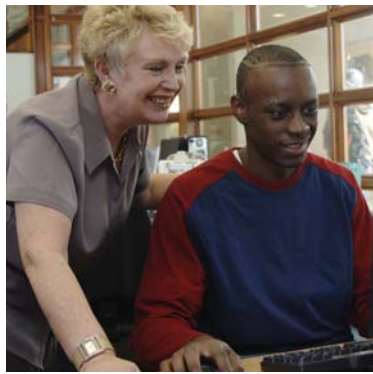


SQA annual review 2005-06



introduction

SQA is the national body in Scotland for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

Our core purpose is to set and maintain standards in education through qualifications and assessment across schools, colleges and in workplace learning.

Each year, we set ourselves a number of objectives. These are decided in response to what our customers tell us, government initiatives, and various other factors, such as market developments and technological change.

This year, our objectives were to:

- 1 Provide qualifications and support to match the needs of individuals, society and the economy of Scotland.
- 2 Inform and support national policy development and implementation.
- 3 Redesign our services and processes to make them better to use and more efficient.
- 4 Develop a highly-skilled, motivated and effective workforce.
- 5 Raise the profile of Scottish education and training internationally to benefit the Scottish economy and users of Scottish qualifications.
- 6 Develop new markets and income streams.

We've published this review so that you can see how well we're doing against our objectives. We hope you'll agree that the picture is positive, though we recognise that there is always room for improvement.

In the next section, we'll go through these objectives one-by-one, and tell you what we've done towards achieving them.

You can find more detailed information on our progress and achievements against all these objectives in our *Annual Report 2005–06*, which is available for download from our website: www.sqa.org.uk (from November), and in hard copy from our Customer Contact Centre on: 0845 279 1000, e-mail: customer@sqa.org.uk.

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foreword

by John McCormick Chairman



In this, my first full year as Chairman of SQA, I continue to be impressed with the commitment of SQA's staff, and the invaluable support we receive from the many education professionals who work closely with us throughout the year to deliver our qualifications.

This report highlights some of our key achievements in 2005–06. It reflects the growing maturity of the organisation with a number of exciting new developments, in addition to the safe delivery of August Certification. We very much appreciate the support and advice of our Advisory Council in ensuring that our customer and stakeholder needs remain front-of-mind in our planning.

I am pleased to be chairing the Board of an organisation with such a clear determination to continue to improve and to deliver on its responsibilities.

John M^c Cormick

message

from Anton Colella Chief Executive



I am pleased to introduce this review of some of the highlights of SQA's achievements in 2005–06.

This year, we introduced Skills for Work Courses, and continued to modernise our portfolio of Higher National and non-advanced qualifications, with strong support from our partners and centres. We are continuing to work towards increasing understanding of the standards we set and maintain, and transparency around the ways in which we quality assure these standards.

As a public sector body, we are also always looking for opportunities to find new and better ways to work, which mean that we can meet our customers' needs in a more efficient way. This review introduces some of our key developments which are designed to do this.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank SQA's staff and our Appointees for their continued hard work and commitment. Once again, they have made a significant contribution to the organisation's performance in 2005–06.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anton Colella". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Objective 1 Provide qualifications and support to meet the needs of individuals, society and the economy of Scotland.

Since qualifications are our core purpose, we'll cover this objective in more depth than the others.

August Certification

One of our primary responsibilities is the diet of assessments for National Courses for candidates in schools and colleges across Scotland.

Every year, we design assessments, recruit Markers and other Appointees, quality assure coursework, and deal with appeals – all of this in addition to the annual peak of assessment and certification activity between May and August. We monitor our progress across this range of tasks throughout the year against a set of targets that have been agreed with the Scottish Executive.

In 2005–06, we met all the agreed performance targets for August certification, and issued certificates to 142,799 candidates.

We also look for any opportunities to improve our services. In 2005–06, we revised our malpractice policy to ensure that it is appropriate and fair to all, and to comply with emerging human rights legislation.

