

SQA Accreditation: Summary Annual Report 2011–12

Operational activity 2011–12

Significant developments

Principles-based regulation

Our shift to principles-based regulation complements our existing risk- and evidence-based models. Principles-based regulation will steer expectations of awarding bodies and the way SQA Accreditation interacts with them.

Principles-based regulation means, where possible, allowing awarding bodies to act in the spirit of regulation and not to its letter. We think this is more likely to support development and innovation, and lead to greater focus on learner outcomes and experience, greater flexibility and less complexity.

The Regulatory Principles will mean our existing formats for qualification submission and reporting will change. Included in this will be a review of the awarding body approval process, audit reporting, and the procedures around these.

Desktop audit methodology

For quality assuring SQA accredited qualifications at centres, desktop audit is currently the only approved alternative to a centre visit. There is a need to continue to use desktop auditing to minimise both bureaucracy and cost, but we will review its appropriateness for centres delivering portfolio-based qualifications (such as SVQs and Competence Based Qualifications (CBQs)). Portfolio and work-based assessments are best viewed on site in a physical visit.

New process for data collection

We changed the process for data collection in June 2011. Candidates' records of achievement are no longer printed, though candidates are not disadvantaged because they still receive their certificate from the awarding body.

Awarding bodies are now only required to submit overall numbers of registrations and certifications for each accredited qualification. This results in a less bureaucratic data collection process. You can find details on the Research and Information section of the Accreditation website: <http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/46992.3042.html>

Project Groups for 2011–12

Project groups help us realise the objectives our operational plan. The key findings for each project group are summarised below.

External communications

The External Communications Group focused on direct communication with stakeholders, and communication via the SQA website.

They developed an information pack for enquirers, a pack for other stakeholders (such as SSCs, Sector Bodies and Scottish Government), and a new presentation on SQA Accreditation's role.

The website content has been thoroughly reviewed and revised using plainer language and simpler navigation. A glossary was compiled for the website and is now included in the Accreditation Update.

Progression pathways

The Progression Pathways project group developed a set of guidelines for SQA approved awarding bodies (and other stakeholders) which outlines best practice when producing Progression Pathways. This was published on the SQA Accreditation website.

Streamlined Accreditation

Streamlined Accreditation is a refined approach to accrediting qualifications that reduces the time taken but maintains rigour.

The project group determined the minimum requirements that would give us confidence that a qualification is suitable for accreditation and fit-for-purpose. It then made recommendations on the areas that could be removed, reduced or retained.

Streamlined Accreditation was formally launched in February 2012, and went live in April 2012.

Revision of Assessment Strategy Criteria and SVQ Criteria

We continued to review the SVQ Criteria, looking specifically at:

- ◆ criteria for all accredited qualifications
- ◆ less ambiguous use of language
- ◆ reduced duplication of effort

The revised Criteria went out to consultation. The response to the consultation was minimal, but those who responded felt that the revised Criteria were a considerable improvement.

The Streamlined Accreditation project group will take this work forward in 2012–13.

Accreditation Co-ordination Group (ACG) Review

This group did some research to help us understand internal and external stakeholders' perspectives on ACG processes. The findings indicated that there were some areas of weakness that we could improve to offer a better service.

We drafted an Action Plan with the aim of resolving these issues, which will be addressed through 2012–13.

Policy review

The Policy Review project group was asked to review accreditation policies and identify any gaps or discrepancies. Two areas of operation that required attention were:

- ◆ a policy to describe the need for qualification product approval
- ◆ a complaints and appeals policy

These have now been addressed.

SCQF credit rating of accredited qualifications

A project group was set up to review the SVQ credit rating methodology. Any revision would aim to reduce bureaucracy. The methodology could also be expanded to cover other qualifications suitable for accreditation.

This work has been completed.

Accreditation database

In 2010–11, SQA Accreditation began working with SQA Software Developers to build a database, particularly for accreditation submissions, to replace the reliance on multiple existing systems. The result will be more efficient and cost effective.

The software is now at the testing stage. The database will be implemented in 2012–13, and the backlog of historical data will be uploaded.

Audit activity 2011–12

SQA Accreditation monitors all SQA approved awarding bodies. Monitoring consists of either an audit of the awarding body or the awarding body completing a self-assessment report. This is followed by monitoring visits to a sample of the awarding body's approved centres.

The SQA Accreditation audit and centre monitoring reports approved during 2011–12 were for 15 audits and 18 centre monitoring reports (54 centre monitoring visits). This is a 16% increase in activity from 2010–11.

New approved awarding bodies

Four organisations gained awarding body approval in 2011–12:

- ◆ 1st4sport Qualifications
- ◆ The Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)
- ◆ The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)
- ◆ Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

21 organisations contacted SQA Accreditation to explore the possibility of becoming an approved awarding body.

Non-compliances 2011–12

Our auditors recorded 71 non-compliances during the main awarding body audit and the centre monitoring visits.

The majority of non-compliances were in the Administration and Support category (which is the one with the most Key Goals that awarding bodies have to meet).

We continued to identify non-compliances in relation to referencing SQA Accreditation in the awarding bodies' documentation and in their approved centres complaints and appeals process.

Observations 2011–12

Auditors made 122 observations this year. The majority of observations were in the Administration and Support category.

Accreditation activity 2011–12

Qualifications accredited

SQA Accreditation has accredited a total of 908 qualifications.

SVQs accredited

717 SVQs were accredited (decrease of 7% on prior year). There were decreases in accredited qualifications from City and Guilds, EAL, ECITB, PAAVQSET and SQA.

147 accredited SVQs were withdrawn. The common rationale for awarding bodies withdrawing SVQs was low or zero uptake of the qualification.

Regulatory and licensing qualifications accredited

39 regulatory and licensing qualifications were accredited (up by 11% on prior year). This increase has come from BIIAB and HABC, who both added to their provision of security and licensing qualifications.

Other qualifications accredited

152 other qualifications were accredited (an increase of 97% on the previous year). Part of this increase is related to the approval of two of the new awarding bodies: ACCA and CIH. This considerable increase is also in relation to existing awarding bodies expanding their provision in 'Other' qualifications such as AAT, CMI, City and Guilds, Pearson Education Limited, FAAL, ECITB, IMI, ITC, NEBOSH, RAD, SQA and WCSM.

SVQ market performance

Both registrations and certifications for SVQs have decreased significantly. This may be due to more awarding bodies moving away from traditional SVQs and opting for other competence-based qualifications, such as ECITB who moved almost all of their provision to 'Other' qualifications.

Regulatory and other qualifications market performance

There has been a significant rise in the number of candidate registrations and certifications for Regulatory and Licensing, and Other qualifications. This reflects the number of Regulatory and Licensing, and Other qualifications accredited, which increased over the year by 11% and 97% respectively.

Plan for 2012–13

Moving into the next operational year 2012-13, the operational plan focuses on

- ◆ the implementation of the streamlined accreditation process
- ◆ the embedding of SCQF credit rating in the accreditation process
- ◆ the implementation of the Regulatory Principles

Our aim will be to keep each of these three activities under review in the course of 2012–13, although a formal evaluation exercise will be conducted towards the end of the financial year.

The potential impact of Universal Services funding for SSCs on our processes and activities will also be considered and, where appropriate, SQA Accreditation will realign processes to provide more effective support for Sector Skills Councils with regards to the development of SVQ structures.