



Ashbrook
RESEARCH & CONSULTANCY

**SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS
SQA ACCREDITATION RESEARCH
May 2009**

PREPARED FOR: SQA Accreditation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Two key conclusions can be readily drawn from this study, namely that:

- Stakeholders have considerable knowledge of – and significant confidence in – SQA Accreditation
- Stakeholders support the broadening remit of SQA Accreditation and are willing to work with SQA Accreditation in order to facilitate its successful implementation

These key conclusions are evidenced by the following key outcomes of the research:

- Awareness of SQA Accreditation is high and awareness and understanding of its key functions and services is considerable, but could be improved (particularly in respect of its extended remit)
- SQA Accreditation is viewed as being highly credible and as being of value to Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and Key Influencers
- Experiences of working with SQA Accreditation are very largely positive
- SQA Accreditation is perceived as having a wide range of strengths which is reflected in very few notable suggestions being made with respect to improvements to performance and service delivery
- SQA Accreditation's functions and services will continue to be of relevance to Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and Key Influencers, and – as a direct result of its extended remit – it is likely that they will be of increasing relevance. Accordingly, Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs are likely to use the key functions and services of SQA Accreditation to a greater extent in future
- There is significant willingness to promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation
- There is a desire for SQA Accreditation to be using a wide range of communication channels and mechanisms, including:
 - Existing mechanisms/forums
 - Specific events (which should be targeted and regional)
 - Electronic communications
 - Web based information

- Face to face contacts
- There is a potential threat that QCA related activities may negatively impact upon SQA Accreditation's communications strategy

The review of Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and Key Influencers highlighted a range of key messages which each of these organisations believed SQA Accreditation should be communicating. Further examination of these responses would suggest that these messages can be split into three categories:

- Principal key messages
- Secondary key messages
- Tertiary messages

Principal key messages that SQA Accreditation should be communicating include:

- The nature of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation
- The specific nature of its extended remit
- The impact of its extended remit for Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs
- The specific changes in practices, procedures and regulations associated with its extended remit

Secondary key messages that SQA Accreditation should be communicating include:

- The key attributes of SQA Accreditation
- The extent/nature of support available from SQA Accreditation
 - The role of SQA Accreditation in promoting/facilitating the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
 - How SQA Accreditation's extended remit will match up/differ from those of other regulators

Tertiary messages that SQA Accreditation should be communicating include:

- The distinction between SQA's accrediting and awarding roles

- The differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK i.e. why there is a specific requirement for the development/accreditation of qualifications for Scottish industry

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of key findings to emerge from research undertaken on behalf of SQA Accreditation by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd. A more detailed report has also been submitted to the SQA.

The purpose of the research was to elicit a range of information pertaining to perceptions of SQA Accreditation amongst Sector Skills Councils, Standard Setting Bodies, Awarding Bodies, Key Influencers and Employers. In particular, a mix of in-depth interviews and structured telephone depth interviews were undertaken on the following basis:

	<u>Number of In-depth Interviews</u>	<u>Number of Structured Telephone Depth Interviews</u>
Qualification Awarding Bodies	8	60
Sector Skills Councils	8	12
Standard Setting Bodies	6	10
Key Influencers	8	N/A
Total	30	82

A total of 600 structured telephone interviews were also undertaken with employers across the UK that employed more than 5 people – 200 in Scotland, 200 in England, 100 in Wales and 100 in Northern Ireland – with the data from these interviews being weighted during the analysis process (based on the actual number of employers employing more than 5 people in each of the nations) in order to restore representativeness.

All interviews were undertaken during April 2009.

Throughout this summary report, reference is made to four functions and services of SQA Accreditation, namely:

- Protecting candidates undertaking SQA accredited qualifications by quality assuring the Awarding Bodies that award the qualifications

- Providing technical advice, guidance and support to SSCs, SSBs and Awarding Bodies to assist them in meeting the requirements of the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
- Supporting the requirements of the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy by providing Awarding Bodies with the opportunity to seek accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees
- Ensuring that qualifications approved by SQA Accreditation are of the relevant quality and meet the requirements of the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy and Scottish industry

2.0 **SECTOR SKILLS COUNCILS/STANDARD SETTING BODIES PROFILE**

Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation

- All of the SSCs and SSBs interviewed were aware of SQA Accreditation, and all SSCs and almost all SSBs were aware of its four principal functions and services, primarily as a result of the extent to which they had worked with SQA Accreditation.
- The vast majority of SSCs and SSBs interviewed stated that they had a well developed understanding of each of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation of which they were aware. However, for most, their understanding in this regard tended to be fairly well rather than very well developed.
- As a general principle, SSCs and SSBs that have a dedicated presence in Scotland – and, in particular, some form of ‘Qualifications Team’ presence – tend to have a far better knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation’s functions and services than those that do not.
- Although the vast majority of SSCs and SSBs had a well developed knowledge and understanding of the ‘existing’ accreditation remit of SQA Accreditation, there was a notably lesser degree of detailed knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation’s extended remit in this regard.