Child protection

SQA takes child protection very seriously. As a key player in education and training, we must respond to emerging best practice and legislation in this area. This year we have reviewed our processes for dealing with child protection issues highlighted in examinations and scripts.

National Qualifications

We've also continued working towards reducing the complexity, variety and total volume of assessment for National Qualifications. In the academic year 2005–06, 20 revised National Courses were available in schools and colleges. In 2006–07, a further 40 will be available.

Skills for Work Courses

In August 2005, we began piloting a new range of Skills for Work Courses for young people in the third and fourth year of secondary education. Young people taking one of these new Skills for Work Courses will normally go to a local college, even though they are still officially a pupil at school. This offers learning in a different environment, meeting new people and facing new challenges. Twenty-one local education authorities, 38 Colleges, 145 schools and over 1,400 young

people are participating in the first phase of the pilot. Five Skills for Work Courses are being piloted.

Higher National Qualifications

Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas (HNCs and HNDs) were introduced in 1925 to meet the demand for skilled labour. Eighty years on, these qualifications still satisfy this need. In August 2005, to celebrate the anniversary, we launched a year-long celebration with the partners whose commitment is so vital to the continuing success of HN Qualifications.

Meanwhile, with our key partners – Scotland's Colleges and other stakeholders such as the Scottish Funding Council, COLEG and the Scottish Further Education Unit – we've been working with a consortium of colleges to update and modernise HNCs and HNDs.

This programme will run until 2008. The revised HNC/Ds and Units are more closely aligned to National Occupational Standards than previously, with greater involvement of employers, professional bodies and sector skills councils. In 2005–06, we validated 45 of these revised HNCs and HNDs.

Objective 1 Provide qualifications and support to meet the needs of individuals, society and the economy of Scotland.

Portfolio review

In 2005-06, we completed a review and consultation on our portfolio of qualifications. The aim of this review was to establish a coherent system of qualifications which is fit for purpose for the range of Scottish learners. The review findings confirmed that we should provide National Progression Awards, National Certificates and Professional Development Awards.

Extension to SQA's Accreditation role

During 2005-06 we consulted our stakeholders about extending our accreditation function so that it would cover two new areas:

- ✓ vocational qualifications that are directly and exclusively based on National Occupational Standards
- ✓ qualifications that are required by industry regulatory bodies

There was a strong positive response to our proposals, and we secured ministerial response in March 2006. We plan to start accrediting these qualifications in December 2006.

Connecting with our customers

The feedback we receive from our customers is vital – it informs everything we do, and we value it highly. We are also constantly aware of the importance of communication, and that it's a two-way process.

We held a 'Connecting with Customers' conference in Glasgow in May 2005. This was our first major customer conference. More than 650 customers attended the conference, and 82% of delegates reported that the event had satisfied their objectives.

There were nearly 50 presentations from SQA business areas and partner organisations. We took the opportunity to showcase our website and its new search engine.



Customer Satisfaction Survey 2005–06

For the last three years, we have conducted an annual independent survey of our customers' satisfaction with our services. We use customer feedback from the survey to focus on areas where we need to improve our services.

Our 2005–06 survey noted a small improvement in overall customer satisfaction on the previous year's results. Our customers' average satisfaction score was 80.0% in 2005–06, compared to 79.8% in 2004–05 and 79.4% in 2003–04.

While the detailed results indicate high levels of customer satisfaction with our products and services, our customers have commented on a number of areas for improvement, such as data management and communication. We will be taking these suggestions forward in 2006–07.

Quality assurance

At the heart of SQA's role in Scottish education is the maintenance of national standards – ensuring that SQA qualifications continue to meet the requirements of candidates, employers and other users of our qualifications.

During 2005–06, we reviewed and revised our quality assurance framework to take account of changing legislation, new technologies and our changing portfolio of qualifications. We published our Quality Framework in March 2006, setting out a summary of responsibilities and criteria for our centres and stakeholders. It uses clear and straightforward language, with more of a focus on the needs of candidates and on working in partnership with centres.

