: The awarding body has systems and procedures for monitoring the quality and consistency of assessment provided at any location.

These systems must ensure that assessment is uniformly systematic, valid and to the defined standard.

SQA currently uses the document titled *External Verification Report – National Qualifications (NQ)* to record the outcomes of external verification visits to centres delivering Emergency First Aid at Work.

Health and Safety Executive specify assessment principles which must be adhered to by awarding bodies delivering the Emergency First-Aid at Work qualification. The principles are contained within the document titled *Training standard for delivery of emergency first aid at work courses for the purpose of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 – a guide for awarding bodies*.

A mapping of the external verification visit report and the Health & Safety Executive assessment principles was carried out during the audit. The Audit Team were unable to identify documented evidence that showed centres had been externally verified against all aspects of the assessment principles as required by the Health and Safety Executive.

This has been recorded as a non-compliance, non-compliance 3 refers.

Areas for improvement

The auditor considers that the following areas, whilst meeting SQA Accreditation's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*, have the potential for improvement:

Key Goal 15 The qualification and associated structure has been designed to ensure it is appropriate and meets the needs of the occupational sector,

Specifically criterion:

15.5 The qualification must be designed to provide opportunities for progression or to meet a specific need.

During the course of the audit a number of qualifications and associated units were reviewed. Units are given a unique identification number at the point of approval by SQA.

It was noted that in some cases the same unit when imported into more than one qualification would be given a different identity number. For example:

- Ensure your own Actions Reduce Risks to Health and Safety Unlevelled F8HV 04 WA is also coded as Ensure your own actions reduce risks to health and safety Unlevelled F9T4 04 WA (there are seven different units codes for this unit).
- Contribute to the Development of Teams and Individuals Unlevelled D1NF 04 WA is also coded as Contribute to the Development of Teams and Individuals Unlevelled D9EA 04 WA (there are six different units codes for this unit).

Allocating a unit more than one identification number has the potential to cause confusion and could have an effect on the candidates' ability to seek credit accumulation and transfer.

This has been noted as an observation; observation 1 refers.

Key Goal 16 The awarding body has designed an assessment methodology that is fit for purpose.

Specifically criterion:

16.2 The assessment methodology must take account of the principles of assessment specified by the Standards Setting Body and/or Regulatory Body.

The document issued by the Health & Safety Executive titled *Training standard for delivery of emergency first aid at work courses for the purpose of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 – a guide for awarding bodies* specifies the training standards that must be applied by awarding bodies offering this qualification. The guidance states that awarding bodies must assess/monitor training centres to ensure the standards are being met and that certain information must be retained for a period of five years. The standard specifically states that the awarding body's records should include the requalification dates of students.

No evidence was found during the audit that SQA collates the candidate's requalification dates. It became apparent during the discussions with SQA employees that the decision not to gather such details was based on a concern that by doing so the awarding body could potentially be in breach of the Data protection Act.

This has been noted as an observation; observation 2 refers.

Key Goal 17 The awarding body submits timely and detailed qualification submissions.

Qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation may have one or more conditions attached to them at the point of accreditation. Where such a condition has been recorded it will be given an agreed action date. The agreed action date will be specified by SQA Accreditation's Accreditation Coordination Group (ACG) and the Qualification Manager/Officer informed subsequently by SQA's Project Officer.

Due to a number of reasons the awarding body may not be able to meet the agreed action date. In such cases the Qualification Manager/Officer may seek to re-negotiate the agreed action date with the Accreditation Manager. Not all Qualifications Manager/Officers interviewed were aware they could re-negotiate the agreed action date.

This has been noted as an observation; observation 3 refers.

Key Goal 21: The awarding body has systems and processes for monitoring the quality and consistency of assessment provided at any location. These systems must ensure that assessment is uniformly systematic, valid and to the defined standard.

Specifically criterion:

21.5 Ensure each action point noted within any agreed action plan is specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and time bound.

SQA records the outcomes of external verification visits on the *External Verification Report – SVQ EV8a*. As a result of evidence, or lack of evidence, found during the external verification visit a hold may be placed on a centre; this is recorded within Section 4 of the report. The resolution date for the hold should be agreed by the External Verifier and the Centre Co-ordinator at the end of the external verification visit.

The External Verifier informs SQA of the hold placed on the centre by completion of *SVQ/Awards/HN & NQ Units hold/not accepted – recommended by External Verifier, form EV8b*.

Once this document is received SQA's Qualification Approval & Verifications section will write to the centre confirming the details of the hold; inform the centre no further certifications may take place for that qualification and confirms the date by which the centre has agreed to resolve the issue that resulted in the hold.

It was noted that, occasionally, External Verifiers will use the term *ASAP* rather than specify a resolution date. Where this was the case the Qualification Approval & Verifications section would state that the resolution date was *to be confirmed*.