Credibility of SQA Accreditation

- All of the SSCs and SSBs interviewed believed SQA Accreditation to have high credibility and, in most cases, to have very high credibility – with this extending to all functions and services of SQA Accreditation and primarily being a function of:
 - the rigorousness and thoroughness of SQA Accreditation’s processes and practices

- the quality of advice, guidance and support provided
- SQA Accreditation staff
- the reputation of SQA per se and SQA Accreditation in particular
- the longevity of SQA per se

Value of SQA Accreditation

- Virtually all of the SSCs and SSBs interviewed believed that each of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation were of value to their organisation and, indeed, a majority believed that these functions and services were very valuable to their organisation, primarily as a function of the quality of advice, guidance and support provided in relation to the development of National Occupational Standards, qualifications and Qualifications Strategies, but also as a function of a range of other factors, including:
 - the credibility which SQA Accreditation brings to National Occupational Standards and qualifications that SSCs and SSBs are involved in the development of
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation helps SSCs and SSBs to develop their understanding of the 'Scottish agenda' – including the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
 - the role of SQA Accreditation in respect of relicensing
 - that SQA Accreditation is required for approval and accreditation purposes

Working With SQA Accreditation

- All of the SSCs and SSBs interviewed stated that they had worked with SQA Accreditation, primarily in relation to functions and services pertaining to:
 - the provision of technical advice, guidance and support
 - ensuring the quality and relevance of qualifications accredited

- For SSCs and SSBs, their experience of working with SQA Accreditation had been very largely positive, with these positive experiences focusing around:
 - SQA Accreditation staff – at all levels
 - responsiveness of SQA Accreditation
 - the quality and relevance of guidance, advice and support provided
 - the accessibility of SQA Accreditation
 - the willingness of SQA Accreditation “*to get involved in detail*”

- Although SSCs and SSBs did identify a number of negative experiences of working with SQA Accreditation, these tended to be far more specific in nature i.e. being expressed by single SSCs or SSBs, rather than multiple SSCs and SSBs (as was the case in relation to positive experiences cited).

- With the exception of one SSC, all of those interviewed stated that SQA Accreditation had added value to what their organisation was trying to achieve, although SSCs were more likely than SSBs to state that this added value had been to a great extent.

- SSCs and SSBs identified a wide range of strengths of SQA Accreditation, including:
 - SQA Accreditation staff – in terms of their qualities, abilities, experience and knowledge
 - the quality of guidance, advice and support provided by SQA Accreditation
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation provides a ‘Scottish perspective’
 - SQA Accreditation being part of SQA and, thereby, benefiting from its longevity, reputation and experience and knowledge of education in Scotland
 - the responsiveness of SQA Accreditation
 - the thoroughness of SQA Accreditation

- the extent to which SQA Accreditation seeks solutions to problems and issues and, in particular, is open to suggestions and ideas
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation is willing to work towards finding tailored solutions for industry
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- When SSCs and SSBs were asked in what areas, if any, SQA Accreditation could improve its performance and service delivery, by far the most common response provided related to a desire for there to be increased efforts to communicate more effectively with SSCs and SSBs – particularly in relation to the extended remit of SQA Accreditation.

Working With Other Accrediting Organisations

- The vast majority of SSCs and SSBs interviewed worked with other accrediting organisations, primarily because *“they had to”*.
- The views of SSCs and SSBs regarding the performance of other accrediting organisations were mixed i.e. with some positive experiences (in relation to, for example, location and quality of advice, guidance and support provided) and some negative experience (for example, in relation to levels of support provided, speed of response and lack of consistency and clarity of information).

Future Use of SQA Accreditation

- Virtually all SSCs and SSBs believed that each of the four key functions and services of SQA Accreditation would be of relevance to their organisation in future, almost all stated that it was likely that they would use these four key functions and services in future, most believed that they would use these functions and services to at least some extent (rather than to a great extent), and most believed that they would use these functions and services fairly frequently (rather than very frequently) – with

the greatest likelihood of frequent use relating to services pertaining to the provision of technical advice, guidance and support.