Supporting our customers

Our Understanding Standards programme was expanded this year, with a programme of 26 Professional Development Workshops which were attended by more than 1,900 teachers and lecturers. The feedback we received on these was overwhelmingly positive.

Our catalogue of support materials, published in print and on our website, continued to grow. In 2005–06 we published more than 550 documents. This includes publications designed to:

- ✓ widen and deepen understanding of National Qualifications
- ✓ provide additional support for our Appointees
- ✓ support the use of ICT in assessment and quality assurance
- ✓ expand our range of Open Learning Packs for Higher National qualifications
- ✓ support delivery of the revised Higher National Qualifications

Objective 2 Inform and support national policy development and implementation.

In keeping with our statutory responsibilities, SQA provides expert advice to Ministers and the Scottish Executive on qualifications and assessment in Scotland. Our commitment to implementing the Lifelong Learning Strategy and the outcomes of A Curriculum for Excellence are examples of SQA working with partners and stakeholders to deliver the priorities in education and training.

Scottish Survey of Achievement

In 2005, around 36,000 pupils at P3, P5, P7 and S2 took part in the first Scottish Survey of Achievement, as part of the Scottish Executive's Assessment is for Learning programme. Around 1,300 schools across Scotland participated in the survey.

In preparation for the survey, we worked in partnership with our Sponsor Department and Learning and Teaching Scotland.

Our contribution included:

- ✓ developing, quality assuring, printing and distributing assessment tasks and teaching materials
- ✓ marking and moderating approximately 100,000 completed tests and writing scripts



We met all our responsibilities within the timescales set by the Scottish Executive Education Department.

The 2005 survey looked at English language with Core Skills, while the 2006 survey will examine Social Subjects (enquiry skills) with Core Skills. For the 2006 survey, we have prepared approximately 150 assessment tasks. For the first time, candidates will be provided with survey booklets which have been pre-printed with their own name and information.

A Curriculum for Excellence

During the year, we made a strong contribution to the Government's Curriculum for Excellence development programme. The Chief Executive serves on the overarching programme board for the initiative, and a number of senior officers are on key management and working groups.

Providing information and advice

In 2005–06, we provided both pre- and post-appeal data on pupil attainment to the Scottish Executive in line with the certification performance measures we mentioned under August Certification in Objective 1.

We also provided data and information to a variety of stakeholders. This included regular reports and ad hoc requests. We published uptake profiles and trends analyses in our *Annual Statistical Report*, and an overview of these in our new, easy-to-read, *Annual Statistical Digest*.

Strategic relationships with key partners

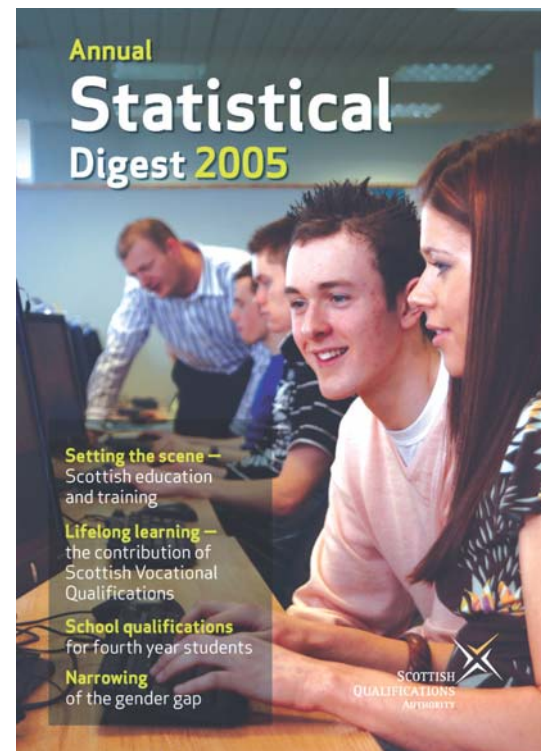
During 2005/06, along with the Scottish Executive, we were involved in refreshing the UK VQ Reform programme. We will be continuing our membership of the UK VQ Reform Programme Board in 2006–07.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

In 2005–06, we continued to play a leading role in the development of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework. This was the final year of the National Implementation Plan, and the core work to establish the framework has now been completed. Along with our SCQF partners, we developed proposals for managing and developing the framework post-2006.