A small number of minor issues were noted during the review of external verification visit reports. These included:

- forms not being fully completed for example dates and signatures missing
- inconsistent information within the external verification visit report for example the External Verifier stating that 6 candidates were registered for the qualification but then noting he/she had observed 11 candidates carrying out assessment

This has been noted as an observation; observation 4 refers.

Conclusion

This was the eleventh audit of SQA and the audit team was provided with full access to the awarding body premises, staff and documentation.

A small number of non-compliances were recorded and a small number of observations noted. It is the opinion of the Lead Auditor that none of the above would seriously impact on the standard of the qualification(s) issued to candidates for the suite of qualifications audited.

The main area of concern for the Audit Team was the lack of monitoring visits to centres delivering the Door Supervision qualifications. This was discussed at the end of audit brief and the awarding body representatives stated they would action this non-compliance with some urgency.

Two areas of good practice have been noted specifically centre risk management and standardisation activities. The Audit Team commends the awarding body and its staff for the work and effort put into these areas.

The Auditors would like to thank SQA employees for their assistance during the course of the audit. The Auditees open and frank discussions and willingness to provide data was appreciated.

Appendixes

Appendix 1: Current year non-compliances, observations and action plan

Non-compliances

A non-compliance will be recorded where the lead auditor finds evidence that the awarding body fails to meet any of *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)* or any of the conditions attached to qualification accredited by SQA Accreditation at the time of accreditation. When recording any non-compliance, the lead auditor will agree the action to be taken by the awarding body and a timetable for resolving the issue.

Non-compliance recorded	Agreed action and date	Key Goal	Risk rating
<p>1. An External Verifier had recorded seeing the record of achievement for ten candidates for an Emergency First Aid at Work course delivered on 30 November 2010. At the time of the audit a review of SQA's database showed no entries, registration or certifications, for these ten candidates.</p> <p>Another external verification visit report recorded that a centre had delivered the Emergency First Aid at Work qualification on the 10 June 2010, though the centre had not been approved by SQA to deliver the qualification until 13 July 2010.</p>	<p>SQA must review its systems and processes for the registration of candidates.</p> <p>The review must ensure that candidates can only be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assessed by centres once they have been registered with the awarding body • registered with the awarding body for those qualifications the centre is approved to offer <p>A summary of the review and any associated outcomes must be sent to SQA Accreditation no later than 31 August 2011.</p>	<p>Key Goal 10 refers</p>	<p>3</p>

Non-compliance recorded	Agreed action and date	Key Goal	Risk rating
<p>2. SQA's centre handbook for GA2J 46 Award in Door Supervision (Scotland) states that 'All active centres will be subject to external verification at least once per calendar year' There have been no external verification visits to centres delivering Door Supervision qualifications.</p>	<p>SQA must review its systems and processes for monitoring the quality and consistency of assessment provided at any location.</p> <p>The review must ensure that where the awarding body has specified the number of monitoring visits to approved centres annually it maintains that level of visits.</p> <p>A summary of the review and any associated outcomes must be sent to SQA Accreditation no later than 31 August 2011.</p>	<p>Key Goal 21 refers</p>	<p>3</p>
<p>3. SQA uses the document titled <i>External Verification Report – National Qualifications (NQ)</i> to record the outcomes of external verification visits to centres delivering Emergency First Aid at Work.</p> <p>The Health and Safety Executive specifies assessment principles which must be adhered to by awarding bodies delivering this qualification.</p> <p>A mapping of the external verification visit report and the Health & Safety Executive assessment principles was carried out during the audit. The Audit</p>	<p>SQA must review and map the document titled <i>External Verification Report – National Qualifications (NQ)</i> against the Health and Safety Executive's assessment principles.</p> <p>The mapping must ensure that the document <i>External Verification Report – National Qualifications (NQ)</i> meets, as a minimum, the specifications laid out within the assessment principles.</p> <p>A summary of the review and any associated outcomes must be sent to SQA Accreditation no later than 31 October 2011.</p>	<p>Key Goal 21 refers</p>	<p>2</p>

Non-compliance recorded	Agreed action and date	Key Goal	Risk rating
Team were unable to identify documented evidence that showed centres had been externally verified against all aspects of the assessment principles as required by the Health and Safety Executive.			

Observations

An observation will be noted to ensure that any recommendations agreed during the audit are recorded for future reference. As observations are recorded for awarding body consideration only, it is not necessary to agree a timescale to resolve the observation in the awarding body action plan.