- There was a general belief that – with the exception of the quality assurance of Awarding Bodies – the other three key functions and services of SQA Accreditation will be of increasing importance to SSCs and SSBs on the basis of:
 - the extended remit of SQA Accreditation leading SSCs and SSBs to increasingly seek advice and guidance regarding the development of ‘new qualifications’
 - the extended remit of SQA Accreditation increasing the ability for SSCs and SSBs to seek tailored solutions for employers in their sector
 - a belief that employers are increasingly looking for ‘different types’ of qualifications
 - a belief that the extended remit of SQA Accreditation will more readily facilitate the accreditation of qualifications on a UK wide basis
 - changes in NVQs meaning that there will be more work required in order to develop SVQs than had been the case in the past
 - a belief that there is a likelihood of increasing divergence between the education and training policies of Scotland and England

- There was a widespread consensus that there were “*enormous opportunities*” for SQA Accreditation relating to the development of unitised qualifications under the auspices of the QCF framework i.e. as these unitised qualifications are developed, there will be a significant opportunity for these to be accredited in Scotland within the extended remit of SQA Accreditation.

- All of the SSCs interviewed – and most of the SSBs – stated that they would be willing to promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation, particularly those pertaining to the provision of technical advice, guidance and support. However, in order to do this effectively, there was a desire for more information with regard to:

- the extended remit of SQA Accreditation
- the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy

- In promoting the functions and services of SQA Accreditation, SSCs and SSBs:
 - were particularly keen to do so within their own organisation
 - expressed a preference to use existing forums and mechanisms in which they participate (including the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils)

Communication of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services

- SSCs and SSBs believe that SQA Accreditation should be communicating its functions and services to a wide range of audiences, with particular priority being placed upon SSCs, SSBs and Awarding Bodies (particularly those without a presence in Scotland) and, thereafter, FE Colleges, employers with head offices in Scotland and professional bodies/industry federations.

- Within SSCs and SSBs, there was a general consensus that there was a critical need to target information to Qualification Teams, Workforce Development Teams, Qualifications Directorates and employer facing staff employed in Scotland.

- With respect of Awarding Bodies, there was a general consensus that SQA Accreditation should be targeting information to management teams and those responsible for developing qualifications and putting them forward for accreditation.

- There was a widespread consensus amongst the SSCs and SSBs interviewed that the communication channels and methods that SQA Accreditation should use should primarily focus around:
 - existing mechanisms and forums

- specific events – which should be regional and specific to SSCs and SSBs
 - electronic communications – such as e-bulletins
 - web based information
 - face to face contacts – particularly at a strategic level
- There were concerns regarding the extent to which SSCs and SSBs are involved in activities relating to QCF may represent a threat to the amount of time they can commit to receiving communications from/interacting with SQA Accreditation in respect of its functions and services.

Messages that SQA Accreditation Should Be Communicating

- The SSCs and SSBs interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation should be communicating a number of key messages:
 - the nature of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation
 - the specific nature of the extended remit of SQA Accreditation – including how this will impact on SSCs and SSBs
 - specific changes in practices, procedures and regulations associated with extended remit of SQA Accreditation
 - key attributes of SQA Accreditation – quality, thoroughness, approachability, responsiveness etc.
 - the extent and nature of support available from SQA Accreditation
 - the role of SQA Accreditation in promoting and facilitating the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
 - the distinction between SQA's accrediting and awarding roles
 - 'differences' between Scotland and the rest of the UK i.e. why specific qualifications require to be developed/accredited for Scottish industry

3.0 AWARDING BODIES PROFILE

3.1 In-depth Interviews

Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation

- All of the Awarding Bodies interviewed were aware of SQA Accreditation and each of its four principal functions and services – primarily as a function of having worked with the SQA Accreditation – and all claimed to have a good understanding of its four principal functions and services.
- It was apparent that larger Awarding Bodies have the staff and resources to develop their knowledge and understanding of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation. However, this is not always the case for smaller, specialised Awarding Bodies.
- Despite the outcomes noted above, there was a more limited understanding of:
 - the extended remit of SQA Accreditation
 - the Scottish Government’s Skills Strategy