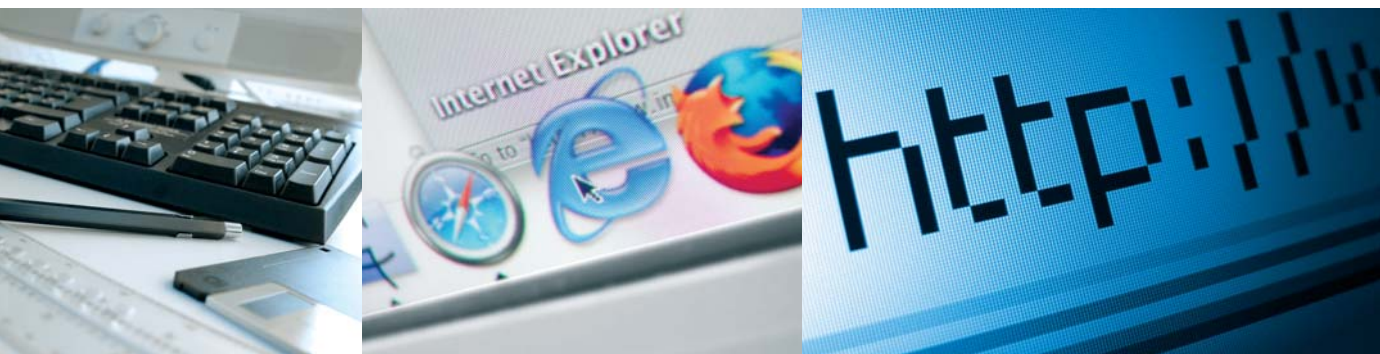
We also completed some key projects:

- ✓ We led Scottish Executive-funded programmes to level and credit-rate 20 SVQs and a Modern Apprenticeship framework.
- ✓ We played a key role in building capacity in the college sector to credit rate.



Objective 3 Redesign our services and processes to make them better to use and more efficient.

We want to be regarded as a leading non-departmental public body offering public services. This means providing quality and best value in our qualifications and services to our customers. We need to encourage greater use of our website by making it more attractive and accessible while providing high-quality information on our qualifications and services. It is also essential that we develop more data exchange services using the web and create further e-assessment and e-learning opportunities.



New text and web results services

In August 2005, around 60 candidates for SQA National Qualifications received their results one day early, by mobile phone text alert. Building on this, in August 2006, candidates in the Western Isles, Orkney and Shetland local authority areas will be able to view their results online a day early. They will also have the option of subscribing to an additional results text alert service.

We now have over 1,000 centres using our SQA.net data transfer service. More than 500 of these are schools. We have expanded it to allow centres to submit National Course estimates electronically, and return automated processing status reports to them. We also began to take Standard Grade estimate files electronically. Automating these services hands control of estimate files back to centres.

Website

In 2005–06, we responded to customer and stakeholder feedback about our website with a number of changes.

We increased the range of information available for centres and candidates.

We introduced new services, such as our Personal Timetable Builder, targeted e-mails, and a new e-zine.

We changed the way the website is laid out – there's now a new search engine, and the home page is easier to use.

E-assessment and e-learning

We are also working in close partnership with colleges and stakeholders to develop e-enabled support for revised Higher National Qualifications. With financial support from the Scottish Funding Council and the European Social Fund, we have worked with our partners to:

- ✓ develop e-enabled summative assessments for Higher National Units
- ✓ develop a range of assessment and other support materials
- ✓ produce information gateways (websites mapped to individual Higher National Units) and learner guides

We also expanded the pilot to use e-assessment for National Units in Higher Mathematics and for Computing, and expanded the range of subjects supported by the Understanding Standards website.

E-marking and quality assurance processes

In 2005, SQA introduced electronic marking of candidates' objective test answer sheets in National Qualifications examinations. Electronic marking allows candidate marks to be processed more quickly, and at a reduced cost, compared to manual marking.