Observations noted	Action recommended	Key Goal
<p>1. It was noted that some imported units were given a different unit code when embedded into another qualification.</p>	<p>SQA may wish to review its methodology for allocating unique identification numbers to units. The review should consider the potential impact of allocating more than one unit code to the same unit.</p>	<p>Key Goal 15 refers</p>
<p>2. The document issued by the Health & Safety Executive titled <i>Training standard for delivery of emergency first aid at work courses for the purpose of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981 – a guide for awarding bodies</i> specifies the training standards that must be applied by awarding bodies offering the Emergency First-Aid at Work qualification. The standard specifically states that the awarding body's records should include the requalification dates of students.</p> <p>No evidence was found during the audit that SQA collates the candidate's requalification dates. It was stated by awarding body personnel this was due to concern that by doing so the awarding body could potentially breach the Data Protection Act.</p>	<p>SQA may wish to consider contacting the Information Commissioner's Office, Scotland to seek advice on the gathering of such information and whether it would result in a breach of the Data Protection Act 1998.</p>	<p>Key Goal 16 refers</p>

Observations noted	Action recommended	Key Goal
<p>3. Qualifications, at the point of approval, may have one or more conditions attached to them. Where such a condition has been noted it will be given an agreed action date.</p> <p>The awarding body may not be able to meet the agreed action date. In such cases the Qualification Manager/Officer may seek to re-negotiate the date with the Accreditation Manager. Not all Qualifications Manager/Officers interviewed were aware they could re-negotiate the agreed action date.</p>	<p>SQA may wish to review and update its process for qualification submissions to ensure it clearly states that, in certain circumstances, the agreed action date may be re-negotiated.</p>	<p>Key Goal 17 refers</p>
<p>4. SQA records the outcomes of external verification visits on the <i>External Verification Report – SVQ EV8a</i>. As a result of evidence, or lack of evidence, found during the external verification visit a hold may be placed on a centre. A resolution date should be agreed between the External Verifier and the Centre Co-ordinator at the end of the external verification visit. It is the responsibility of the Qualification Approval & Verifications section to confirm this date with the centre.</p> <p>It was noted that occasionally External Verifiers will use the term <i>ASAP</i> rather than specify a resolution date. Where this was the case the Qualification Approval & Verifications section would state that the</p>	<p>SQA may wish to remind its External Verifiers that the use of the terms <i>ASAP</i> and <i>to be confirmed</i> does not allow for an audit trail nor does it allow the organisation to track issues to completion.</p> <p>SQA may wish to remind its External Verifiers that a check should be completed prior to sending the external verification visit report to the awarding body. The check should ensure that reports are signed off, the use of an</p>	<p>Key Goal 21 refers</p>

Observations noted	Action recommended	Key Goal
<p>resolution date was <i>to be confirmed</i>.</p> <p>A small number of minor issues were noted during the review of external verification visit reports. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forms not being fully completed for example dates and signatures missing • Inconsistent information within the external verification visit report for example the External Verifier stating that 6 candidates were registered for the qualification but then saying he/she had observed 11 candidates carrying out an assessment 	<p>e-signature is acceptable where the report is sent electronically, dated and a check for consistency completed.</p>	

Once agreed, the action plan is signed by representatives from both SQA Accreditation and the awarding body and will inform the agenda for the next annual audit meeting.

Appendix 2: Risk-rating of non-compliances

SQA Accreditation assigns a risk rating to each non-compliance recorded as a result of an awarding body audit or through our centre monitoring activity. The table below illustrates how the rating for a non-compliance is assigned, and identifies the possible impact of the non-compliance on qualifications and/or the learner.

The assignment of a risk rating allows an awarding body to target their resources to areas that have been identified as having a major impact. The risk rating also allows SQA Accreditation to target its resources to support awarding bodies in improving their performance.

Rating	Risk	Impact of non-compliance
1	Very Low	The non-compliance is likely to cause minimal concern and would not threaten the integrity of the qualification or impact adversely on the learner. Any overall effect is likely to be small scale and/or localised, rather than widespread. The issue identified is unlikely to recur once resolved and no long lasting damage would be anticipated.
2	Low	The non-compliance is of low impact but of sufficient importance to merit intervention, with a low threat to the systems or procedures associated with the qualification and/or impact on the learner. Disruption may not just be localised but more widespread and would possibly cause residual damage; however, this could be easily corrected without further consequence.
3	Medium	The non-compliance could potentially damage the credibility of the qualification and/or be detrimental to the learner. There may be some impact to the systems or procedures that support the qualification or the operational effectiveness of the awarding body.
4	High	The non-compliance could have a high impact on the integrity and reliability of the qualification or the effective operation of awarding body as a whole if corrective action is not quickly taken. There is a high probability that the qualification and/or learner will be negatively affected.
5	Very High	The non-compliance will have a serious impact on the integrity and reliability of the qualification or the effective operation of the awarding body if corrective action is not immediately taken. There is a very high probability that the qualification and/or learner will be negatively affected.

In assigning a risk rating, each non-compliance is considered on its own merit, taking account of the context in which it was identified.

Appendix 3: Table of awards

Accredited qualifications selected for audit

Award title	Level	Code	Accreditation date	Re-accreditation date
Arboriculture	22	G70Y	5-Dec-02	31-Dec-10
Award in Door Supervision (Scotland)	46	GA2J	22-Sep-10	31-Dec-13
Business and Administration	21	GA3W	1-Feb-11	29-Feb-16
Business and Administration	21	G7Y2	20-Jul-05	31-Jan-11
Business and Administration	22	GA3V	1-Feb-11	29-Feb-16
Business and Administration	22	G7Y3	20-Jul-05	31-Jan-11
Business and Administration	23	GA41	1-Feb-11	29-Feb-16
Business and Administration	23	G7Y5	20-Jul-05	31-Aug-07
Business and Administration	23	G8LH	3-Sep-07	31-Jan-11
Business and Administration	24	GA3Y	1-Feb-11	29-Feb-16
Business and Administration	24	G7Y4	20-Jul-05	31-Jan-11
Emergency First Aid at Work	45	G9NN	8-Apr-10	31-Dec-12
Floristry	22	G99T	25-Feb-09	31-Jul-11
Floristry	23	G99V	25-Feb-09	31-Jul-11

Award title	Level	Code	Accreditation date	Re-accreditation date
Floristry	23	G6WE	12-Sep-02	31-Dec-07
Forestry - Establishment	22	G70T	5-Dec-02	31-Dec-10
Forestry - Harvesting	22	G704	5-Dec-02	31-Dec-10
Land-based Engineering Operations (Arboriculture/Forestry)	22	G9WH	30-Jun-10	30-Jun-15
Land-based Engineering Operations (Arboriculture/Forestry)	23	G9WG	30-Jun-10	30-Jun-15
Security Operations: Door Supervision	45	G8GN	12-Apr-07	31-Dec-10
Treework (Arboriculture)	23	G70E	5-Dec-02	31-Dec-10
Treework (Forestry - Establishment)	23	G707	5-Dec-02	31-Dec-10
Treework (Forestry - Harvesting)	23	G709	5-Dec-02	31-Dec-10

Appendix 4: Approval and accreditation conditions

A condition will be recorded at the time of approval of the awarding body or at the time of accreditation for an SQA accredited qualification. A condition is recorded when SQA's Accreditation Co-ordination Group finds evidence that the awarding body does not fully meet SQA's *Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*.

Condition	Agreed action and date	Key Goal/criterion
1		Key Goal X

Appendix 5: List of documents reviewed pre-audit and post-audit

Document title	Date of issue	Version number
Assessor guidelines for the SVQs in Land-based Engineering Operations at Levels 2 and 3	February 2011	DB5645
Assessor's guidelines fro the SVQ's in Floristry at level 2 and 3	June 2009	DB1617/2
Emergency first aid at work FQA		
Approval criteria to offers EFAW qualifications in Scotland, England and Wales.	April 2010	1.0HSE
Training standard for delivery of emergency first aid at work courses for the purpose of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981		
Emergency First Aid at Work – assessment strategy and guidance	June 2010	BA5073
Minimum training standards for the delivery of Emergency First Aid at Work courses the purpose of the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981		
External verification of S/NVQ Qualifications – procedural flow chart.		
The appeals process – information for centres	January 2011	FF5480
Centre risk process - Quality assurance criteria		
Risk management process guide		
Risk register		
External verification visit report	October 2009	SVQ V8a
SVQ awards/HN & NQ Units hold/not accepted – recommendation by External Verifier.		SVQ V8b
Continuing Professional Development Record – examples		
Continuing Professional Development Record – spreadsheet		
CFA Business skills at work – assessment strategy 2010 Business & Administration	September 2010	Final version
Business & Administration – qualification structures	September 2010	1.0

Document title	Date of issue	Version number
SQA Security Licence Qualifications – candidate handbook – award in Door Supervision		Draft
SIA - Specifications for learning and qualifications in conflict management	October 2009	
SIA - Specifications for learning and qualifications for door supervisors	February 2010	
SQA Security Licence Qualifications – centre handbook – award in Door Supervision		Draft
SQA planning cycle – corporate information		
SQA organigrammes - various		
SQA internal report 2010-11 product marketing review – PWC	February 2011	
SQA annual report and accounts 2009-10	September 2010	AE5408
SQA Corporate plan 2010-13		
Annual Equality Review 2010	December 2010	
Business case light template		
Business case (full)		
Ideas capture form		
Process maps – marketing – various		
Product marketing overview		
Business Case Group – terms of reference		
Development Programme Group - terms of reference		1.1
Slide show – product development process		
Guidance on completion of external verification visit plan and the SVQ external verification report.	November 2009	FA3913

Appendix 6: Signatures of agreement to action plan

For and on behalf of SQA

For and on behalf of SQA Accreditation

Signature

Signature

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Designation

Designation

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Date

Date

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