Credibility of SQA Accreditation

- All of the Awarding Bodies interviewed believed SQA Accreditation to be highly credible, with this being a function of a number of factors, including:
 - the quality of advice and guidance given to Awarding Bodies
 - the technical knowledge and expertise of SQA Accreditation staff
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation has a clearly defined role which is delivered effectively
 - the thoroughness and rigour of SQA Accreditation practices, procedures and processes
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation is ‘demanding of’ Awarding Bodies

- the value of audit processes, in terms of facilitating improvements in processes and systems
- the extent to which SQA Accreditation is willing to 'work with' Awarding Bodies
- the responsiveness of SQA Accreditation – allied to the accuracy and relevance of its responsiveness

Value of SQA Accreditation

- There was a general consensus amongst Awarding Bodies interviewed that SQA Accreditation was valuable to their organisation, particularly in terms of:
 - audit processes i.e. in terms of helping Awarding Bodies improve processes and systems
 - their critical role in accrediting qualifications that they develop
 - the extent to which the accreditation of qualifications developed is given credibility by SQA Accreditation
 - the value of SQA accredited qualifications in sectors where the merit of qualifications may not be recognised

Working With SQA Accreditation

- All of the Awarding Bodies interviewed had worked with SQA Accreditation – many on a significant basis – particularly in relation to audit services, accreditation services and the provision of advice, guidance and support.
- Awarding Bodies experiences of working with SQA Accreditation were largely positive in terms of:
 - quality of advice and guidance provided
 - audit and accreditation processes allowing Awarding Bodies 'access to Scotland'
 - the clarity and structure of audit processes (including in comparison to other regulators)

- the willingness of SQA Accreditation to share best practice and information
 - SQA Accreditation sharing information regarding its engagement with stakeholder organisations
 - SQA Accreditation providing Awarding Bodies with critical information regarding the views and requirements of the Scottish Government
 - the willingness of SQA Accreditation to work with Awarding Bodies on a 'partnership basis'
 - the quality of SQA Accreditation staff
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- Although Awarding Bodies noted a number of negative experiences, these were far more specific in nature i.e. related to single Awarding Bodies, rather than multiple Awarding Bodies (as was the case in relation to the positive experiences noted earlier).
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- Awarding Bodies believed SQA Accreditation to have a wide range of key strengths, including:
 - responsiveness
 - rigorousness
 - the extent to which it engages with Awarding Bodies
 - the extent to which it allows Awarding Bodies access to other key players and stakeholders in Scotland
 - accessibility
 - supportiveness
 - its 'compact nature' – which makes interaction more focused and effective
 - providing credibility to qualifications developed/awarded by Awarding Bodies
 - quality of technical advice, guidance and support provided
 - knowledge and expertise of SQA Accreditation personnel
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- Suggestions for possible improvements to performance and service delivery were made single Awarding Bodies, rather than a number of

Awarding Bodies. However, a number of those interviewed did make reference to a desire for there to be better co-ordination between regulators in the UK, in order to minimise discrepancies between regulators in terms of their needs and demands.

Future Use of SQA Accreditation

- There was a widespread consensus amongst the Awarding Bodies interviewed that the principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation will continue to be relevant to their organisation in future and, as a result, that they will continue to be likely to use these functions and services.
- Indeed – as a direct result of the extended remit of SQA Accreditation – there was a general consensus that the functions and services of SQA Accreditation will be of more relevance to Awarding Bodies in future and, as such, Awarding Bodies will be more likely to use its functions and services.
- More specifically, there was a belief that the extended remit of SQA Accreditation will mean that demand for its accreditation services would increase significantly for many Awarding Bodies on the basis of providing them with:
 - a significant opportunity to develop more qualifications to be delivered in Scotland
 - the opportunity seek the accreditation of professional qualifications in Scotland
 - the opportunity to seek accreditation of other existing qualifications
 - an opportunity to develop UK wide qualifications
- There was also a widespread consensus that many Awarding Bodies that do not currently work with SQA Accreditation may seek to do so as a direct result of its extended remit.

- Two further factors were also noted in respect of future use of SQA Accreditation:
 - concerns regarding the remit of SQA Accreditation excluding the suite of qualifications which are currently regulated under the auspices of SQA's awarding function
 - a concern that the increasing divergence between SVQs and NVQs could represent a threat to SVQs i.e. if Awarding Bodies cannot see any value (or 'return') in the development of SVQs

Promoting Functions & Services of SQA Accreditation

- There was a widespread willingness amongst Awarding Bodies interviewed to promote all of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation, with a particular willingness in this regard to work on a partnership basis with SQA Accreditation, particularly in terms of providing access for SQA Accreditation to existing mechanisms and forums operated or participated in by Awarding Bodies.