This was the first e-assessment development in external examinations for our National Qualifications. Across five subject areas: Biology, Biotechnology, Chemistry, Human Biology, and Physics, 53,000 candidates were involved. In 2005, we set 13 objective tests for these subject areas, and all of these were marked electronically. To achieve this, we issued candidates with revised format answer sheets which included their personal details. As this was the first year of operation, we carried out additional quality checks to ensure that marks were processed accurately.



We evaluated this first e-assessment development with feedback from our centres, and we have agreed to repeat the process in 2006. We are also trialling a number of other e-assessment techniques.

Objective 4 Develop a highly-skilled, motivated and effective workforce.

As well as having the necessary financial resources, we need to ensure that our workforce – staff and appointees – has the skills, knowledge and motivation to provide qualifications and services.

Implement a workforce development plan

Each year we carry out a survey of employee satisfaction which allows us to monitor trends in overall satisfaction, and also to identify issues where we should be taking action to improve employee motivation.

Our employee satisfaction survey for 2004–05 identified a number of issues, and the progress we made in addressing these during 2005–06 includes:

- ✓ introducing a new Business Awareness programme
- ✓ reviewing our internal communications
- ✓ quarterly briefings by our Chief Executive, supported by Directors, as well as various other informal meetings with staff

In April 2005, we began to strengthen the link between the development opportunities we offer our employees and the organisation's strategic objectives.

We also defined competence frameworks for our management team during 2005–06. These set out the skills needed to perform each role in our organisation. In 2006–07, we will review our existing calendar of training opportunities to ensure that these skill needs are fully addressed.

SQA's partnership working with trade unions

Interaction between SQA management and our three recognised trade unions (Amicus, ACTS and Unison) has been moving away from traditional employee relations models in recent years. Strong working relations with the trade unions representing SQA's employees are helpful in creating a shared understanding of the organisation's objectives and the issues we face. The SQA Partnership Group, which meets each month, was formed in April 2005. Another milestone in our partnership working was the signing of a formal Partnership Agreement in September 2005.

The agreement defines a number of structures and behaviours for joint working, including communication between unions and the management team, and communication with employees. Staff support for the agreement was secured through information sessions held by the three unions. The agreement was then approved by SQA's Board of Management in September 2005 and the principles captured in the agreement continue to be applied through SQA's Partnership Group.

Estates and facilities management programme

In spring 2006, all SQA's Glasgow-based staff moved into a single open-plan office at the Optima Building. The move brought together all of SQA's Glasgow-based staff in a single office, for the first time. This is supporting improved communication within and between teams, and streamlining of business processes.

The new office also provides an enhanced working environment for our staff and visitors.



It also means more effective use of resources as, not only are all our Glasgow-based teams now in the same building, but we are also co-located with our colleagues at Learning and Teaching Scotland, which will lead to a closer working relationship.

Appointee development

SQA could not deliver its commitments without the help and support of the thousands of professionals who enrol as Appointees every year. Without the Markers, Setters, Veters, Verifiers, Examiners, Principal Assessors and many others who give up their time, our work would be impossible, and we are enormously grateful to them all.

We held discussions with the General Teaching Council for Scotland exploring the guidelines for their Framework for Professional Recognition, looking at our possible contribution to Continuing Professional Development.

Demographic changes – an ageing population – mean that we are anticipating shortages in our pool of Appointees, so we have been taking steps to address this. These steps include:

- ✓ a pilot with student teachers that explored widening access to SQA and its procedures for younger professionals
- ✓ exploring the potential for formal and informal linkages with professional development in association with the SQA Academy

SQA Academy

SQA Academy was launched this year. It is the umbrella term for the training in qualifications and assessment that we make available to our own staff and our appointees. The training can be delivered in workshops, online, or, more usually, in a combination of the two.