Communication of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services

- The Awarding Bodies interviewed believed that that it was of fundamental importance for SQA Accreditation to be communicating the availability and nature of its functions and services to Awarding Bodies and, in particular:
 - Awarding Bodies that are not active in Scotland
 - smaller Awarding Bodies – that lack the resources to keep up to date with developments in SQA Accreditation
 - specialist interest groups within the Federation of Awarding Bodies
- Within Awarding Bodies there was a general consensus that there was a need for SQA Accreditation to target information at a range of individuals (including external verifiers, product development personnel and quality personnel), and a need for SQA Accreditation to communicate the availability and nature of its functions and services at a strategic level

within Awarding Bodies and to Scottish based personnel within Awarding Bodies (who could “*bang the drum*” with their colleagues south of the border).

- A number of the Awarding Bodies interviewed stated that they would like to know more about the extended remit of SQA Accreditation.
- A number of the Awarding Bodies interviewed expressed concerns with regard to the extent to which developments outwith Scotland in relation to QCF might impact on the ability of SQA Accreditation to communicate the availability and nature of its functions and services effectively to Awarding Bodies.
- The Awarding Bodies interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation should be using a range of communication channels and methods to promote the availability and nature of its functions and services, including:
 - specific events – which should be targeted at specific types of Awarding Bodies, should be regionalised, should be in the form of workshops, should include input from SCQF and should include input from a SSC perspective
 - electronic communications – in the form of e-bulletins and e-mails
 - existing forums within which Awarding Bodies operate
- Again, Awarding Bodies had concerns with regard to the extent to which current pressures they face pertaining to developments in relation to QCF may result in relevant individuals from Awarding Bodies lacking the time or commitment to attend events organised by SQA Accreditation.

Messages that SQA Accreditation Should be Communicating

- There was a widespread consensus amongst the Awarding Bodies interviewed that SQA Accreditation should be communicating a number of key messages pertaining to its extended remit and, in particular:

- the extent and nature of its extended remit
- how its extended remit will affect Awarding Bodies
- revised processes and procedures associated with its extended remit
- how existing regulations will change
- potential changes in auditing requirements
- the type of information that Awarding Bodies will require and will require to provide in respect of the SQA Accreditation's extended remit
- how changes in the SQA Accreditation's remit will relate to the business needs of Awarding Bodies
- how SQA Accreditation's extended remit will match up to/differ from the remits of other regulators
- support structures that would be in place in respect of the utilisation of the extended remit

3.2 Structured Telephone Interviews

Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation

- All of the Awarding Bodies interviewed had heard of SQA Accreditation, and the vast majority were aware of each of its four principal functions and services.
- A notable majority of Awarding Bodies interviewed stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of three of the principal services and functions of SQA Accreditation relating to quality assuring Awarding Bodies, ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited and the accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees. However, only around half stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation's role in providing technical advice, guidance and support.

Credibility of SQA Accreditation

- 9 out of 10 Awarding Bodies interviewed believed SQA Accreditation to have high credibility, with half specifically believing it to have very high credibility.
- Around three quarters of Awarding Bodies believed that two functions of SQA Accreditation – ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited and quality assuring awarding bodies – had high credibility, whilst around half believed that two remaining functions and services – namely, accrediting of all qualifications other than degrees and providing technical advice, guidance and support – had high credibility.
- Very few Awarding Bodies stated their belief that any of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation had low credibility.
- The perceived high credibility of SQA Accreditation amongst Awarding Bodies was principally a function of the following factors:
 - SQA per se – and SQA Accreditation in particular – being well established, highly credible, well known and having a good reputation
 - experience of working with SQA Accreditation across a range of functions and services
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation protects the integrity of qualifications it accredits
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation protects candidates in respect of qualifications that they pursue
 - the quality and consistency of the quality assurance practices and procedures implemented by SQA Accreditation
 - the level and quality of communications, liaison and support provided by SQA Accreditation

Value of SQA Accreditation

- A notable majority of Awarding Bodies interviewed believed that each of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation were of value to their organisation, with this primarily being a function of:
 - SQA Accreditation fulfilling a required role in the Scottish context
 - the relevance of SQA Accreditation functions and services to “*what they are trying to achieve*”
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation enhances them – and their qualifications – in the marketplace
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation is supportive of – and contributes to – the quality of their products and systems
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation contributes to their understanding of the needs of Scottish industry and employers
 - the quality of technical advice and guidance provided by SQA Accreditation

Working With SQA Accreditation

- 2 out of 5 of the Awarding Bodies interviewed had worked with SQA Accreditation and of these a notable majority had experienced one or more of its four principal functions or services.
- Amongst Awarding Bodies that had worked with SQA Accreditation, their positive experiences primarily focused around:
 - the significant extent to which staff were helpful
 - the quality of advice and guidance provided by SQA Accreditation
 - speed of response to queries and requests
- The vast majority of Awarding Bodies that had worked with SQA Accreditation stated that they had encountered no negative experiences.

- Almost all of the Awarding Bodies interviewed that had worked with SQA Accreditation stated that it had added value to “*what they were wanting to achieve*”.
- Awarding Bodies interviewed believed that the key strengths of SQA Accreditation were:
 - its staff – who were described as being supportive, helpful, responsive and knowledgeable
 - support and guidance provided – which was described as being of high quality
- A number of other key strengths of SQA Accreditation were also identified by those who had worked with it, including:
 - frequency and quality of communications
 - response times to issues and queries raised
 - knowledge of Scottish education
 - focus on Scottish issues
 - cost effectiveness
 - commitment
 - consistency
 - professionalism
 - promoting and supporting the Scottish Government’s Skills Strategy
 - quality and clarity of materials provided
- When Awarding Bodies that had worked with SQA Accreditation were asked in what areas, if any, they believed SQA Accreditation could improve its performance or service delivery, the vast majority could not think of any potential improvements.

Not Working With SQA Accreditation

- When Awarding Bodies that had not worked with SQA Accreditation were asked why this was the case, the principal responses provided related to:
 - their customer base being focused in England
 - SQA Accreditation not being appropriate or relevant to their business
 - having no need for Scottish qualifications i.e. low demand from Scottish candidates for their qualifications

Working With Other Accrediting Organisations

- 9 out of 10 of the Awarding Bodies interviewed stated that they had used other accrediting organisations, primarily because *“they had to”*.
- Amongst these Awarding Bodies, a majority stated that overall, the other accrediting organisations with which they had worked had performed well, primarily in relation to:
 - the quality of advice, guidance and technical support provided
 - online resources – with considerable mention being made of web based accreditation processes
- The areas in which other accrediting organisations had performed poorly primarily focused around:
 - levels of organisational change and staff turnover
 - communications and account management
 - speed of processes
 - levels of bureaucracy

Future Use of SQA Accreditation

- Typically, two thirds to three quarters of Awarding Bodies interviewed believed that each of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation were of relevance to their organisation, and a notable majority stated that it was likely that their organisation would use three functions/services of SQA Accreditation (namely ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited, accrediting of all qualifications other than degrees and quality assuring Awarding Bodies).
- Typically, around two thirds of Awarding Bodies interviewed stated that they would make use of the same three functions and services of SQA Accreditation noted above, although significantly less than half stated that their organisation would use each of the four principal functions or services of SQA Accreditation frequently.
- Very few Awarding Bodies stated that their organisation would be unwilling to use each of the four principal functions or services of SQA Accreditation.
- 6 out of 10 of the Awarding Bodies interviewed stated that it was likely that their organisation would promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation and, in particular, those functions and services pertaining to:
 - ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited
 - quality assuring Awarding Bodies

Communication of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services

- The Awarding Bodies interviewed primarily believed that SQA Accreditation should be communicating the availability and nature of its functions and services to Awarding Bodies and, thereafter, large employers, Sector Skills Councils, Standard Setting Bodies and Training Providers.

- Awarding Bodies also felt that less prominence should be given to the communication of functions and services to colleges, learners and other organisations (such as Government organisations/bodies, professional bodies and other regulators).
- Awarding Bodies primarily believed that SQA Accreditation should be using the following communication channels and methods to communicate the availability and nature of its functions and services:
 - e-bulletins
 - a dedicated SQA Accreditation website (or readily identifiable part of the SQA website)
 - e-newsletters
 - specific e-mails
- However, the Awarding Bodies interviewed also made reference to their belief that SQA Accreditation should be using a range of other communication channels and methods, including:
 - events – including networking events with Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs
 - seminars, conferences, workshops and presentations
 - paper newsletters and publications
 - direct contact – either on a face to face basis or by telephone
 - written communications and direct mail