The aims of SQA Academy are to enhance professional development for those who take part; and to widen understanding of our standards. In turn, this should lead to more consistency in the quality of assessment (and candidate attainment), and to reduced quality assurance and appeals costs. In 2005–06, we ran the foundational course on 'Assessment: Purposes, Principles and Processes' twice. The package 'Marking Examinations to National Standards' is now being piloted.

Objective 5 Raise the profile of Scottish education and training internationally to benefit the Scottish economy and users of Scottish qualifications.

International work

We continue to seek new markets in other countries, and to develop those we already have. Most of this work involves partners in Scotland and internationally. Our work in Romania has involved developing support materials and teacher training for enhancements to the national curriculum.

In Antigua and Barbuda we have been providing assistance with setting up a National Training Agency and vocational education curriculum.

An important focus of our activity has been the uptake of Higher National Qualifications in the People's Republic of China, where the services we have been offering include: centre approval; support and assessment materials; developing institutional capacity to undertake the roles of quality management and procedures involved in delivering SQA qualifications; developing occupational standards and curriculums; and quality assurance and certification.

We have worked closely with Scottish Colleges and COLEG to deliver these services.

We hope to develop more international work to enhance the reputation of Scottish education throughout the world, and to complement the work we do in Scotland. Where possible, we will work with our partners, for instance the Scottish Colleges, to this end.



EQF

We are involved in developing a European Qualifications Framework to promote transparency and portability of qualifications across Europe. During 2005–06, we part-sponsored a major conference as part of the consultation on the proposed framework. It provided an opportunity to showcase the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.

Following this event, we were asked to join the UK delegation to the consultation dissemination event in Hungary in February 2006.

Objective 6 Develop new markets and income streams.

DIVA

We are constantly looking for new commercial opportunities and new partnerships to maximise them. An important development in 2005–06 was the launch of our Digital media and ICT Vendor Alliance (DIVA) project to update and expand our range of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and digital media qualifications working with industry partners.



Six global vendors – Apple, Avid, Cisco, Macromedia, Microsoft and Oracle – and the computing industry trade association CompTIA, will work with SQA and education partners over the next three years to introduce further industry-recognised options into our qualifications.

Several Scottish Colleges are also heavily involved in the project.

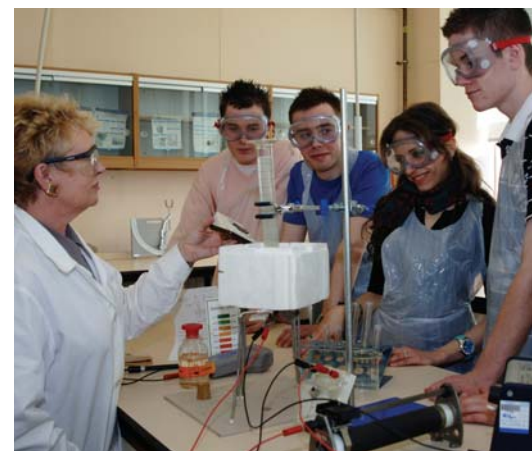
Extend the range of funding sources

During 2005–06 we have continued to seek out further opportunities for acquiring additional funding for projects. In addition to a number of business cases being funded by our Sponsorship Department, we have also been successful in obtaining funding from the European Social Fund and also from the Scottish Funding Council for modernising Higher National Qualifications.

E-commerce capability

During 2005–06, we have been preparing to expand the range of services we offer to centres and candidates through our website. We have completed an agreement to provide the financial software platform to support our e-commerce capability.

Our first two e-commerce services – replacement certificates and past papers online – will launch in 2006–07.



Testing Services

Our Testing Services team provide commercially-contracted examination and licensing services.

In August 2005 we were awarded the contract for the Scottish Police Promotion examinations for another three years. In January 2006 we were also awarded the contract for the Dangerous Goods Driver Training examinations by the Department for Transport, starting from October 2006 for a period of three years.

More information SQA's Annual Report 2005–06 contains more details on all the issues discussed in this review.

If you'd like more information about any of the points
raised here, please contact our Customer Contact Centre:

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e-mail: customer@sqa.org.uk

Or see our website: www.sqa.org.uk



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