Messages that SQA Accreditation Should Be Communicating

- The Awarding Bodies interviewed primarily believed that SQA Accreditation should be communicating the following messages:
 - identifying the services and functions of SQA Accreditation – including the fact that ‘it exists’ and its extended remit
 - SQA Accreditation’s quality assurance role

- the benefits and value of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation – for Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and employers
 - how SQA Accreditation relates to/‘fits with’ the broader UK context – including its relationship to/with other UK regulators
 - the quality and standards associated with SQA Accreditation products and services
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- Thereafter, the Awarding Bodies interviewed believed that secondary importance should be placed upon the communication of the following messages by SQA Accreditation:
 - the support that it can provide to Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and employers
 - the integrity of its products and services
 - its relationship with and distinction from SQA’s awarding function
 - the accessibility and approachability of SQA Accreditation
 - the flexibility of SQA Accreditation in meeting client needs

4.0 **KEY INFLUENCERS PROFILE**

Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation

- All of the key influencers interviewed were aware of SQA Accreditation and of each of its four principal functions and services. However, some recognised that they did not have a detailed knowledge and understanding of some of these functions and services.

Credibility of SQA Accreditation

- All of the key influencers interviewed believed SQA Accreditation to have very high credibility and, furthermore, believed that SQA Accreditation was viewed as being highly credible across the learning and skills sector as a function of:
 - the quality of functions and services delivered by SQA Accreditation
 - the quality of advice, guidance and support provided by SQA Accreditation
 - the relative lack of change in regulatory functions in Scotland over the past 10 years (particularly compared to England and Wales)

Value of SQA Accreditation

- Virtually all of the key influencers interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation was of considerable value to their organisation in a number of ways, including:
 - SQA Accreditation providing services and functions which are critical to them
 - allowing other regulators to have a 'different perspective' on how common functions and services are developed and delivered
 - activities of SQA Accreditation complimenting their own activities
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation provides assurance for standards which are applied

- the extent to which SQA Accreditation provides confidence in qualifications that they are funding

Working with SQA Accreditation

- Almost all of the key influencers interviewed worked extensively with SQA Accreditation through a range of formal and informal interactions and across a wide range of functional areas.
- Experience of key influencers working with SQA Accreditation were very largely positive and, in particular, it was apparent that key influencers have built up a range of valuable and productive relationships with SQA Accreditation.
- Key influencers identified a range of key strengths of SQA Accreditation, including:
 - the extent to which it maintains standards, ensures qualifications are credible and ensures that qualifications are appreciated and valued by employers
 - the extent to which SQA Accreditation promotes confidence in qualifications they accredit
 - the extent to which the work of SQA Accreditation in relation to credit and levelling is very much 'ahead of the game'
- The key influencers interviewed had few suggestions with regard to ways in which SQA Accreditation could improve its performance and service delivery – although it was suggested that SQA Accreditation and other regulators could work together more closely.

Future Use of SQA Accreditation

- All of the key influencers interviewed fully anticipated that they would continue to work with SQA Accreditation in future, with more extensive interaction being anticipated in a number of areas, including:
 - links between the QCF and SCQF
 - facilitating and co-ordinating work with Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs in respect of the extended remit of SQA Accreditation
 - working with SQA Accreditation to support emerging and developing SSCs
- From a broader perspective, a number of key influencers believed that – in the short term – use of SQA Accreditation’s extended role by Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs might be compromised by their lack of capacity to take it on board (due to the level of *“turmoil south of the border”*). However, there was confidence amongst the key influencers that there would be a ‘push’ to use SQA Accreditation’s functions and services in the medium to longer terms.
- There was a general consensus amongst the key influencers interviewed that SQA Accreditation’s extended remit represented a significant opportunity for it to promote its functions and services and, thereafter, benefit from increased levels of demand for these functions and services from Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs.
- All of the key influencers interviewed were extremely keen to work with SQA Accreditation in order to promote its functions and services – particularly in a range of existing forums within which they participate which would allow SQA Accreditation access to a wide range of key players in the marketplace.

Communication of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services

- There was a recognition amongst the key influencers interviewed that there would be a need for SQA Accreditation to communicate the availability and nature of its functions and services to a wide range of different types of organisations, including as a priority, Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and other key influencers and, thereafter, employers, Training Providers and Colleges.
- Particular emphasis was placed upon promoting functions and services to SSCs, on the basis that they have to develop Action Plans and Sector Qualifications Strategies.
- Given resource constraints, it was suggested that there may be value in SQA Accreditation initially focusing on the six Scottish Government sector priorities i.e. focusing on SSCs that develop standards in these sectors and Awarding Bodies that award qualifications in these sectors.
- The key influencers also believed that it was of fundamental importance for SQA Accreditation to:
 - have events targeted at SSCs, SSBs, Awarding Bodies and other key influencers
 - develop relationships with key individuals within SSCs, SSBs and Awarding Bodies
- The key influencers also believed that the SQA website should have a fundamental role to play in terms of communicating the availability and nature of SQA Accreditation's functions and services – with a belief that the SQA website could be improved significantly in this regard.
- The key influencers believed that events should be undertaken on a regional basis to encourage attendance/limit the amount of travel required by SSCs, SSBs and Awarding Bodies

Messages That SQA Accreditation Should Be Communicating

- The key influencers believed that SQA Accreditation should be communicating a number of key messages:
 - the nature of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation and, in particular, its extended remit and how this will impact on Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and other key influencers
 - key attributes of SQA Accreditation
 - the role of SQA Accreditation in promoting and facilitating the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
 - the benefits and value of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation – for Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and employers
 - how SQA Accreditation – particularly in the context of its extended remit – relates to/'fits with' other UK regulators

5.0 **EMPLOYER PROFILE**

The Accreditation Process

- Less than half of employers stated that they were aware that many qualifications go through an accreditation process, although amongst these employers, three quarters stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of what qualification accreditation processes involve.
- Two thirds of employers interviewed stated that, if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification, it would be important that it was be accredited, with this primarily being a function of:
 - contributing to the credibility of qualifications
 - demonstrating qualification quality
- For employers stating that accreditation of qualifications would be of little or no importance, this was primarily a function of a perceived 'lack of need for qualifications' and, thereafter, 'training being undertaken in-house'.
- Over two thirds of employers stated that if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification, it would be important that they had heard of the accrediting organisation, primarily 'to ensure the credibility of the accrediting organisation' and, thereafter, to 'ensure the credibility of its qualifications'.
- For employers stating that knowledge of the accrediting organisation would be of little or no importance, this was again primarily a function of a perceived 'lack of need for qualifications' and, thereafter, that 'training was undertaken in-house'.
- Over two thirds of employers stated that if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification, it would be important that they had an

understanding of the accrediting organisation, primarily to 'ensure the credibility of the accrediting organisation' and, thereafter, 'to ensure the credibility of the qualifications of that organisation'.

- For employers stating that an understanding of an accrediting organisation would be of little or no importance, this was primarily a function of a perceived 'lack of need for qualifications'.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority

- A quarter of employers stated that they had heard of the SQA, although nearly three quarters of these employers stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of the Authority and what it does.
- Nearly 9 out of 10 employers aware of the SQA described the Authority as having high credibility and none believed it to have low credibility.

SQA Accreditation

- Very few employers interviewed had heard of SQA Accreditation.
- On the basis of a description of SQA Accreditation provided to them, 2 out of 5 employers stated that they would be happy for qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working in future to be accredited by SQA Accreditation, and very few would be unhappy. However, it should be noted that half of employers provided a 'don't know' response here.
- When employers stating that they would be happy for qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working in future to be accredited by SQA Accreditation were asked why this was the case, this was primarily due to 'SQA being a highly regarded and highly credible organisation'.

Accreditation of Qualifications by Other Accrediting Organisations

- Only around 1 in 10 employers stated that they would prefer another accrediting organisation to accredit qualifications towards which people in their workforce were work in future.

Communication Methods

- Employers believed that a wide range of methods would be useful in terms of encouraging them to consider using the services of SQA Accreditation and, in particular:
 - sending printed materials
 - sending links to information on its website
 - sending information by e-mail
 - correspondence by e-mail
 - advertising at events/conferences
 - attending events/conferences

Messages for Employers

- When employers were asked what kind of messages they thought SQA Accreditation should be putting forward to employers in order to promote itself and its services, the two principal responses provided related to:
 - the functions and services of SQA Accreditation i.e. “*what SQA Accreditation does*”
 - that qualifications could be recognised across the UK
- In addition, secondary mention was made of a range of other suggested messages here, including:
 - that SQA Accreditation exists
 - the benefits of SQA Accreditation for employers
 - the costs associated with the functions and services of SQA Accreditation

- the quality of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation