



**Ashbrook**

RESEARCH & CONSULTANCY

**DRAFT REPORT  
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 details key findings to emerge from research undertaken on behalf of SQA Accreditation by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd. A summary 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 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**

### **2.1 Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation**

All of the SSCs and SSBs interviewed stated that they were aware of SQA Accreditation. For those that were interviewed on an in-depth basis, this was overwhelmingly a function of the extent to which they had worked with SQA Accreditation – currently, previously or both.

All of the SSCs interviewed and the vast majority of SSBs, were aware of each of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation. However, it should be noted that a small number of SSBs were not aware of two of SQA Accreditation's principal functions and services, namely:

- Providing technical advice, guidance and support
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees

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, with one exception, this tended to be a 'fairly well developed' knowledge and understanding, rather than 'very well developed' knowledge and understanding. The exception here was that of the provision of technical advice, guidance and support, in relation to which, a significant majority of SSBs noted that they had a 'very well developed' knowledge and understanding.

For those functions and services in relation to which there was limited knowledge and understanding, this was primarily a function of three factors:

- Respondents having limited experience of working with SQA Accreditation
- SSCs or SSBs having no dedicated ‘presence’ in Scotland
- Respondents interviewed in Scotland on a personal basis having an ‘employer facing’ role

Indeed, as a general principle here, it was apparent during the course of the in-depth interviews undertaken with SSCs and SSBs that those 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 who do not.

In addition, a number of the SSCs interviewed stated their belief that functions and services of SQA Accreditation are less well understood by personnel based in England who were relatively ‘new’ (which is often the case in SSCs) or had come into SSCs from industry (i.e. not from an education background).

One final factor which should be noted here is that, during the course of the in-depth interviews with SSCs and SSBs, it became apparent that although the vast majority did have a well developed knowledge and understanding of the 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.

## **2.2 Credibility of SQA Accreditation**

All of the SSCs and SSBs interviewed believed SQA Accreditation to have high credibility and, indeed in most cases, SQA Accreditation was seen as having very high credibility – with this extending to all of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation (and, in particular, its role in providing technical advice, guidance and support).



When respondents were asked – on an unprompted basis – why they believed SQA Accreditation (across all of its functions and services) to have high credibility, the principal reasons to emerge were:

- The rigorousness and thoroughness of its processes and practices
- The quality of advice, guidance and support provided (including in comparison to other regulators)
- SQA Accreditation staff (in terms of their skills, knowledge, helpfulness etc.)
- The reputation of SQA per se and SQA Accreditation in particular
- The longevity of SQA per se

In addition, a number of other factors were also cited here contributing to perceptions of high credibility, including:

- SQA Accreditation's positive role in accrediting SVQs (which are viewed as highly positive qualification)
- The willingness of SQA Accreditation to respond proactively to issues and problems raised by SSCs and SSBs
- The level of engagement of SQA Accreditation with stakeholders and employers

It should also be stressed that only two respondents interviewed (one SSC and one SSB) believed any of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation to have low credibility, with this being a function of:

- Lack of familiarity with specific functions and services of SQA Accreditation
- Lack of understanding of the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
- Perceived lack of relevance of particular functions and services to a specific SSC

### 2.3 Value of SQA Accreditation

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 – with the exception of one SSC that believed that the provision of technical advice, guidance and support was of ‘little or no value’ to their organisation. Indeed, it should be stressed that a majority of SSCs and SSBs believed that each of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation were very valuable to their organisation – although this applied to a lesser extent to SQA Accreditation’s role in accrediting qualifications.

When respondents were asked why they believed the principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation to be valuable to their organisation, the main factor to emerge was the quality of advice, guidance and support provided in relation to the development of National Occupational Standards, qualifications and qualification strategies.

In addition, a range of secondary factors were also cited here, 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 an understanding of the ‘Scottish agenda’ – including the Scottish Government’s Skills Strategy
- The role of SQA Accreditation in respect of re-licensing
- That SQA Accreditation is required for approval and accreditation purposes – for example, in relation to National Occupational Standards developed

In addition to the above, a number of other factors were also cited by single SSCs or SSBs, including:

- The 'discipline' that SQA Accreditation brings to the qualification development process
- The proactive and positive input that they have to the development of National Occupational Standards
- Helping SSCs and SSBs to identify opportunities for the development of qualifications
- Assisting SSCs and SSBs to promote the 'Scottish agenda' outwith Scotland
- Ensuring the protection of – and giving confidence to – candidates

Finally, it should be noted that – for the single SSC that noted that one function of SQA Accreditation was of 'little or no value to her organisation' – this was primarily a function of a lack of understanding of this function on the part of this individual.

#### **2.4 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

In addition – during the course of the in-depth interviews undertaken with SSCs and SSBs – respondents made specific reference to working with SQA Accreditation in relation to:

- The development and approval of national occupational standard

- SQA Accreditation overseeing National Occupational Standards reviews – to ensure that these are in line with the Scottish Government’s Skills Strategy
- Developing qualifications frameworks
- SQA Accreditation reviewing qualifications development and validation activities that they are undertaking
- The accreditation of qualifications by SQA Accreditation

### Positive Experiences of Working With SQA Accreditation

It was apparent from the interviews undertaken with SSCs and SSBs that their experience of working with SQA Accreditation had been very largely positive.

In particular, a wide range of positive experiences were noted by those taking part in the interview process, with these principally focusing around:

- SQA Accreditation staff – at all levels – who were described as being approachable, accessible, professional, helpful, responsive and knowledgeable. In particular, specific reference was made – by a number of SSCs and SSBs – to the value of having ‘named contacts’ within SQA Accreditation and the ability to build relationships with these contacts.
- Responsiveness (for example, in relation to queries and issues – both in terms of their speed and relevance)
- 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’ – for example, attending technical meetings regarding the development of National Occupational Standards

In addition to the above, a number of other positive experiences were also noted by those interviewed, including:

- The thoroughness of SQA Accreditation
- Their provision of clear, unambiguous and 'judgement free' inputs
- Their impartial and objective treatment of all SSCs and SSBs
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation encourages and promotes networking in Scotland
- The speed of approval processes (in comparison to other regulators)
- Levels of sector knowledge
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation is willing to develop relationships with SSCs and SSBs

Despite these positive outcomes, however, a number of negative experiences were also noted by specific SSCs and SSBs, namely:

- That SQA Accreditation can be inflexible at times if things are not 'done the SQA way'
- That SQA Accreditation processes and procedures can be 'pedantic'
- Concerns about translating 'words into action' in terms of how centres are regulated
- That SQA Accreditation can fail to take into account the UK and international needs and circumstances of employers (and, in particular, that processes can be 'very Scottish' in nature)
- Lack of sector knowledge of SQA staff (which can lead to issues being raised which aren't of actual importance)
- That there can be a degree of variability in advice and guidance provided
- Concerns regarding the process for incremental review of qualifications in Scotland
- Timescales regarding accreditation approval processes

- The extent to which the thoroughness of SQA can lead to required activities being highly time consuming (allied to the failure of SQA Accreditation to take into account the resources of an SSC)
- Personnel changes
- Lack of distinction between SQA awarding and SQA accrediting functions

It should be stressed, however, that all of the above negative experiences were expressed by single SSCs or SSBs, rather than multiple SSCs and SSBs.

#### Adding Value to Desired Achievements

With the exception of one SSC, all of those interviewed stated that working with SQA Accreditation had added value to what their organisation was trying to achieve – although interestingly whilst a majority of SSCs stated that SQA Accreditation had added value to a great extent to what their organisation was wanting to achieve, SSBs were more likely to state that SQA Accreditation had added value to some extent to what their organisation was trying to achieve

#### Strengths of SQA Accreditation

When respondents were asked to identify what they believed to be the strengths of SQA Accreditation, the principal factors to emerge were as follows:

- SQA Accreditation staff (in terms of their quality, abilities, experience and knowledge – with specific reference being made by a number of respondents to long term relationships having been developed with staff at all levels)
- The quality of guidance, advice and support provided by SQA Accreditation

- The extent to which SQA Accreditation provides ‘a Scottish perspective’ i.e. pursues the accreditation of qualifications that are relevant to Scotland
- The longevity and reputation of SQA allied to its experience and knowledge of education in Scotland
- The responsiveness of SQA Accreditation – both in terms of quality and relevance of response
- 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

In addition to the above, a number of other strengths were also noted by SSCs and SSBs interviewed, including:

- The willingness of SQA Accreditation to develop relationships and partnerships with SSCs and SSBs
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation provides measured and considered responses
- The quality and efficiency of its processes and systems
- The speed of approval processes in comparison to other regulators
- Facilitating access to industry for SSCs and SSBs
- SQA Accreditation’s quality assurance role
- SQA Accreditation’s communications

### Performance & Service Delivery

When respondents were asked to consider 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 and particularly, amongst SSBs (a number of which described themselves as being treated as 'second class citizens' by SQA Accreditation).

Thereafter, specific suggestions for improvements in performance and service delivery were made by, at most, two respondents, including:

- Concerns regarding the SQA website and, in particular, access to information about SQA Accreditation
- A belief that SQA Accreditation could be 'less pedantic' at times
- A desire for more information regarding the relationship between SQA and SCQF – in terms of linkages and synergies
- A desire for more information regarding the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy and, in particular, how this will impact upon SSCs, SSBs and Awarding Bodies
- Efforts to increase the knowledge of specific sectors amongst some SQA Accreditation staff
- A desire for SQA Accreditation to be more willing to 'trust the judgement' of SSCs to a greater extent
- A belief that SQA Accreditation could be 'doing more' in terms of engaging with the broader stakeholder community – including employer groups and organisations
- A request for the process for the incremental review of qualifications in Scotland to be reviewed
- A desire for a reduction in personnel changes
- A belief that SQA Accreditation should be less stringent regarding the requirement to demonstrate demand for qualifications in Scotland
- A belief that the speed of accreditation and approval processes could be improved



## 2.5 Working With Other Accrediting Organisations

The SSCs and SSBs that were interviewed by telephone were asked if they had used other accrediting organisations and, on this basis, this applied to a majority of both SSCs and SSBs – and, in particular, a significant majority of SSBs.

When these respondents were asked why they had chosen to work with these accrediting organisations, the principal reason to emerge was that it was mandatory to do so i.e. national definitions dictate the need for their use.

However, it is of interest to note that there were mixed views with regard to how well other accrediting organisations had performed, although – for both SSCs and SSBs – these organisations emerged positively in terms of:

- Access to named contacts
- Responsiveness of contacts
- Location i.e. close proximity
- Quality of advice, guidance and support provided
- Quality of website

In contrast, a number of SSCs and SSBs believed that other accrediting organisations had performed poorly in terms of:

- Levels of support provided
- Lack of named contacts
- Lack of attendance at meetings
- Complexity of systems
- Timescales
- Lack of consistency and clarity of information
- Speed of response

## 2.6 Future Use Of SQA Accreditation

### Use of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services

The interviews undertaken with SSCs and SSBs indicated the following key outcomes in respect of the future use of SQA Accreditation:

- Virtually all SSCs and SSBs believed that each of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation would be of relevance to their organisation in future, particularly those relating to the provision of technical advice, guidance and support and ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited
- Almost all SSCs and SSBs interviewed stated that it was likely that they would use the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation under consideration, with most specifically stating that it would be very likely that they would use these functions and services
- Most SSCs and SSBs interviewed believed that they would use each of the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation. However, whilst the vast majority of SSCs stated that they would use each of these functions and services to a great extent, amongst SSBs, this only applied to services pertaining to the provision of technical advice, guidance and support i.e. for the three remaining functions and services, most SSBs stated their belief that they would use these to some extent
- Most SSCs and SSBs believed that they would use the four principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation fairly frequently, rather than very frequently, although there was a greater likelihood of SSCs stating that they would use services pertaining to the provision of technical advice, guidance and support very frequently
- Very few of the SSCs and SSBs interviewed stated that they would be unwilling to use any of the four principal functions or services of

SQA Accreditation, although this did apply to a very small number in relation to services pertaining to:

- Quality assurance of Awarding Bodies
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees

### Relevance of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services in Future

There was a very clear consensus amongst the SSCs and SSBs interviewed that they would wish to continue to operate in the Scottish market and, accordingly, will continue to work with SQA Accreditation regarding the development of National Occupational Standards, qualifications and Sector Skills Strategies.

In particular, although the role of SQA Accreditation in quality assuring Awarding Bodies was seen as being of little direct relevance to SSCs and SSBs, there was a general belief that its other three principal functions and services will be of increasing importance to such organisations on the basis of:

- The extended remit of SQA Accreditation leading to SSCs and SSBs increasingly seeking advice and guidance regarding the development of 'new' qualifications
- The extended remit of SQA Accreditation increasing the ability of 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 (i.e. as qualifications that could only be accredited outwith Scotland can be accredited within Scotland)

- Changes in NVQs meaning that there will be more work required in order to develop SVQs than had been the case in the past (in comparison to 'redesigning' NVQs)
- A belief that there is a likelihood of an increasing divergence between the education and training policies in Scotland and England

In particular, it should be stressed that there was a very strong consensus that there was an enormous opportunity for SQA Accreditation in relation to the development of unitised qualifications under the auspices of the QCF framework i.e. that, as these unitised qualifications are developed, there will be a significant opportunity for these to be accredited within the extended remit of SQA Accreditation in Scotland.

In the context of the general consensus that SQA functions and services would be of increasing relevance to SSCs and SSBs – and, consequently that there was an increasing likelihood that these organisations would make use of SQA Accreditation's functions and services – a number of other comments should be noted, including:

- A number of SSCs and SSBs believed that it was 'too early' for them to comment with regard to the relevance of SQA Accreditation's functions and services – and the likelihood of using these – on the basis that they still had to 'see how QCF developments will impact in Scotland'
- Despite its extended remit, there was a belief that some large employers may not consider the accreditation of VRQs in Scotland since they are already accredited elsewhere in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Despite its extended remit, it was stressed that Awarding Bodies will continue to only seek accreditation of a qualification in Scotland if there is a demonstrated demand for it

- There was a belief that SSCs cannot ignore the ‘Scottish dimension’ due to relicensing considerations
- It was recognised that, for some SSBs, their use of SQA Accreditation functions and services will decline as they pass their responsibilities and remit over to SSCs

#### Promoting the Functions & Services of SQA Accreditation

All of the SSCs interviewed 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 – although a small number of SSCs stated that they would be least likely to promote functions and services of SQA Accreditation pertaining to:

- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies
- The accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees

Amongst SSBs, there were more mixed views with regard to their promotion of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation and, in particular, those pertaining to:

- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies
- The accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees

During the course of the in-depth interviews undertaken with SSCs and SSBs it was apparent that whilst they were keen to promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation, 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

It was also apparent that SSCs and SSBs are particularly keen to promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation within their own organisation.

In addition, it was apparent that a number the SSCs and SSBs interviewed on an in-depth basis were less keen to promote these functions and services of SQA Accreditation to employers on the basis of their belief that these would be of 'little or no interest to employers'.

Finally, it should be noted that – in promoting the functions and services of SQA Accreditation – the SSCs and SSBs interviewed stated that they would prefer to do so by using existing forums and mechanisms in which they participate. In addition, it was stressed by a number of SSCs interviewed that they believed that the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils should play a fundamental role in terms of the promotion of SQA Accreditation functions and services.

## **2.7 Communication of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services**

### Audiences

It was clear that the SSCs and SSBs interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation should be communicating its functions and services to a wide range of audiences, with the priority in this regard being placed upon communications with:

- SCCs
- SSBs
- Awarding Bodies (particularly those without a presence in Scotland)

In addition, it was also stressed that the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils should represent a key partner in terms of communicating SQA functions and services amongst SSCs.

Thereafter, although of significantly lesser importance, it was felt that there was a need for SQA Accreditation to promote its functions and services to:

- FE Colleges (due to their role in developing qualifications and links with local employers)
- Employers with head offices in Scotland
- Professional bodies and industry federations (due to the fact that they can have a significant influence in attitudes towards training in their sector)

It should also be noted that a number of those interviewed believed that there should be particular priority placed upon communicating the functions and services of SQA Accreditation to SSCs on the basis that:

- They have the lead role in the design of qualifications
- As new and emerging organisations, they have a particular need for this information
- SSCs and increasingly taking on staff who do not have an NTO background

In the context of the outcomes noted above, it was argued by a number of those interviewed that within SSCs and SSBs, there was a critical need to target information at:

- Qualification Teams
- Workforce Development Teams
- Qualifications Directorates
- Employer facing staff employed in Scotland

In addition, it was argued that within SSCs and SSBs, there was a critical need to communicate information about the functions and services of SQA Accreditation at both strategic and operational levels.

With respect to Awarding Bodies, there was a general consensus that SQA Accreditation should be targeting:

- Management teams (in order to help them develop their policies for accreditation in Scotland)
- Those responsible for developing qualifications and putting them forward for accreditation

It should be stressed that whilst identifying the need for SQA Accreditation to be promoting its functions and services to a wide range of audiences, it was recognised by all of those interviewed that:

- This represented a considerable and extensive task for SQA Accreditation
- It was likely that this would have to be achieved within the context of relatively limited resources available to SQA Accreditation

### Communication Channels & Methods

There was a widespread consensus amongst the SSCs and SSBs interviewed that the communication channels and methods that SQA Accreditation should be used should primarily focus around:

- Existing mechanisms and forums – such as SSC and Awarding Body forums
- Specific events – which should be regional and specific to SSCs/SSBs



- Electronic communications – such as e-bulletins regarding new developments, changes in the Scottish Government’s Skills Strategy etc.

There was also considerable support for web based information to be available and, in particular, a belief that there was a need for the provision of information – and easily accessible information – on the existing SQA website. Indeed, a number of those interviewed stated a desire for a specific SQA Accreditation website – particularly in the context of its extended remit.

It should also be noted that a notable number of SSCs and SSBs interviewed emphasised the importance of face to face contacts – particularly at a strategic level – in order to effectively promote SQA Accreditation functions and services.

Finally, a number of other suggestions were made with regard to promoting SQA Accreditation functions and services, including:

- The use of newsletters and mailshots
- Working in partnership with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils
- Video conferencing (for example, to specific teams within SSCs)

In the context of the outcomes noted above, two further comments should be noted:

- There was a concern that the extent to which SSCs and SSBs are involved in activities relating to the QCF may represent a notable threat to the amount of time they can commit to receiving communications from and interacting with SQA Accreditation in respect of its functions and services
- In comparison to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there was a belief that there was less of a ‘tradition’ of partnership working in

England (primarily due to the scale of activities there) and, accordingly, there was a belief that this might contribute to the challenge for SQA Accreditation to engage with SSCs, SSBs and Awarding Bodies in the promotion of its functions and services

## **2.8 Messages That SQA Accreditation Should Be Communicating**

The SSCs and SSBs interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation should be communicating a number of key messages to organisations such as themselves and others, including:

- The nature of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation – including its extended remit (particularly in the context of many ‘new’ personnel within the developing SSCs)
- The specific nature of the extended remit of SQA Accreditation, how it will impact on SSCs and SSBs and, indeed, how it will impact on other countries within the UK in relation to, for example, QCF and credit levelling
- Specific changes in practices, procedures and regulations associated with the extended remit of SQA Accreditation
- Key attributes of SQA Accreditation such as quality, thoroughness, flexibility, approachability and responsiveness
- The extent and nature of support available from SQA Accreditation
- The role of SQA Accreditation in promoting and facilitating the Scottish Government’s Skill Strategy
- The distinction between the SQA accreditation and awarding roles
- Differences between Scotland and the rest of the UK and the consequent need for qualifications which are being developed to be tailored to recognise the requirements of Scottish industry and meet the needs of Scotland

### **3.0 AWARDING BODIES PROFILE**

#### **3.1 In-depth Interview Profile**

##### **3.1.1 Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation**

All of the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis stated that they were aware of SQA Accreditation and each of its functions and services. Indeed, it was apparent that almost all of those interviewed had worked with SQA Accreditation in the past, or were currently doing so and, indeed, a number of those interviewed had worked with SQA Accreditation extensively.

All of the Awarding Bodies interviewed on a in-depth basis also claimed to have a good understanding of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation, with this being a function of a number of factors, including:

- Having a 'presence' in Scotland i.e. staff based in Scotland
- A stated 'commitment' to the Scottish market
- Extensive interaction with SQA Accreditation
- Audit activities of SQA Accreditation
- Through SQA Accreditation communications and updates

It should be stressed that, in general, 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 the case for small specialised Awarding Bodies – a factor that must be taken into account by SQA Accreditation.

Despite the outcome highlighted above, it should be noted that amongst the Awarding Bodies interviewed on a in-depth basis, there was more limited understanding of:

- The extended remit of SQA Accreditation in respect of the accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees
- The Scottish Government's Skills Strategy

With respect to the former, it should be noted that a number of those interviewed stated that they had received 'paperwork' from SQA Accreditation regarding its extended remit, but had not had time to 'digest this'.

### 3.1.2 Credibility of SQA Accreditation

The in-depth interviews carried out with Awarding Bodies indicated that SQA Accreditation is viewed as being highly credible – and, indeed, 'at least as credible' as other regulators in the UK. Indeed, it should be stressed that a number of those interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation was more credible than other UK regulators, whilst only one respondent believed that SQA Accreditation was less credible than another regulator (and, in particular, Ofqual).

The high credibility of SQA Accreditation – in both absolute and relative terms – was 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 (often to a greater extent than other regulators)
- The value of audit processes in terms of enhancing 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

It should be noted, however, that despite these positive outcomes, one respondent believed that SQA’s credibility was less than that of her own organisation and, in particular that, as a professional body, they have more credibility amongst employers in her sector than SQA Accreditation.

### 3.1.3 Value of SQA Accreditation

There was a general consensus amongst the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis that SQA Accreditation was valuable to their organisation. In particular, it was stated that:

- The audit process is of value in terms of helping Awarding Bodies improve processes and systems and, in particular, it was stressed by a number of those interviewed that SQA Accreditation has a highly proactive approach in terms of “*working with us rather than simply policing us*” and, as part of this, in providing suggestions for improvements to processes and systems
- The accreditation of qualifications is critical for many Awarding Bodies if they wish to have them delivered in Scotland

In addition to the above, other elements of value were noted by a number of the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis, including:

- 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 (for example, by Local Authorities or the Police)

Two further outcomes should be noted from this part of the discussions with Awarding Bodies:

- There was a general consensus that the auditing function of SQA Accreditation in respect of Awarding Bodies is the most important function/service provided by SQA Accreditation to Awarding Bodies
- A number of Awarding Bodies stated that, in principle and/or in practice (to some extent), they 'don't need' SQA Accreditation i.e. a belief that their brand is sufficiently strong to allow qualifications to be delivered in Scotland successfully without their accreditation by SQA Accreditation

#### 3.1.4 Working With SQA Accreditation

It was apparent that all of the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in depth basis had worked with SQA Accreditation and, in particular, had experienced – to a greater or lesser extent – three of the principal functions/services of SQA Accreditation, namely:

- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support
- Accreditation of qualifications

In addition, it was recognised that – although on perhaps a 'less direct' manner – they had also experienced SQA Accreditation's role in terms of ensuring the quality and relevance of qualifications accredited.

It was apparent from the interviews undertaken with Awarding Bodies on in-depth basis that, for many respondents, their interactions with SQA Accreditation – either current or in the past – had been considerable and, in particular, many of those interviewed were or had worked closely ('on a day to day basis') with SQA Accreditation personnel through:

- Indirect contact (via e-mail and letter exchange)
- Direct contact (through attendance at meetings, telephone contacts etc.)

As mentioned earlier, for many respondents, their principal experience of working with SQA Accreditation related to their annual audit. However, it was apparent that SQA Accreditation also had a significant role to play for a number of Awarding Bodies in relation, for example, providing advice and guidance relating to the development and ultimate 'signing off' of qualifications for which accreditation was being sought.

#### Positive Experiences of Working With SQA Accreditation

It was apparent from the personal interviews undertaken with Awarding Bodies that their experiences of working with SQA Accreditation had been largely positive and, in particular:

- Quality of advice and guidance provided (during, for example, audit and accreditation processes)
- Audit and accreditation process 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 audits challenging Awarding Body processes and procedures and, in doing so, facilitating improvements to these processes and procedures
- 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' i.e. suggesting improvements to processes and systems and proactively seeking resolutions to problems and difficulties
- The quality of SQA Accreditation staff in terms of their approachability, helpfulness, professionalism, knowledge, expertise and, in particular, the opportunity to develop one to one contacts and relationships with SQA Accreditation staff

#### Negative Experiences of Working With SQA Accreditation

Despite the largely positive nature of Awarding Bodies experiences of working with SQA Accreditation, a number of negative experiences were noted, including:

- A belief that SQA Accreditation submission requirements are 'onerous' from a product development perspective
- Difficulties encountered by one Awarding Body in the development of non SVQ qualifications
- Instances of lack of help and support being provided by SQA Accreditation in respect of the development of qualifications
- The 'physical distance' between SQA Accreditation and many Awarding Bodies
- The onerous nature of audit processes, including as they do, annual audits, annual self assessments and quarterly risk assessments



- A belief that annual audits are too regular for Awarding Bodies for which there are a small number of candidates in Scotland
- A belief amongst some Awarding Bodies that audit processes lack clarity and are too complex
- A belief that SQA audit processes can be more pedantic than those of other regulators
- A belief that some SQA Accreditation auditors ‘tend to look for problems’

It should be stressed, however, that these negative outcomes should be placed within broader context of the largely positive nature of experiences of working with SQA Accreditation outlined earlier.

#### Key Strengths of SQA Accreditation

The Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis identified a wide range of key strengths of SQA Accreditation, including:

- The responsiveness of SQA Accreditation (allied to the accuracy and relevance of responses)
- The supportiveness of SQA Accreditation
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation engages with Awarding Bodies – particularly in comparison with other regulators in the UK
- The accessibility of SQA Accreditation (particularly from a personal point of view) and the opportunity to develop one to one relationships with individuals who have a knowledge of specific sectors
- The rigorousness of SQA Accreditation practices and processes
- The quality of the technical advice, guidance and support provided by SQA Accreditation
- The knowledge and expertise of SQA Accreditation personnel
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation allows access for Awarding Bodies to other key players and stakeholders in Scotland

- The 'compact nature' of SQA Accreditation (particularly compared to Ofqual and QCA) which makes interaction with Awarding Bodies more focused and effective
- The extent to which qualification accreditation and Awarding Body auditing provides credibility to Awarding Bodies and the qualifications they develop/award

### Possible Areas for Improvement in Performance & Service Delivery

When respondents were asked in what areas – if any – SQA Accreditation could improve its performance and service delivery, the suggestions made tended to be by one or two respondents, rather than representing a consensus.

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

- Some form of 'fast track process of accreditation' for qualifications on the QCF framework i.e. for such qualifications to have an 'easier path to accreditation in Scotland'
- A removal of the requirement for Awarding Bodies to have a separate Marketing Plan for Scotland

Other specific Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis also made the following suggestions with regard to improvements in SQA Accreditation performance and service delivery, including desire for SQA Accreditation to:

- Improve the SQA website – and, in particular, to provide a dedicated SQA Accreditation website or to allow easier access to SQA Accreditation information on the SQA website

- Improve liaison with Awarding Bodies in relation to, for example, SQA Accreditation's plans, priorities and potential developments (indeed this should be placed within the context that a number of the Awarding Bodies interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation liaises more effectively with Sector Skills Councils than it does with Awarding Bodies)
- Be 'less demanding' (and, in particular, to be 'more on a par' with other regulators in this regard)
- Have greater confidence in the judgement of Awarding Bodies and, in particular, to allow Awarding Bodies (and, more specifically, larger Awarding Bodies) more flexibility in the qualifications that they develop
- Review the timescales that it allows for the completion of activities
- Facilitate greater access to Sector Skills Councils – particularly for smaller Awarding Bodies
- Avoid 'looking for problems' during audits
- Decrease the frequency of audits for Awarding Bodies and, in particular, for those that have a small number of candidates in Scotland
- Provide greater consistency and clarity of advice and guidance provided
- Increase the number of forums and meetings held in England – particularly those that are specifically targeted at Awarding Bodies
- Simplify data return requirements – which, it was generally believed, are more onerous on the part of SQA Accreditation than other regulators

### 3.1.5 Future Use of SQA Accreditation

There was a widespread consensus amongst the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis that the principal functions and services of SQA Accreditation will continue to be relevant to their

organisation in future and, as a result, they would 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 the functions and services of SQA Accreditation in future.

More specifically, there was a belief that the extended remit of SQA Accreditation to accredit all qualifications other than degrees in Scotland would mean that demand for the accreditation services of SQA Accreditation would increase significantly for many Awarding Bodies on the basis of providing them with the opportunity to:

- Develop more qualifications to be delivered in Scotland
- Seek the accreditation of professional qualifications in Scotland
- Seek accreditation of other existing qualifications (that are not currently suitable for accreditation in Scotland)
- Develop 'UK wide qualifications' i.e. the potential to develop a single qualification that could be accredited throughout the UK

In particular, it was stressed that the extended remit of SQA Accreditation could increase the relevance of SQA Accreditation functions and services – and likelihood of use of these functions and services by Awarding Bodies – if VRQs could be accredited in Scotland.

In addition, a number of the Awarding Bodies interviewed stated that the extended remit of SQA Accreditation represented an opportunity for it to work directly with large employers (i.e. to support them in the development of qualifications that were tailored towards their own company).

There was also a widespread consensus that many Awarding Bodies that do not work – or do not work extensively with SQA Accreditation – may seek to do so.

In the context of the outcomes noted above, three further factors should be noted:

- There was a widespread belief that Scottish employers will be comfortable with the ‘new qualifications’ that are developed by Awarding Bodies to be delivered in Scotland, on the basis that they will be accredited by SQA Accreditation
- There was also a belief that large Awarding Bodies will continue to want to work within a Scottish regulatory framework, as this allows them to ‘get closer’ to key stakeholders in the Scottish economy, such as the Scottish Government and Scottish Enterprise
- A key factor for Awarding Bodies in terms of their future interaction with SQA Accreditation will be the extent to which the market in Scotland will provide a return for their investment i.e. in terms of the amount of effort and time they put into developing qualifications to be accredited in Scotland

In the context of the outcomes noted above, two final factors should be noted here:

- Concerns were raised by a number of the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis with regard to the extended remit of SQA Accreditation excluding the suite of qualifications which are currently regulated under the auspices of the SQA’s awarding function. In particular, there were concerns that this represents a limitation on SQA Accreditation’s extended remit, provides a unique dichotomy in respect of other regulator/Awarding Body

relationships, and will serve to perpetuate a degree of confusion amongst Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- There was also a concern that the increasing divergence between SVQs and NVQs could represent a threat to SVQs i.e. if Awarding Bodies – and, in particular, smaller Awarding Bodies – cannot see any value (or ‘return’) in the development of SVQs (particularly if ‘single qualifications’ can be developed and, thereafter, accredited across the UK).

### 3.1.6 Promoting Functions & Services of SQA Accreditation

There was a widespread willingness amongst the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis to promote all of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation and, in particular, those functions and services pertaining to:

- The quality assurance of Awarding Bodies
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees

Indeed, all of the Awarding Bodies interviewed on a personal basis indicated a willingness to work proactively with SQA Accreditation in the promotion of its functions and services on a partnership basis, particularly by means of providing access for SQA Accreditation to existing mechanisms and forums that they operate or participate in by Awarding Bodies.

### 3.1.7 Communication of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services

#### Audiences

The Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis believed 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 (on the basis that those that are active in Scotland are more likely to be aware of the functions and services of SQA Accreditation and, in particular, it's extended remit)
- Smaller Awarding Bodies that lack the resources to keep up to date with developments in SQA Accreditation (again, particularly in relation to its extended remit)
- 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
- Quality personnel

In addition, there was a belief that there was a need for SQA Accreditation to communicate the availability and nature of its functions and services:

- At a strategic level within Awarding Bodies i.e. to seek 'buy-in' to these functions and services at that level

- To Scottish based personnel within Awarding Bodies (in order that such individuals could help to “*bang the drum*” on behalf of SQA Accreditation with their colleagues south of the border)

It should be noted, however, that a number of those interviewed stated that they would need to know more about the extended remit of SQA Accreditation (and, in particular, its implications for Awarding Bodies) before being able to effectively comment as to the type of individuals within Awarding Bodies that should be targeted.

One final point to note here is that a number of the Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis expressed concerns with regard to the extent to which developments outwith Scotland in relation to QCF might impact upon the ability of SQA Accreditation to communicate the availability and nature of its functions and services effectively to Awarding Bodies i.e. in the context of the considerable amount of time and effort that Awarding Bodies are currently committing to QCF related activities and consequent implications for the time and commitment they may have to take on board messages communicated to them by SQA Accreditation.

### Communication Channels & Methods

The Awarding Bodies interviewed on an in-depth basis 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 to Awarding Bodies, including:

- Specific events which should be targeted at Awarding Bodies per se and specific types of Awarding Bodies (such as small, specialised professional Awarding Bodies), should be regionalised, should be in the form of workshops (incorporating case studies of, for example, new types of qualifications which have or are currently going



through the process of accreditation in Scotland), should include input from SCQF, and should include input from a Sector Skills Council perspective

- Electronic communications in the form of e-bulletins and e-mails which should be short, regular and concise and on an ongoing basis (with additional electronic communications through the SQA website, which it was believed, could be greatly enhanced in terms of the accessibility of information with regard to SQA Accreditation)
- Existing forums within which Awarding Bodies operate, which it was felt would represent a highly cost effective means by which SQA Accreditation could gain access to groupings of Awarding Bodies and groupings of relevant individuals within Awarding Bodies

There was also a general consensus that it was of critical importance for SQA Accreditation to target:

- Contacts at a strategic level within Awarding Bodies
- Small Awarding Bodies
- Those that don't have a presence in Scotland

In particular, as part of this, there was a widespread belief that it would be inherently easier for larger Awarding Bodies (even those without a presence in Scotland) to devote resources to ensuring that they are sufficiently cognisant of SQA functions and services (including its extended remit).

Within the context of the comments noted above, however, it should be stressed that a number of Awarding Bodies interviewed had concerns about the extent to which current pressures on Awarding Bodies 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 – even where these are regional and tailored to the specific needs of these Awarding Bodies.

Accordingly, in this respect, there was a belief that there was a fundamental need for SQA Accreditation to be clear about the purpose of events in order to ensure attendance per se by Awarding Bodies and, indeed, attendance by 'the most relevant individuals' within Awarding Bodies.

### 3.1.8 Messages That SQA Accreditation Should Be Communicating

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

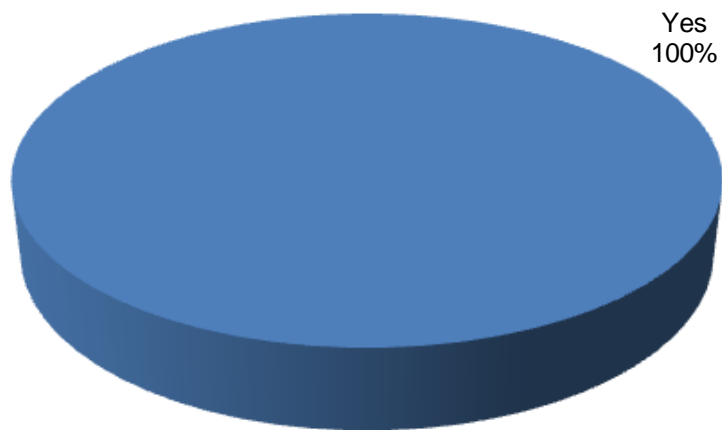
- The extent and nature of its extended remit
- How its extended remit will affect Awarding Bodies
- Revised processes and procedures associated with its extended remit
- How existing regulations will change i.e. changes to regulatory requirements
- Potential changes in auditing requirements
- The type of information that Awarding Bodies will require and will require to provide in respect of SQA's extended remit
- How the changes in the SQA's remit will relate to the business needs of Awarding Bodies
- How SQA's extended remit will match up to/differ from the remits of other regulators
- Support structures that will be in place in respect of the utilisation of the extended remit

## 3.2 Telephone Interview Profile

### 3.2.1 Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation

*“Before today, had you heard of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 1: Heard of SQA Accreditation?**

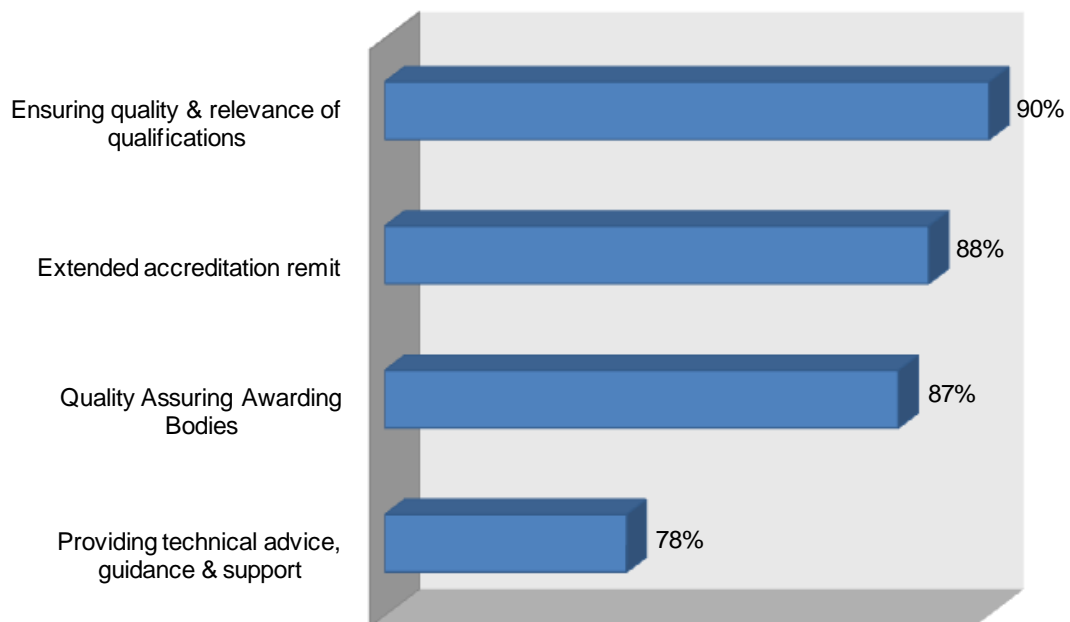


**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 1 it can be seen that all of the Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone stated that they had heard of SQA Accreditation.

*“Before today, were you aware of each of the following functions and services of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 2: Awareness of Functions/Services of SQA Accreditation**

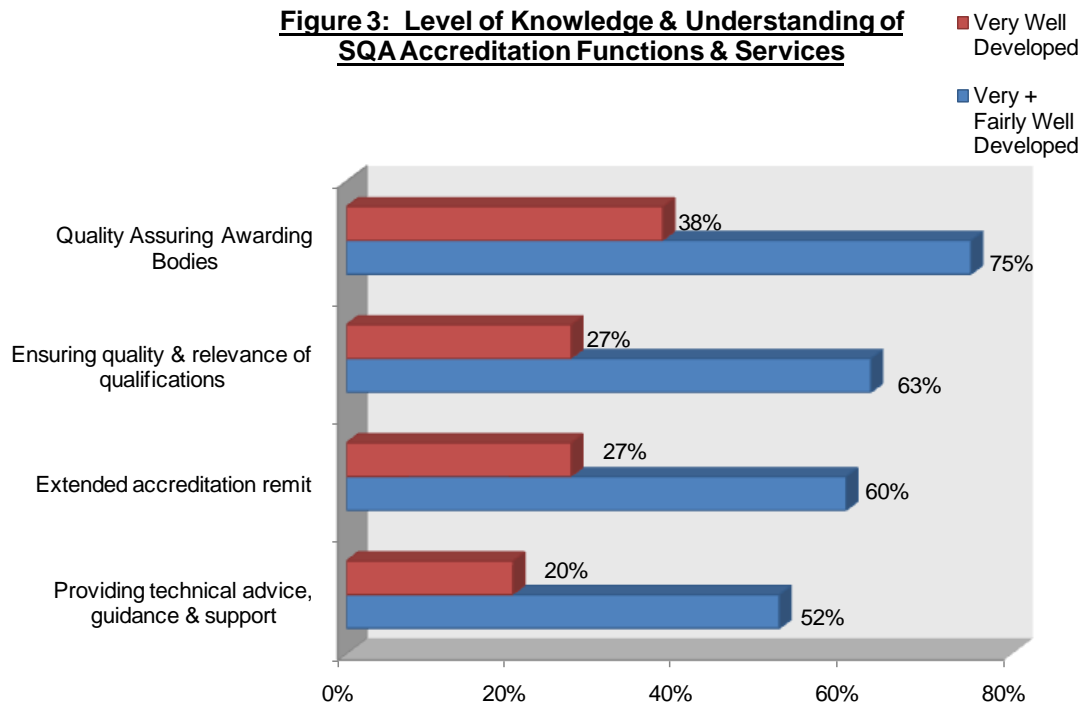


**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 2 it can be seen that a significant majority of Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone stated that they were aware of each of four functions and services of SQA Accreditation, namely:

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (90%)
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (88%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (87%)
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (78%)

*“How would you describe your level of knowledge and understanding of each of these functions and services of SQA Accreditation?”*



**Base: All Respondents**

It is encouraging to note from Figure 3 that a notable majority of Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone stated that they had a well developed level of knowledge and understanding of each of three services and functions of SQA Accreditation, namely:

- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (75%)
- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (63%)
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (60%)

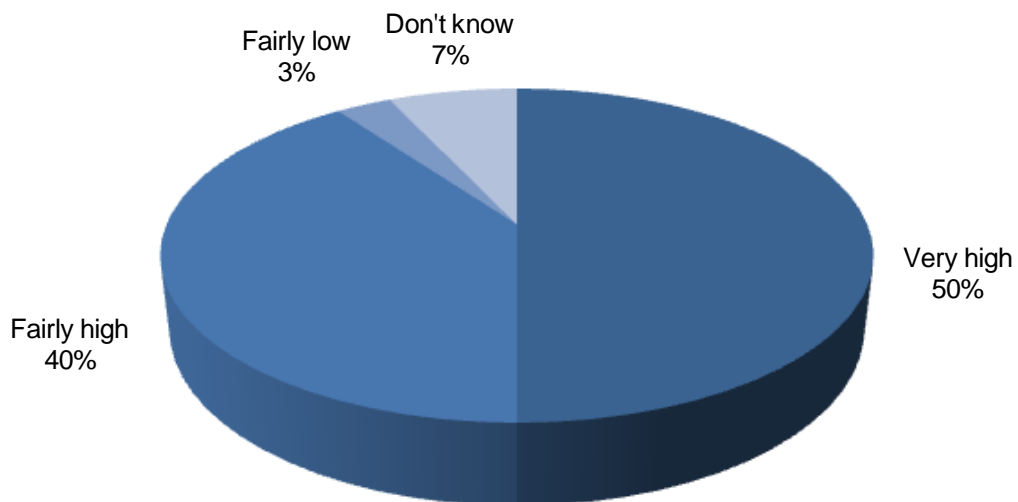
However, only around half of Awarding Bodies interviewed (52%) stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation’s role in ‘providing technical advice, guidance and support’, whilst only a core of Awarding Bodies interviewed specifically stated that they had a very well developed knowledge and

understanding of each of the four functions and services of SQA Accreditation under consideration (i.e. ranging from 20% to 38%).

### 3.2.2 Credibility of SQA Accreditation

*“How would you describe the credibility of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 4: Credibility of SQA Accreditation**

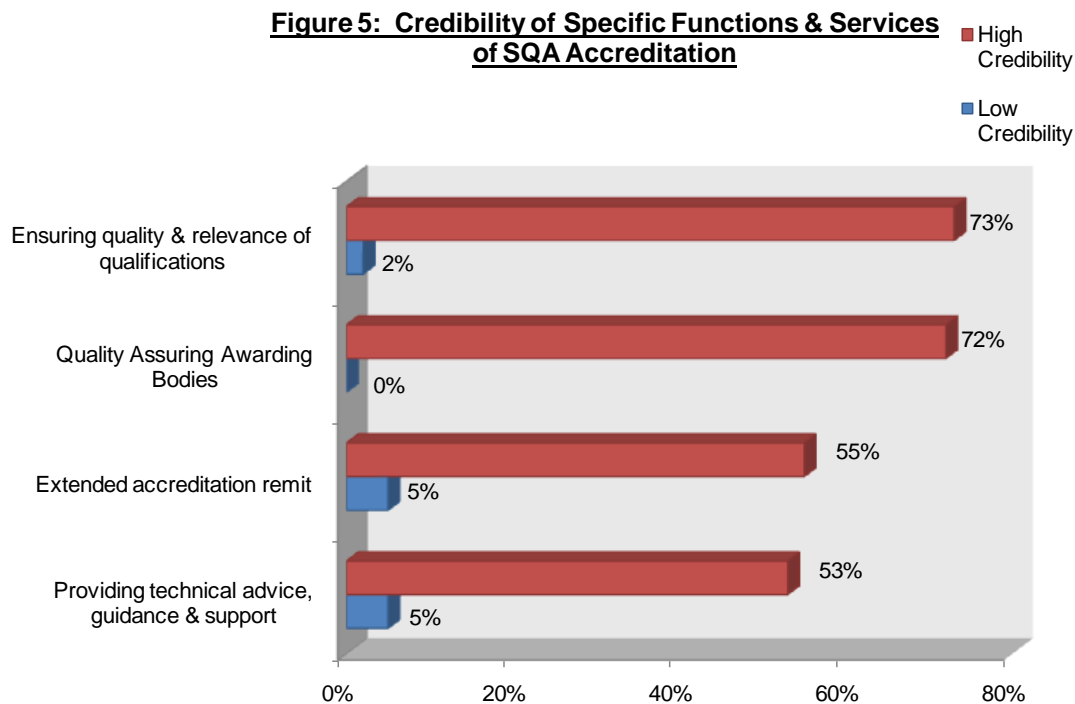


**Base: All Respondents**

It is encouraging to note from Figure 4 that 9 out of 10 Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone (90%) believed SQA Accreditation to have high credibility, with half (50%) specifically believing SQA Accreditation to have very high credibility.

Indeed, it should be stressed that very few respondents (only 3%) described SQA Accreditation as having low credibility.

*“Which of the following functions and services of SQA Accreditation do you believe have high or low credibility?”*



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 5 it can be seen that around three quarters of respondents stated their belief that two functions and services of SQA Accreditation had high credibility, namely:

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (73%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (72%)

Thereafter, Figure 5 indicates that over half of respondents believe two remaining functions and services of SQA Accreditation had high credibility, namely:

- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (55%)
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (53%)

Indeed, it should be stressed that very few respondents (ranging from 0% to 5%) stated their belief that any of the functions and services under consideration had low credibility.

When respondents were asked – on an unprompted basis – why they believed functions and services of SQA Accreditation to have high credibility, the principal responses elicited related to:

- 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 (with specific reference being made here to the thoroughness of SQA Accreditation, the quality of its staff and support provided)
- 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 (with a number of respondents making specific reference here to the willingness of SQA Accreditation to work in partnership with Awarding Bodies)

In addition to the factors noted above, a number of others were also cited by respondents as contributing to their belief that SQA Accreditation functions and services have high credibility, including:

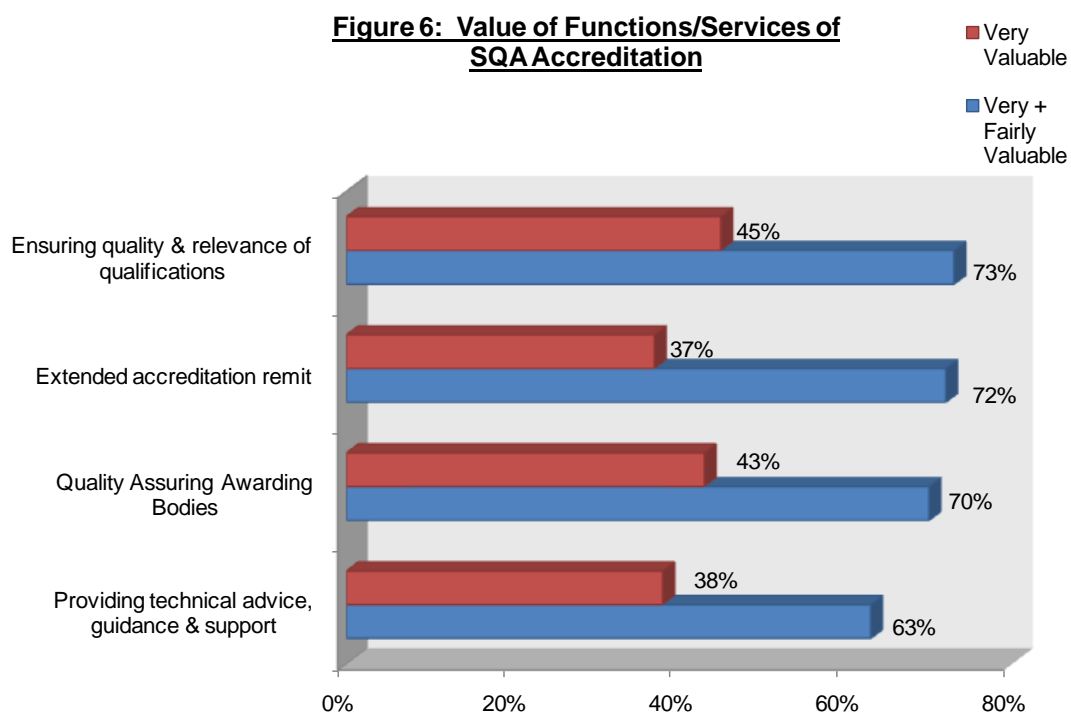
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation functions and services help them – as Awarding Bodies – meet the needs of industry



- The level of technical knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation is seen as being highly regarded and monitored by the Scottish Government

### 3.2.3 Value of SQA Accreditation

*“How valuable are the following functions and services of SQA Accreditation to your organisation?”*



**Base: All Respondents**

It is encouraging to note from Figure 6 that a notable majority of Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone believe that each of four functions and services of SQA Accreditation were of value to their organisation, namely:

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (73%)
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (72%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (70%)

- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (63%)

It should be noted, however, that less than half of respondents (ranging from 37% to 45%) specifically believed that each of the four functions and services under consideration were very valuable to their organisation.

When respondents were asked – on an unprompted basis – in what ways the functions and services of SQA Accreditation were of value to their organisation, the principal responses elicited related to:

- SQA Accreditation fulfilling a required role in the Scottish context e.g. in relation to quality assurance of Awarding Bodies
- 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 (amongst providers, employers and candidates)
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation is supportive of and contributes to the quality of their product and systems (e.g. through quality assurance)
- 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

It should be noted that a core of respondents stated that each of the SQA Accreditation functions and services under consideration were of little or no value to their organisation i.e.:

- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (34%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (29%)
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (28%)

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (26%)

When these respondents were asked – again, on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, the principal responses elicited focused around a belief that SQA functions and services and/or Scottish qualifications (the Scottish market) were not of interest/relevance to them as an Awarding Body.

In addition, however, a number of other unprompted responses were provided here, including:

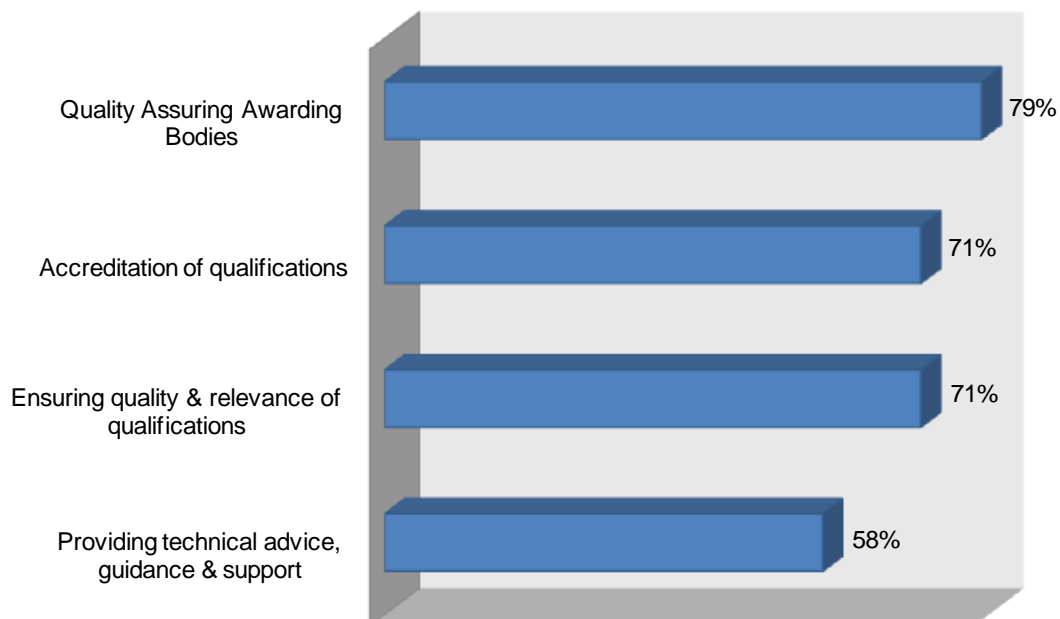
- A lack of understanding of SQA Accreditation functions and services
- Lack of contact/interaction with SQA Accreditation
- Lack of synergy between SQA functions and services and those of other regulators

#### 3.2.4 Working With SQA Accreditation

A number of questions were asked of the Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone that had worked with SQA Accreditation – 2 out of 5 respondents.

*“What functions or services of SQA Accreditation have you used?”*

**Figure 7: Use of SQA Functions/Services**



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 7 it can be seen that a notable majority of respondents who had worked with SQA Accreditation stated that their organisation had used one or more of four functions or services, namely:

- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (79%)
- Accreditation of qualifications (71%)
- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (71%)
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (58%)

When respondents were asked – on an unprompted basis – what were their positive experiences of using SQA Accreditation functions and services, the principal responses provided related to:

- The significant extent to which staff were helpful – with specific reference being made to the value of one to one relationships developed

- The quality of advice and guidance provided by SQA Accreditation
- Speed of response to queries and requests

Thereafter, specific mention was made of a number of other positive experiences, including:

- The accessibility of staff
- Efficiency and effectiveness of processes
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation seeks to be proactive in solving problems and issues

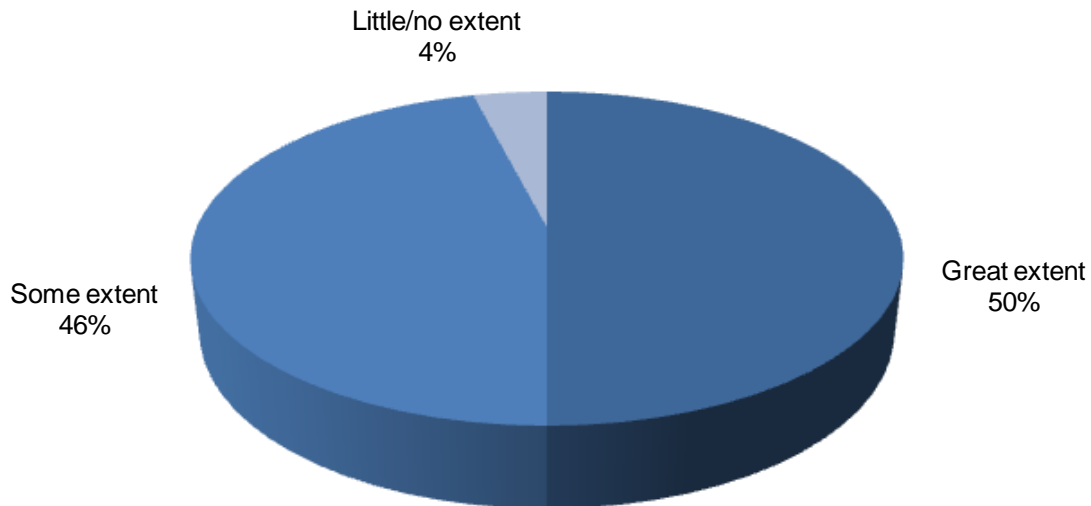
When respondents were then asked – again, on an unprompted basis – what were their negative experiences of using SQA Accreditation functions and services, the vast majority of those interviewed stated that they had encountered no negative experiences.

However, specific mention was made – by a maximum of two respondents – to the following negative experiences:

- Provision of inconsistent advice and guidance
- Cumbersome and repetitive systems and processes
- Difficulties relating to differences between SQA and other regulators
- Frequency of auditing (annual)
- Cost of SQA functions and services
- Personnel changes within SQA Accreditation

*“To what extent did SQA Accreditation add value to what you were wanting to achieve?”*

**Figure 8: Extent To Which SQA Accreditation Adds Value**



**Base: Use SQA Accreditation**

It is encouraging to note from Figure 8 that almost all of the Awarding Bodies who had worked with SQA Accreditation (96%) stated that they it had added value to at least some extent to ‘what they were wanting to achieve’ and, in particular, half of respondents here (50%) stated that SQA Accreditation had added value to a great extent.

### Strengths of SQA Accreditation

When respondents were asked what they believed to be the key strengths of SQA Accreditation, the two principal unprompted responses provided related to:

- Staff – who were described, amongst other things, as being supportive, helpful, responsive and knowledgeable
- Support and guidance provided – which was described as being of high quality and relevance

In addition to the above, a wide range 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 Skills Strategy
- Quality and clarity of materials provided

When respondents were then asked – again, on an unprompted basis – 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. However, individual respondents did make reference to:

- Clarifying the relationship between the SQA accreditation and SQA awarding functions
- A desire for SQA Accreditation to be more proactive in interpreting the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
- A desire for more open and transparent auditing processes e.g. regarding non compliance issues at specific centres

Beyond these specific suggestions, however, a number of respondents made reference to concerns regarding the 'bureaucratic' and 'paper based' nature of some processes and, accordingly, a number noted a desire for the introduction of more online systems.

### 3.2.5 Not Working With SQA Accreditation

When respondents who's organisation had not used SQA Accreditation were asked – on an unprompted basis – 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

Thereafter, mention was made of a number of other factors here which had led respondents organisations to not work with SQA Accreditation, including:

- That they were based in London
- That they were too small/lacked resources
- That they used Ofqual/QCA
- That they had a lack of opportunities to work with SQA Accreditation
- That they lacked time to work with SQA Accreditation
- That SQA's awarding function was a competitor to them as an Awarding Body



### 3.2.6 Using Other Accrediting Organisations

*“Have you used other accrediting organisations such as Ofqual?”*

**Figure 9: Other Accrediting Organisations Used?**

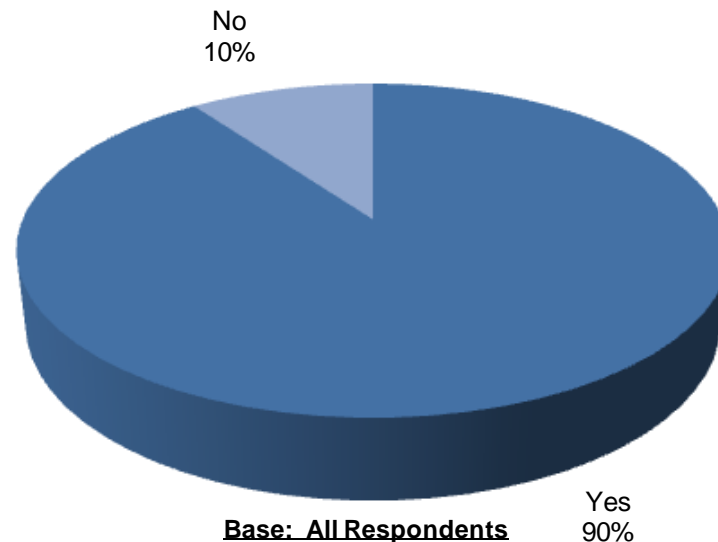


Figure 9 indicates that 9 out of 10 of the Awarding Bodies interviewed (90%) stated that they had used other accrediting organisations. When these respondents were then asked – on an unprompted basis – to state their main reason for choosing to work with these other accrediting organisations, by far the most significant response elicited was that their use was mandatory. However, reference was also made here to a number of other reasons, including:

- Funding reasons
- Credibility
- National definitions
- For support provided by these other accrediting organisations
- Demanded by customers
- For access to ‘regional’ markets e.g. Wales and Northern Ireland

“Overall, how well did this organisation/these organisations perform?”

**Figure 10: Performance of Other Regulators**

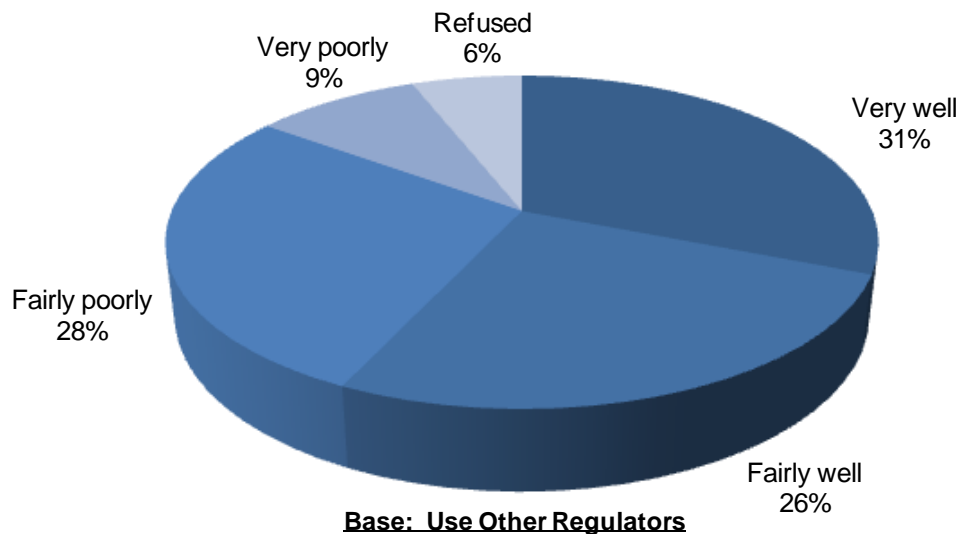


Figure 10 indicates that around 6 out of 10 Awarding Bodies that had used other accrediting organisations (57%) stated that, overall, they had performed well. However, for approaching 4 out of 10 (37%), these organisations had performed poorly.

When respondents stating that other accrediting organisations with which they had worked had performed well were asked to state in what areas this had been, the principal responses focused around:

- The quality of advice, guidance and technical support provided
- Their online resources – with considerable mention being made here of web based accreditation processes

Thereafter, notable mention was made of areas of good performance pertaining to:

- Audit processes (which were described as being effective and supportive)
- Quality and relevance of information and documentation
- Communications – in terms of frequency and methods

- Responsiveness
- Consistency of personnel and relationships developed
- Professionalism
- Expertise and knowledge
- Workshops and training provided

When respondents were then asked in what ways other accrediting organisations had performed poorly, the principal responses elicited focused around:

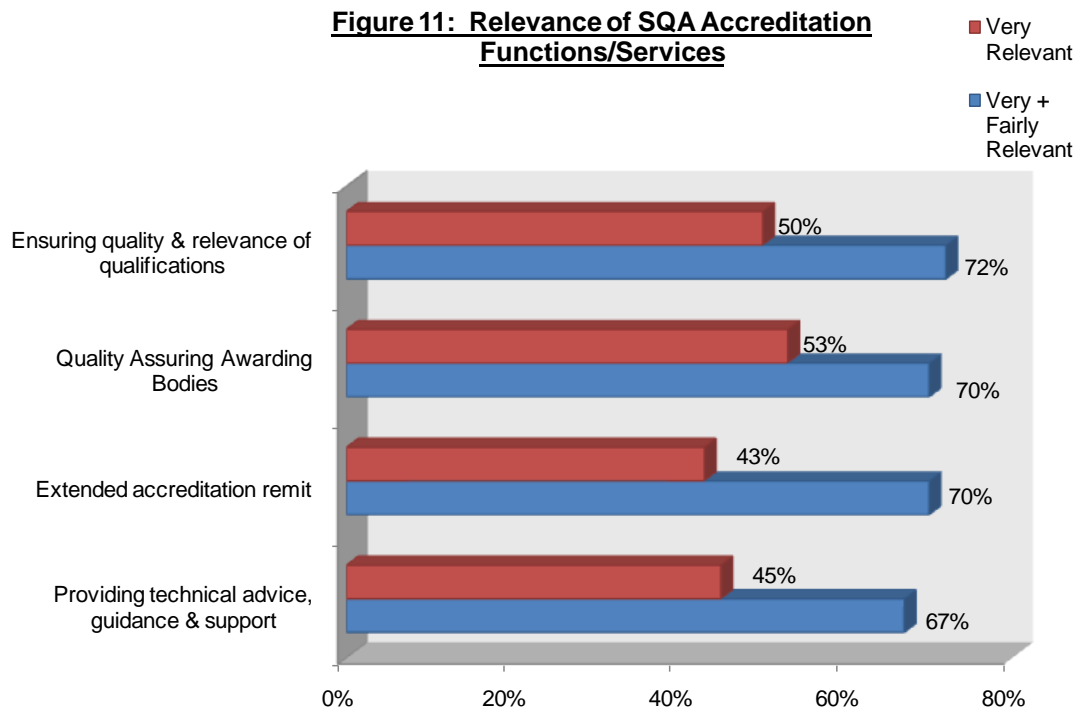
- Levels of organisational change and staff turnover – with a considerable number of respondents making reference here to changing responsibilities between Ofqual and QCA
- Communications (including effectiveness) – which were often considered to be poor
- Poor engagement and account management (including a number of references to lack of one to one contacts)
- Speed of processes (for example, regarding accreditation)
- Levels of bureaucracy

In addition, a number of respondents made specific reference here to other areas of poor performance, including:

- Lack of consistency (for example, in relation to advice/guidance, messages and performance)
- Poor guidance and advice
- Unhelpfulness
- Lack of support

### 3.2.7 Future Use Of SQA Accreditation

*“How relevant do you believe the following functions and services of SQA Accreditation are to your organisation?”*



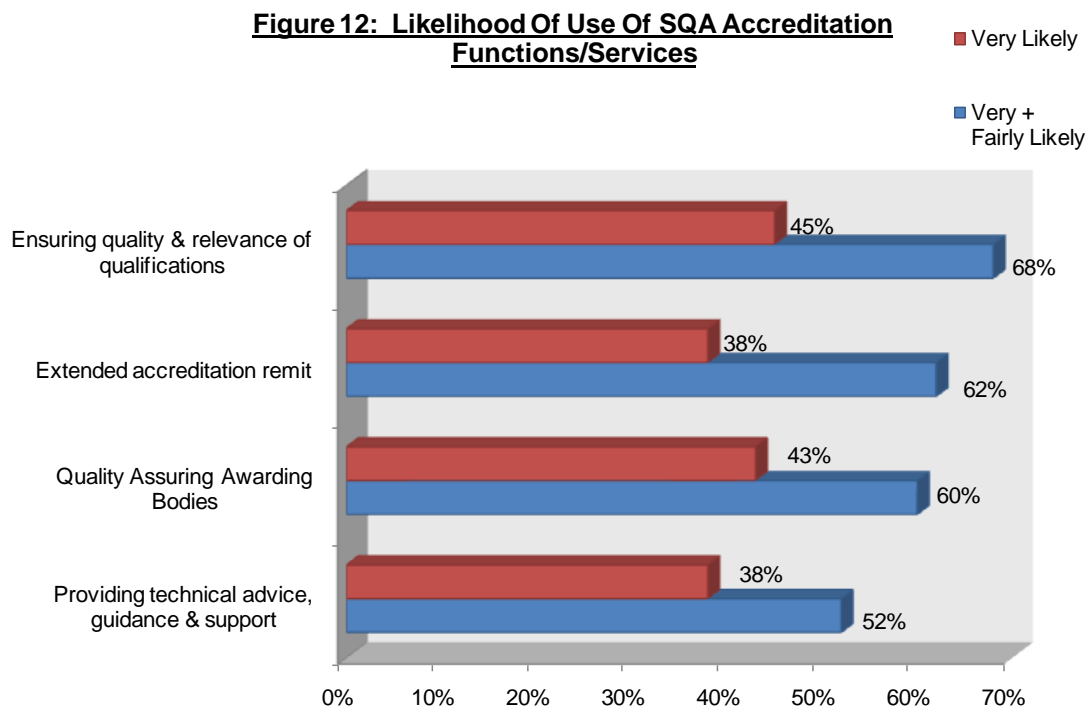
**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 11 indicates that typically two thirds to three quarters of Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone believed that each of four functions and services of SQA Accreditation were of relevance to their organisation, namely:

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (72%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (70%)
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (70%)
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (67%)

Indeed, Figure 11 also indicates that around half of respondents specifically believed that each of these functions and services would be very relevant to their organisation.

*“How likely is it that your organisation will use the following functions or services of SQA Accreditation?”*



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 12 indicates that a notable majority of Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone stated that it was likely that their organisation would use three functions or services of SQA Accreditation, namely:

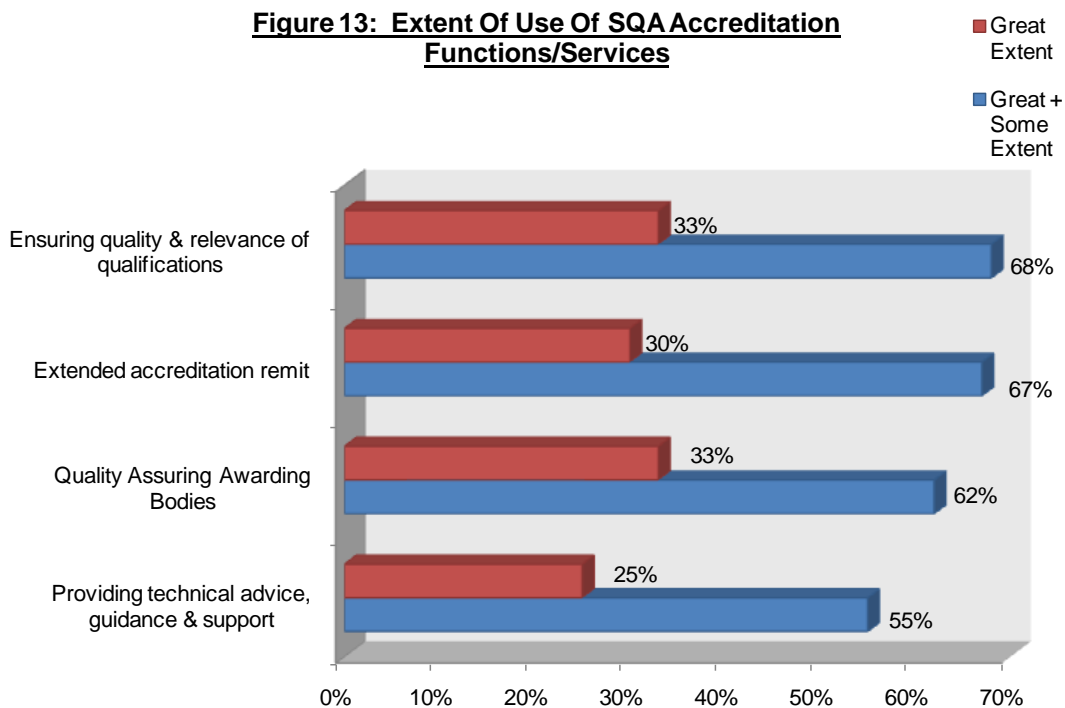
- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (68%)
- Accrediting of all qualifications other than degrees (62%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (60%)

However, only around half of respondents (52%) stated that it was likely that their organisation would use ‘technical advice, guidance and support’ provided by SQA Accreditation.

Figure 12 also indicates that typically around 2 out of 5 respondents specifically stated that it was very likely that their organisation would

use each of the four functions and services of SQA Accreditation under consideration.

*“To what extent do you think your organisation would make use of the following functions or services of SQA Accreditation?”*



**Base: All Respondents**

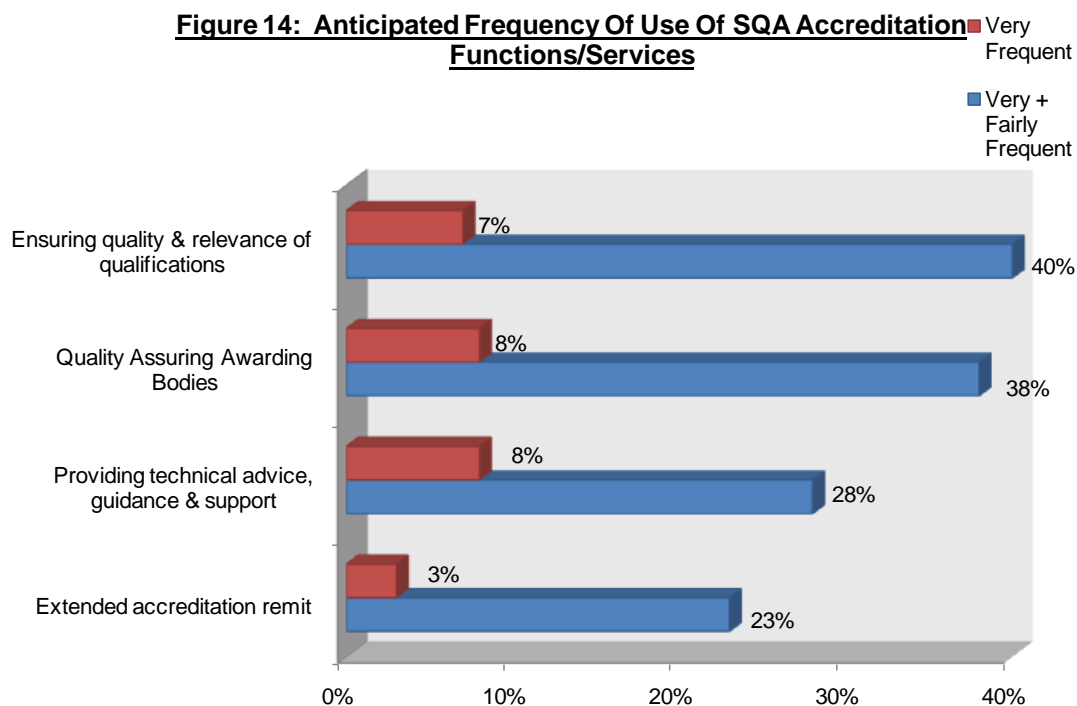
From Figure 13 it can be seen that typically around two thirds of Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone stated that to at least some extent their organisation would make use of three functions and services of SQA Accreditation, namely:

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (68%)
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (67%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (62%)

Thereafter, over half of respondents (55%) stated that to at least some extent they would use SQA Accreditation in respect of ‘providing technical advice, guidance and support’.

Finally, it should be noted from Figure 13 that only between a quarter and a third of respondents specifically stated that their organisation would use the four functions or services of SQA Accreditation under consideration to a great extent.

*“How frequently do you think your organisation might use the following functions or services of SQA Accreditation?”*



**Base: All Respondents**

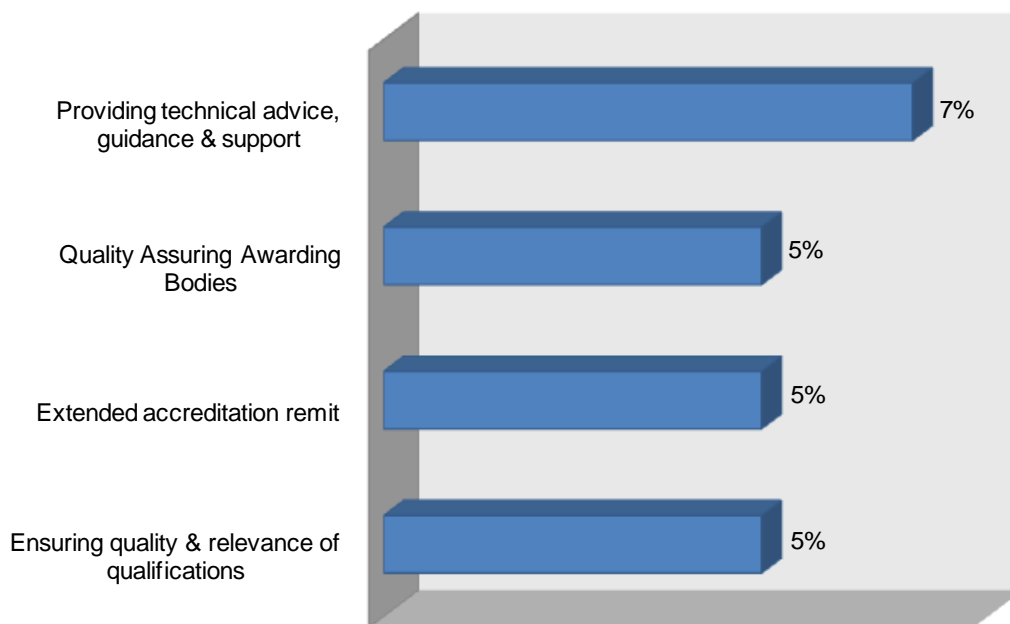
From Figure 14 it can be seen that less than half of respondents stated that their organisation would use each of four functions or services of SQA Accreditation frequently i.e.:

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (40%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (38%)
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (28%)
- Accreditation of qualifications other than degrees (28%)

Indeed, it should be stressed that Figure 14 indicates that very few respondents specifically stated that their organisation would use each of the functions or services of SQA Accreditation under consideration very frequently.

*“Would you be unwilling to use any of the following functions or services of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 15: Functions/Services of SQA Accreditation Unwilling To Use**



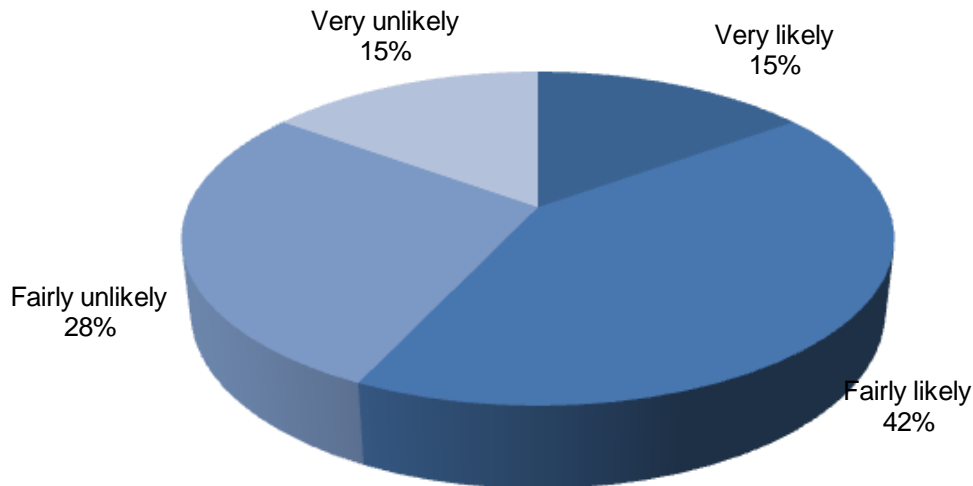
**Base: All Respondents**

It is encouraging to note from Figure 15 that very few respondents (ranging from 5% to 7%) stated that their organisation would be unwilling to use each of the four functions or services of SQA Accreditation under consideration, with the principal reasons being cited for this stance (by the small number of respondents involved) relating to these functions and services not being in line with their business plans, strategies or priorities.



*“How likely is it that your organisation would promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 16: Likelihood of Promoting Functions/Services of SQA Accreditation**

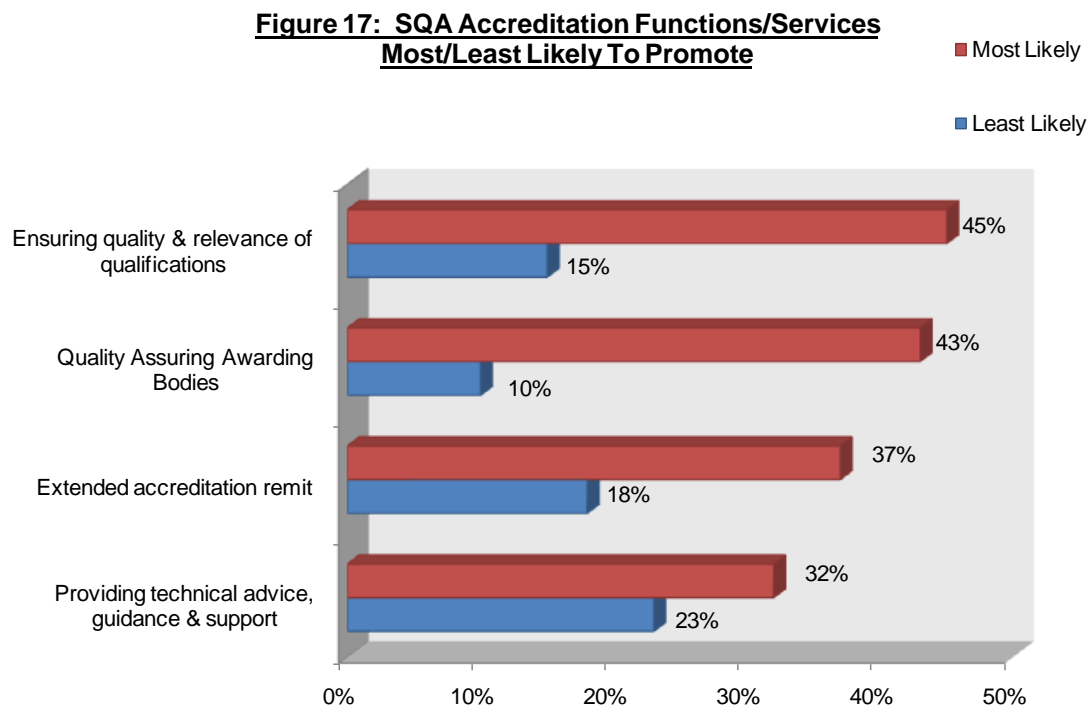


**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 16 it can be seen that around 6 out of 10 of the Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone (57%) stated that it was likely that their organisation would promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation – although only around 1 in 7 respondents (15%) specifically stated that this would be very likely.

Accordingly, as a corollary of this, only around 4 out of 10 Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone (43%) stated that their organisation would be unlikely to promote the functions and services of SQA Accreditation.

“Which of the following functions and services of SQA Accreditation would your organisation be most and least likely to promote?”



**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 17 indicates that around 4 out of 10 of the Awarding Bodies interviewed by telephone stated that their organisation would be most likely to promote two functions and services of SQA Accreditation, namely:

- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (45%)
- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies (43%)

Thereafter, typically around a third of respondents stated that their organisation would be most likely to promote SQA Accreditation’s functions and services in relation to:

- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (37%)
- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (32%)

Figure 17 also indicates that a relatively small proportion of respondents stated that their organisation would be least likely to promote each of the four functions and services of SQA Accreditation under consideration, although this outcome was highest in relation to:

- Providing technical advice, guidance and support (23%)
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees (18%)
- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited (15%)

### 3.2.8 Communication of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services

#### Audiences

Respondents were asked – on an unprompted basis – to identify the type of organisations they believed SQA Accreditation should be communicating the availability and nature of its functions and services to.

On this basis, the responses provided fell into three categories:

- Primary organisations i.e. identified by a majority of respondents
- Secondary organisations i.e. identified by a notable proportion, but less than half of respondents
- Tertiary organisations i.e. identified by a core of respondents
- Other organisations i.e. identified by relatively few respondents

On this basis, the following matrix was identified.

### Primary Organisations

- Awarding Bodies

### Secondary Organisations

- Sector Skills Councils
- Standard Setting Bodies
- Training Providers
- Large Employers

### Tertiary Organisations

- Colleges
- Learners

### Other Organisations

- Government organisations/bodies
- Professional bodies
- Other regulators
- Employer organisations
- Trades Unions
- Professional Associations
- Schools
- Universities
- Funding organisations
- Local Authorities

Communication Channels & Methods

When respondents were further asked what communication channels or methods they believed SQA Accreditation should be using in relation to the organisation types they identified earlier, the primary preference was for electronic based communications in the form of:

- E-bulletins
- E-newsletters
- Specific e-mails
- A dedicated SQA Accreditation website (or readily identifiable part of the SQA website)

Thereafter, significant secondary suggestions were made in respect of the use of a number 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 – on a monthly or quarterly basis
- Direct contact – either on a face to face basis or by telephone
- Written communications and direct mail

Thereafter, a core of respondents made reference to other communication methods and channels here, including:

- Professional journals
- PR and media activities e.g. newspaper advertisements and features and articles/features in trade publications

### 3.2.9 Messages That SQA Accreditation Should Be Communicating

Respondents were asked to consider what key messages they thought SQA Accreditation should be communicating to the organisations they identified earlier and, on this basis, the primary responses related to messages that:

- Identified the services and functions provided by SQA Accreditation – including the fact that ‘it exists’ and its extended remit
- SQA Accreditation’s Quality Assurance role in processes
- 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 its products and services

Thereafter, secondary responses were provided in respect of a range of other messages which respondents believed SQA Accreditation should be communicating, including:

- The support that it can provide to Awarding Bodies, SSBs, SSCs 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

In addition to the above, a core of respondents made reference to other messages which they believe SQA Accreditation should be communicating, including:

- The role of SQA Accreditation in relation to the Scottish Government's Skills Strategy
- The accountability of SQA Accreditation
- 'The Scottish perspective' i.e. "*why things are different in Scotland*"
- Access that SQA Accreditation can provide to Scotland for Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and employers

## **4.0 KEY INFLUENCERS PROFILE**

### **4.1 Awareness & Understanding of SQA Accreditation**

All of the key influencers interviewed stated that they were aware of SQA Accreditation and, indeed, each of its four principal functions and services.

Thereafter, it is of interest to note that whilst all of the key influencers interviewed believed that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of each of these four functions and services, some recognised that they did not have a detailed knowledge and understanding of three of these functions and services, namely:

- Quality assuring Awarding Bodies
- Accreditation of all qualifications other than degrees
- Ensuring quality and relevance of qualifications accredited

Indeed, it was recognised by a number of the key influencers interviewed that there could potentially be other gaps in their knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation's functions and services.

In addition, there was a broader concern raised amongst the key influencers interviewed that many key partners (including Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs) – although largely aware of SQA Accreditation's current role – may be less aware of its extended remit.

### **4.2 Credibility of SQA Accreditation**

It is encouraging to note that all of the key influencers interviewed believed SQA Accreditation to have very high credibility and, indeed, believed that SQA Accreditation was viewed as being highly credible



across the learning and skills sector i.e. amongst Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs, employers and other key partners.

This belief was a function of a number of factors, including:

- The quality of functions and services delivered by SQA Accreditation
- The quality of advice, guidance and support provided by SQA Accreditation
- That there has been less change in regulatory functions in Scotland than in the rest of the UK over the past 10 years (particularly in England and Wales)

#### **4.3 Value of SQA Accreditation**

Virtually all of the key influencers interviewed believed that SQA Accreditation was of considerable value to their organisation.

For example, other regulators stated that it was of considerable value to have a different perspective on how common functions and services are developed and delivered, whilst other key influencers interviewed made reference to the value of SQA Accreditation in terms of:

- SQA Accreditation providing functions and services which are critical to them (for example, accrediting the underpinning qualifications for Modern Apprenticeships)
- SQA Accreditation functions and services complimenting their own activities
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation provides assurance for the standards which are applied
- The extent to which SQA Accreditation provides confidence in qualifications that they are funding

#### **4.4 Working With SQA Accreditation**

Almost all of the key influencers interviewed worked extensively with SQA Accreditation and, in particular, had a range of formal and informal interactions with SQA Accreditation, with the former including:

- Joint initiatives and projects
- Joint forums
- Sitting on committees

It was also apparent that the range of formal and informal mechanisms involve activities in a wide range of areas, including:

- The changing qualifications framework in England
- Approval of National Occupational Standards
- The VQ reform programme
- Four country regulation

It was also apparent that the work that a number of key influencers did with SQA Accreditation facilitated access to SSCs, SSBs, Awarding Bodies and other key partners.

#### **Experiences of Working With SQA Accreditation**

It was apparent from the interviews undertaken with key influencers that their experiences of working with SQA Accreditation were very largely positive. In particular, it was apparent that key influencers have built up a range of valuable and productive relationships with a range of personnel within SQA Accreditation.

In addition, however, a number of other positive aspects of working with SQA Accreditation were also highlighted, including:

- The extent to which SQA Accreditation is open to suggestion and discussion
- The speed of response of SQA Accreditation
- SQA Accreditation personnel being informative and knowledgeable
- Confidence in the advice and guidance provided by SQA Accreditation
- The links which SQA Accreditation facilitate to SSCs, SSBs, Awarding Bodies and other key partners
- The 'pragmatic stance' adopted by SQA Accreditation (for example, in relation to the Leitch Report)
- Providing support in the context of 'the often Anglo centric processes of four country regulation'

Indeed, the only negative element of working with SQA Accreditation – which was highlighted by two respondents – was that 'we can be pulling in different directions and trying to do different things'. However, it was stressed by both respondents here that this was not a major issue and that different agendas tended to either be accepted or resolved.

#### Key Strengths of SQA Accreditation

The key influencers interviewed identified a number 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 their work on credit and levelling is 'very much ahead of the game'

### Ways in Which SQA Accreditation Could Improve Its Performance & Service Delivery

The key influencers interviewed had few suggestions with regard to ways in which SQA Accreditation could improve its performance and service delivery. However, it was suggested that SQA and other regulators (particularly Ofqual) could work together more closely in order to bring their processes closer together (which, it was believed, would be of considerable benefit to Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs, employers and other key partners).

However, in this context, it was recognised that changes in England and Wales – for example, in relation to NVQ templates – had the potential to negatively impact upon the extent to which processes could be brought closer together.

### Working With SQA Accreditation In Future

All of the key influencers interviewed fully anticipated that they would continue to work with SQA Accreditation in future, particularly in the context of (and perhaps because of) changing circumstances in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Indeed, a number of the key influencers interviewed believed that they would be working more extensively with SQA Accreditation in future in a number of specific areas, including:

- Links between the QCF and SCQF (for example, in the readjustment of credit levels between 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 the key influencers believed that – in the short term – use of SQA Accreditation’s extended role by Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs might be compromised on the basis that they lack capacity to take this 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 functions and services in the medium to longer terms. One factor contributing to this confidence is that SSCs are currently going through the process of being re-licensed and, therefore, will have to show that they are engaging in Scotland in terms of establishing qualification demand, sourcing labour market intelligence and engaging with employers.

Indeed, there was a general consensus amongst the key influencers interviewed that the SQA’s extended remit represented a significant opportunity for SQA Accreditation to promote its functions and services and, thereafter, benefit from increased levels of demand for its functions and services from Awarding Bodies, SSCs and SSBs. In particular, it was felt that the potential of this opportunity was significantly enhanced due to the fact that SQA Accreditation is viewed as being highly credible across the Awarding Body, SSC, SSB and employer community.

#### Promoting the Functions & Services of SQA Accreditation

It was apparent that all of the key influencers interviewed were extremely keen to work with SQA Accreditation in order to promote its functions and services. In particular, there was a widespread belief amongst the key influencers interviewed that a range of forums within which they participate would be ideally suited to SQA Accreditation in terms of allowing access to a wide range of key players in the marketplace i.e. other key influencers, Awarding Bodies, SSBs, SSCs and employer organisations etc.

#### **4.5 Communication Of SQA Accreditation Functions & Services**

##### Audiences

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.

There was a particular argument for SQA Accreditation to be promoting its functions and services to SSCs on the basis that SSCs have to develop Action Plans and Sector Qualification Strategies. In particular, it was felt that SQA Accreditation should be devoting more time and resources to demonstrated to SSCs the importance of taking greater cognisance of 'the Scottish perspective'.

It was also recognised, however, that SQA Accreditation will be resource constrained in terms of communicating the availability and nature of its functions and services and, accordingly, it was suggested that in terms of prioritisation, there may be value in initially focusing on the six Scottish Government Sector priorities – particularly in Scotland, but also in England, Wales and Northern Ireland where these six sectors may also provide a useful focus i.e. focusing on those SSCs that develop standards in these sectors and the Awarding Bodies that award qualifications in these sectors.

### Communication Channels & Mechanisms

As noted earlier, the key influencers interviewed believed that there were a range of existing forums and mechanisms which could be utilised by SQA Accreditation to promote its functions and services. However, it was also felt 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

In addition, it was felt that the SQA website should have a considerable role to play in terms of promoting the functions and services of SQA Accreditation and, once again in this regard, it was felt that there were opportunities to improve the accessibility of information regarding SQA Accreditation on the SQA website.

With respect to events, there was a general belief amongst the key influencers interviewed that these should be undertaken on a regional basis – particularly taking into account the impacts of the recession which are likely to limit the amount of travel that Awarding Bodies and others will be able to make to Scotland.

There was also a general recognition that SQA Accreditation would be unlikely to have the resources to target employers directly and, accordingly, that it should work through Awarding Bodies, SSCs, SSBs and employer organisations in order to ensure that its functions and services are promoted effectively.

### Messages That SQA Accreditation Should Be Communicating

The Key Influencers interviewed 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

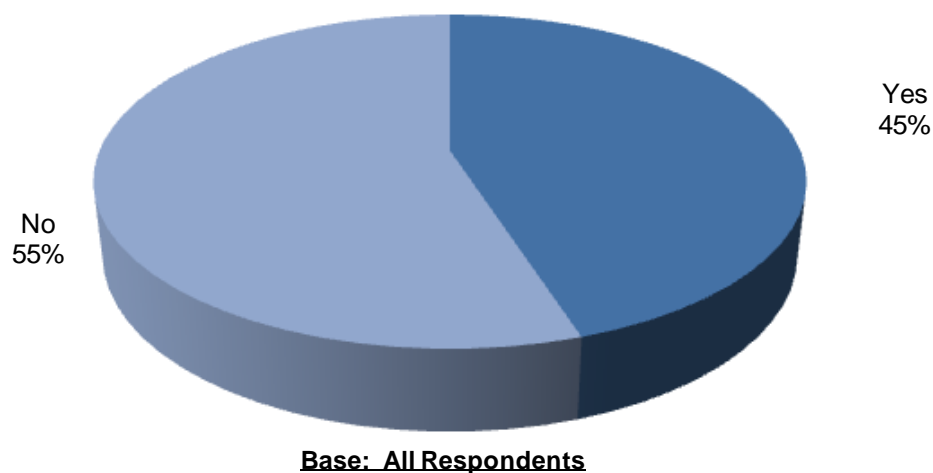


## 5.0 EMPLOYER PROFILE

### 5.1 The Accreditation Process

*“Were you aware that many qualifications go through an accreditation process?”*

**Figure 18: Aware That Qualifications Go Through Accreditation Process?**



From Figure 18 it can be seen that less than half of employers (45%) stated that they were aware that many qualifications go through an accreditation process, with this outcome being highest amongst employers in England and lowest amongst those in Northern Ireland i.e.:

- England = 48%
- Scotland = 35%
- Wales = 35%
- Northern Ireland = 15%

*“What would best describe your level of knowledge and understanding of what qualification accreditation processes involve?”*

**Figure 19: Knowledge & Understanding of Accreditation**

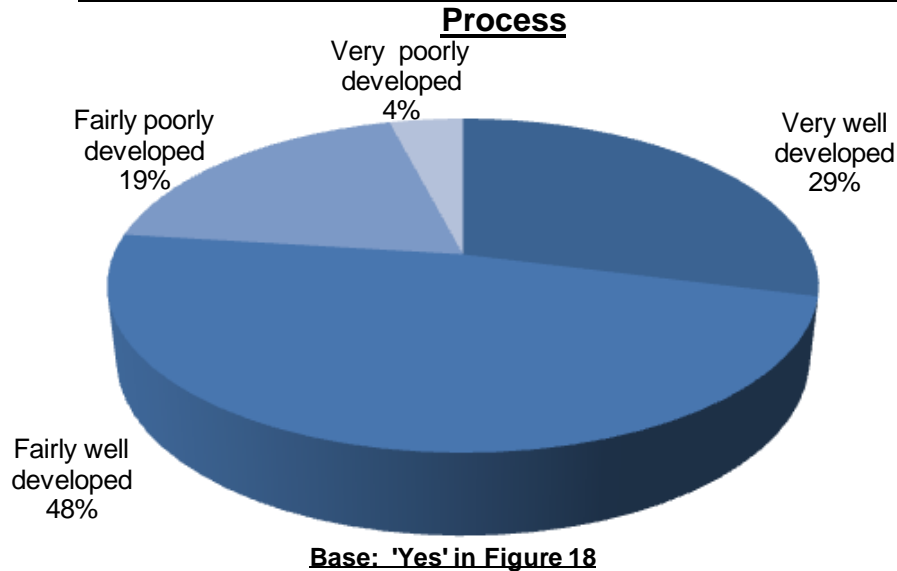


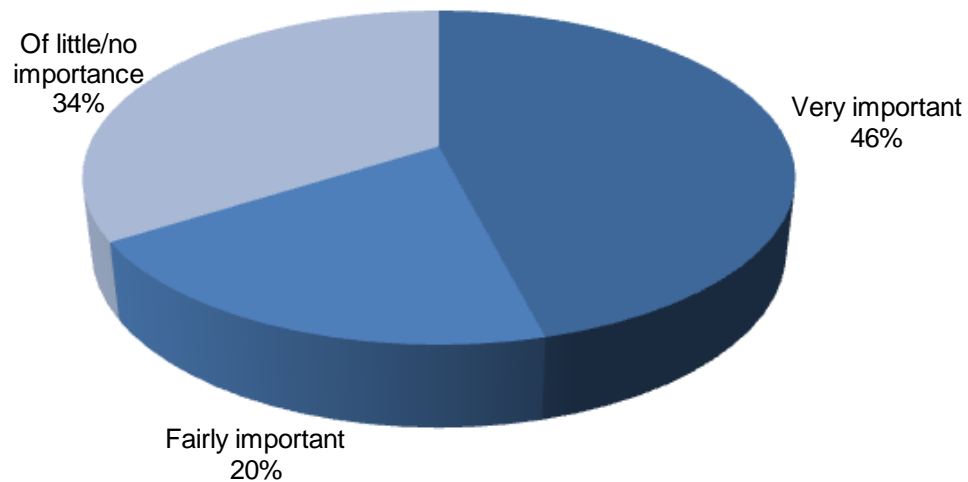
Figure 19 indicates that – amongst employers aware that many qualifications go through an accreditation process – three quarters (77%) stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of what qualification accreditation processes involve – although this was more likely to be fairly well developed (48%) than very well developed (29%).

Further examination of the data indicates that outcomes here were relatively consistent across the four countries, although employers in Wales were most likely to state that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of what qualification accreditation processes involved, whilst those in England were least likely to state this i.e.:

- Wales = 94%
- Scotland = 86%
- Northern Ireland = 80%
- England = 76%

*“If people in your workforce were working towards a qualification, how important would it be that it was accredited?”*

**Figure 20: Importance of Accreditation Qualification To Workforce**



**Base: All Respondents**

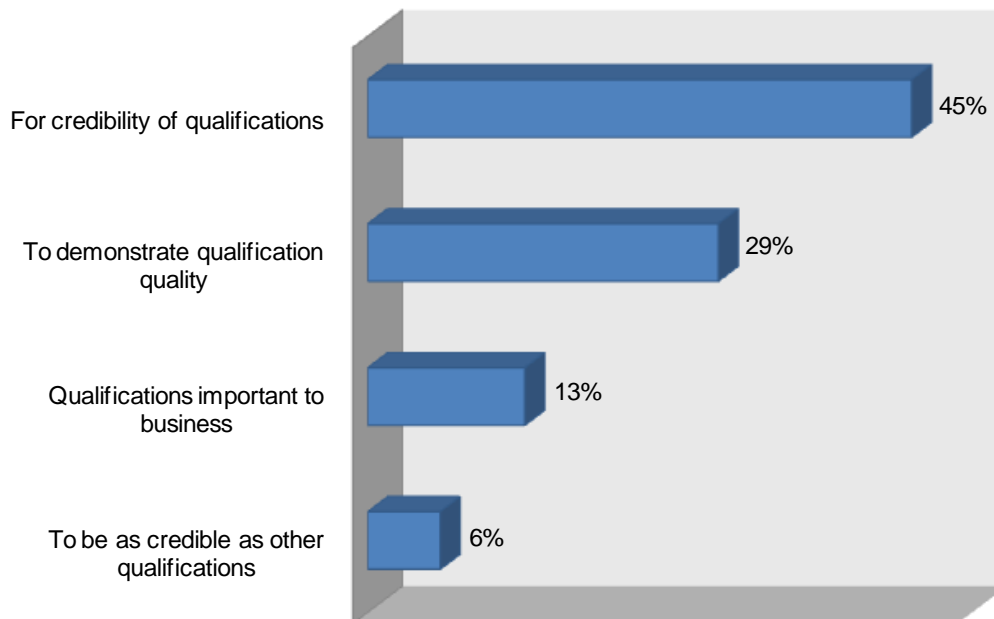
Figure 20 indicates that two thirds of employers interviewed (66%) stated that if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification, it would be important that it was accredited, with nearly half of respondents here (46%) specifically stating that accreditation of a qualification would be very important.

Further examination of the data indicates that the outcomes here were relatively consistent across Scotland, England and Wales, but that perceived importance of accreditation was lowest in Northern Ireland i.e.:

- England = 68%
- Wales = 64%
- Scotland = 63%
- Northern Ireland = 51%

*“Why do you say that this would be important?”*

**Figure 21: Reasons For Importance of Accredited Qualifications (Unprompted)**



**Base: 'Very & Fairly Important' in Figure 20**

When employers stating that it would be important that qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working were accredited were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, Figure 21 indicates that the most common responses elicited here related to:

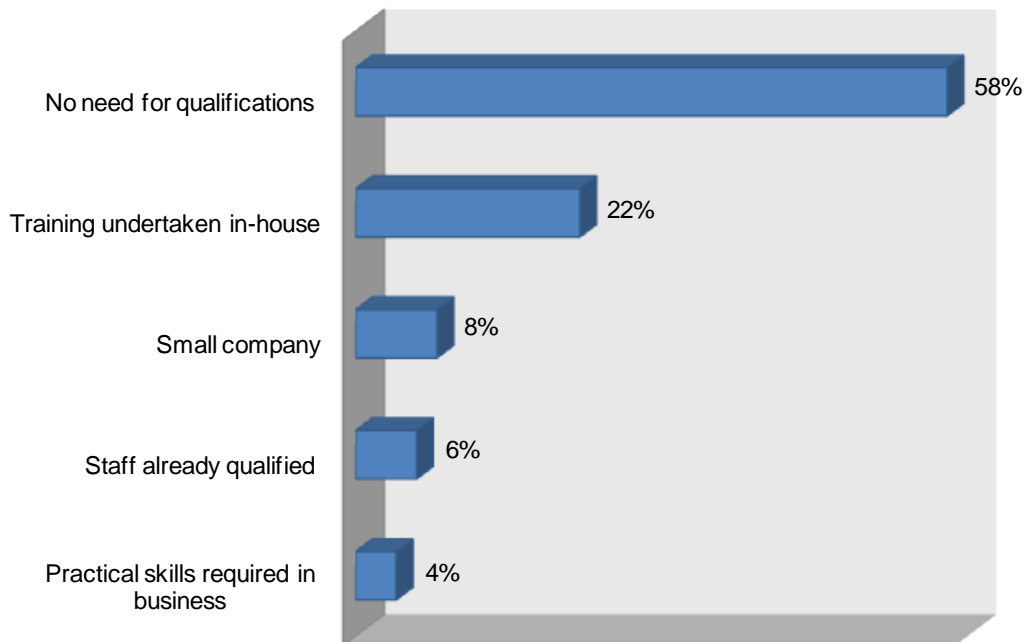
- For the credibility of qualifications (45%)
- To demonstrate qualification quality (29%)

It should also be noted that a core of respondents also made unprompted response here to other factors, including:

- Qualifications being important or necessary for their business (13%)
- For qualifications to be seen as being as credible as other qualifications (6%)

*“Why do you say that this would be of little or no importance?”*

**Figure 22: Reasons For Accredited Qualifications Being Of Little/No Importance (Unprompted)**



**Base: 'Of Little/No Importance' in Figure 20**

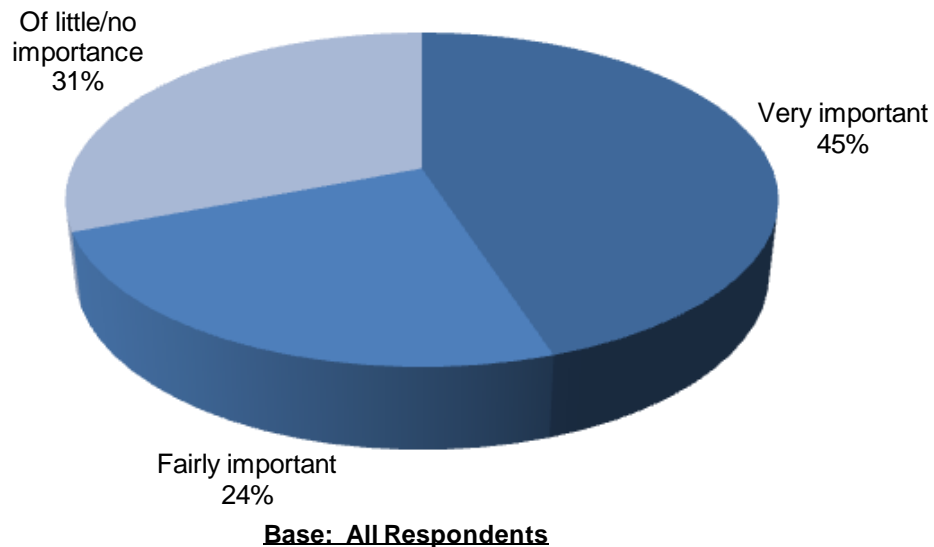
When employers stating that it was of little or no importance for qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working to be accredited were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, the principal response elicited was that a perceived lack of ‘need for qualifications’ (58%) and, thereafter, ‘training being undertaken in-house’ (22%).

It should also be noted, however, that a small proportion of employers here also made unprompted reference to:

- Their company being small (8%)
- Staff already being qualified (6%)
- Practical skills being required by their business (4%)

*“If people in your workforce were working towards a qualification, how important would it be that you had heard of the accrediting organisation?”*

**Figure 23: Importance Of Knowing Accrediting Organisation**



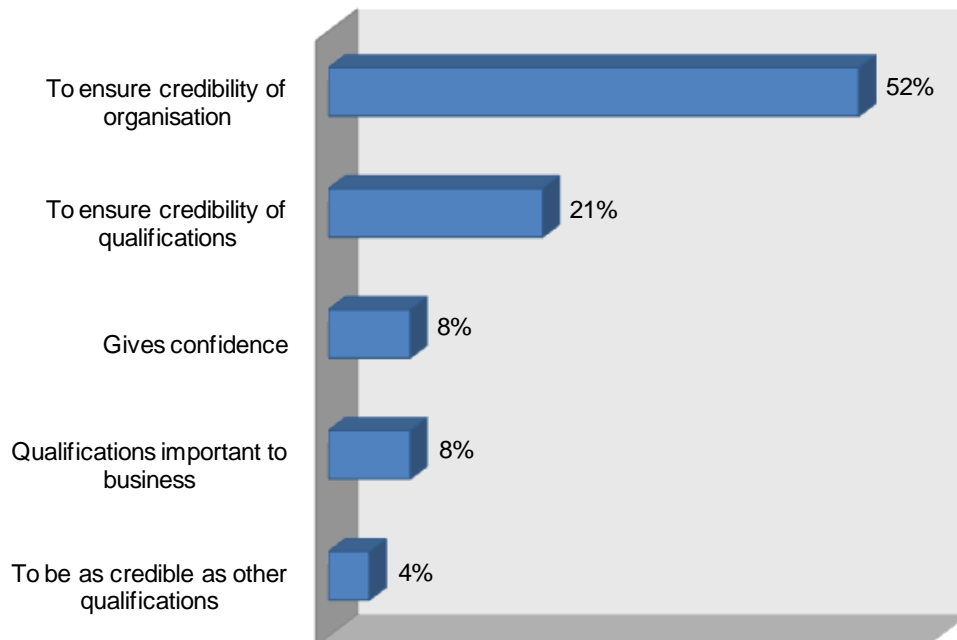
From Figure 23 it can be seen that over two thirds of employers (69%) stated that if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification, it would be important that they had heard of the accrediting organisation – with approaching half of employers here (45%) specifically stating that this would be very important.

Further examination of the data indicates that the outcomes here were relatively consistent across Scotland, England and Wales, but that employers in Northern Ireland were least likely to state that knowledge of the accrediting organisation would be important i.e.:

- England = 70%
- Wales = 67%
- Scotland = 66%
- Northern Ireland = 52%

*“Why do you say that this would be important?”*

**Figure 24: Reasons For Importance of Knowing Accrediting Organisation (Unprompted)**



**Base: 'Of Little/No Importance' in Figure 23**

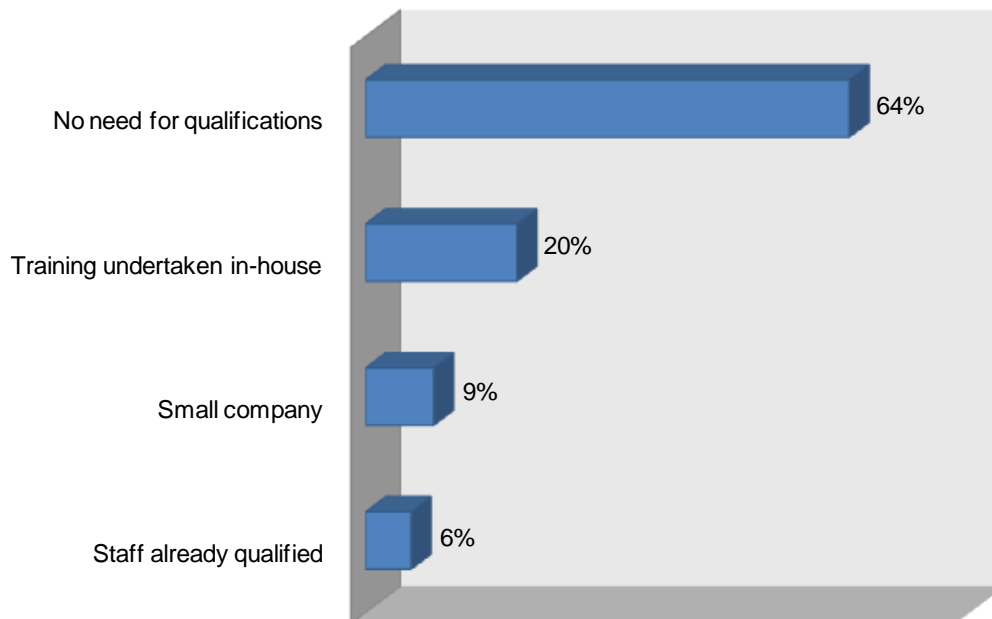
When employers stating that it would be important that they had heard of the accrediting organisation if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, Figure 24 indicates that by far the most common reason cited was ‘to ensure the credibility of the accrediting organisation’ (52%).

Indeed, the only other factor to emerge with significant unprompted note here was that of a desire to ‘ensure the credibility of qualifications’ (21%), although a core of respondents also made unprompted reference here to other factors, including:

- To give confidence in the organisation and its qualifications (8%)
- Qualifications being important or necessary for their business (8%)

*“Why do you say that this would be of little or no importance?”*

**Figure 25: Reasons For Knowing Accrediting Organisation Being of Little/No Importance (Unprompted)**



**Base: 'Very/Fairly Important' in Figure 23**

When employers stating that it would be of little or no importance that they had heard of the accrediting organisation were people in their workforce working towards a qualification were asked – again, on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, Figure 25 indicates that by far the most common factor cited was a perceived ‘lack of need for qualifications’ (64%) and, thereafter, that ‘training was undertaken in-house’ (20%).

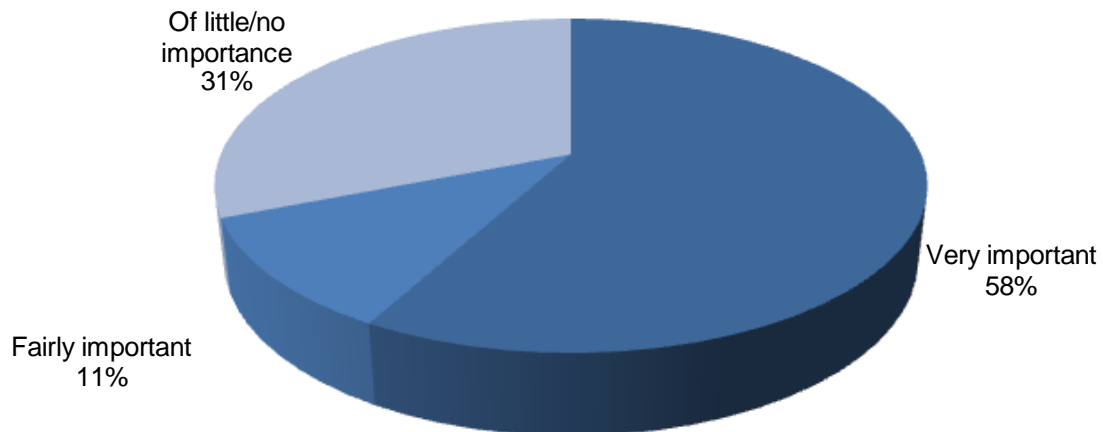
However, a small proportion of companies here also made reference to:

- Their company being small (9%)
- Staff in their company being already qualified (6%)



*“If people in your workforce were working towards a qualification, how important would it be that you had an understanding of the accrediting organisation and, in particular, its status and credibility?”*

**Figure 26: Importance Of Having Understanding Accrediting Organisation**

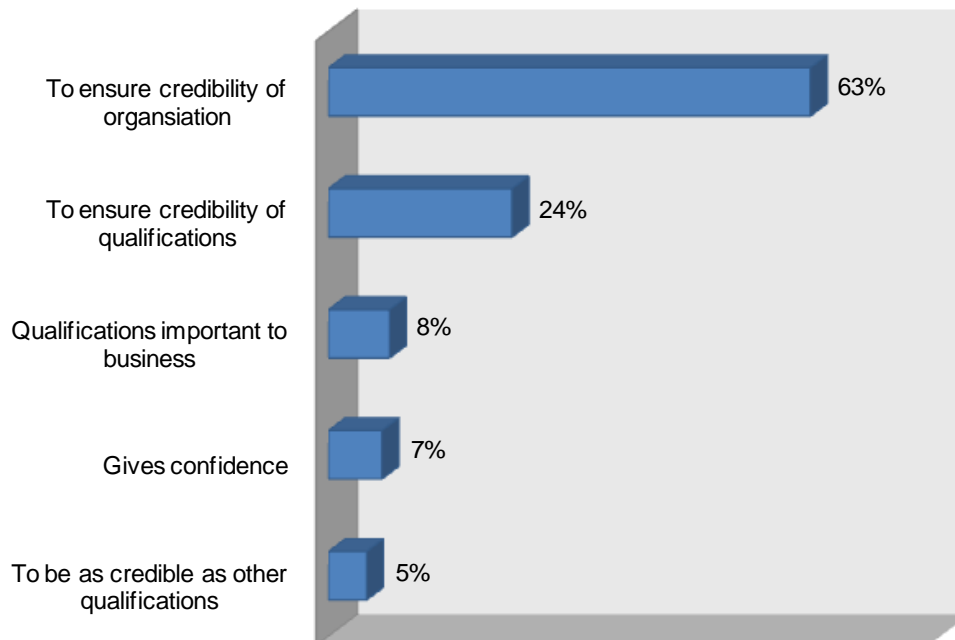


**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 26 it can be seen that over two thirds of employers (69%) 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, with 3 out of 5 employers here (58%) specifically stating that this would be very important.

*“Why do you say that this would be important?”*

**Figure 27: Reasons For Importance of Having Understanding Accrediting Organisation (Unprompted)**



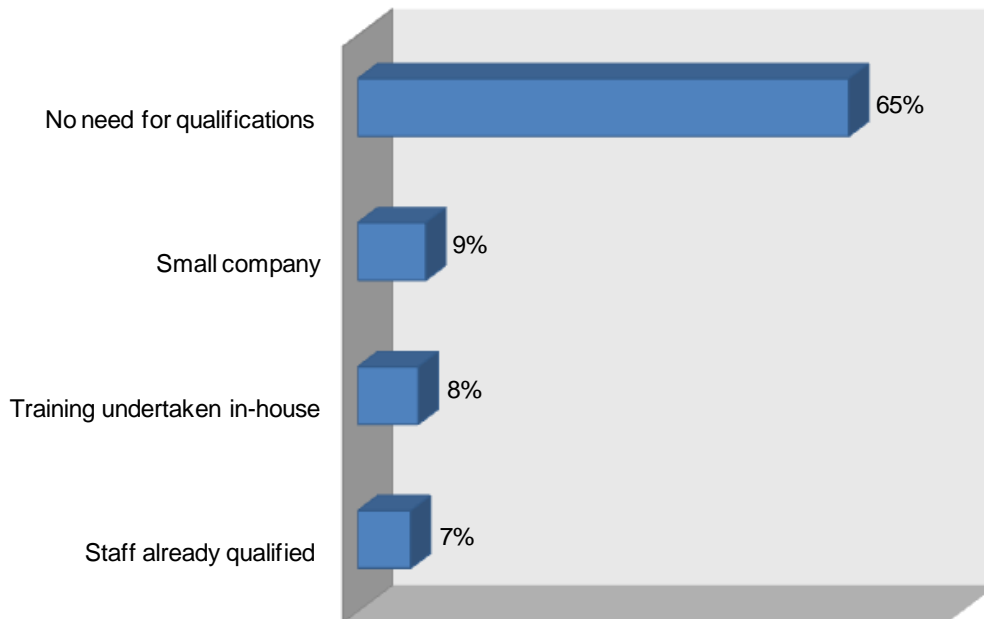
**Base: 'Very/Fairly Important' in Figure 26**

When employers stating that it would be important that they had an understanding of the accrediting organisation if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, Figure 27 indicates that by far the most prominent reason cited was ‘to ensure the credibility of the accrediting organisation’ (63%), with the only other notable unprompted reason cited here being ‘to ensure the credibility of the qualifications themselves’ (24%), although a core of respondents also made unprompted reference to other factors such as:

- Qualifications being important or necessary for their business (8%)
- Giving them confidence with regard to the organisation or its qualifications (7%)
- To be seen as being as credible as qualifications accredited by other regulators (5%)

*“Why do you say that this would be of little or no importance?”*

**Figure 28: Reasons Having Understanding Of Accrediting Organisation of Little/No Importance (Unprompted)**



**Base: 'Of Little/No Importance' in Figure 26**

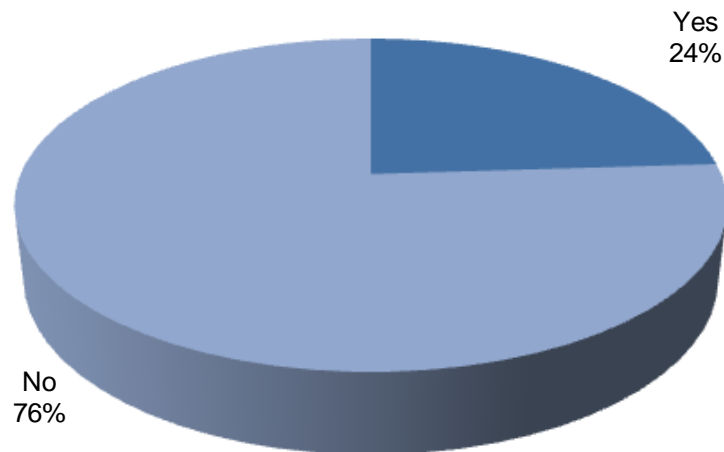
When employers stating that it would be of little or no importance that they had an understanding of the accrediting organisation if people in their workforce were working towards a qualification were asked – again, on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, Figure 28 indicates that by far the most common unprompted reason cited was that they had ‘no need for qualifications’ (65%), although a core of respondents also made unprompted reference here to:

- Their company being small (9%)
- Training being undertaken in-house (8%)
- Staff in their company already being qualified (7%)

## 5.2 The Scottish Qualifications Authority

*“Before today, had you heard of the Scottish Qualifications Authority – also known as the SQA?”*

**Figure 29: Heard of SQA Before Today?**



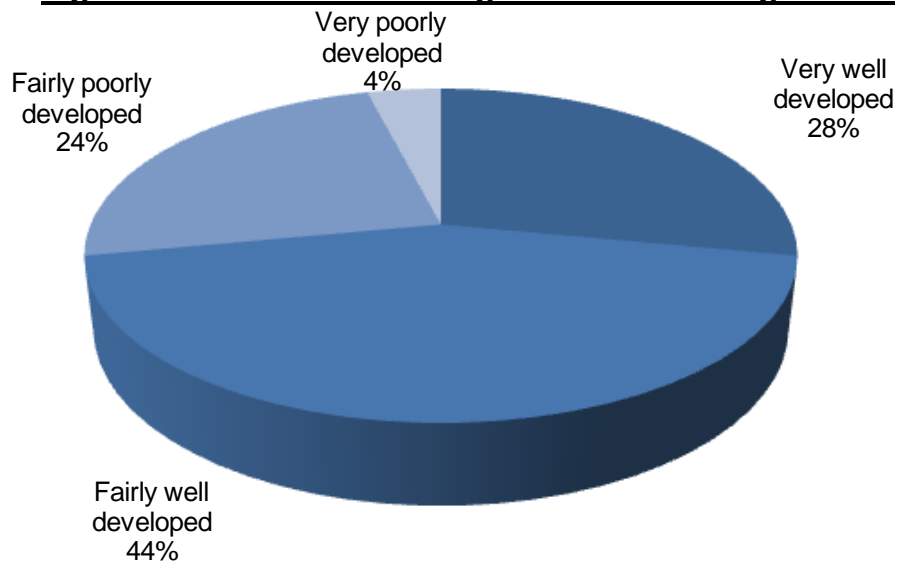
**Base: All Respondents**

From Figure 29 it can be seen that a quarter of respondents (24%) stated that they had heard of the SQA. Whilst this applied to the vast majority of employers in Scotland (94%), it applied to typically around 1 in 5 employers in other parts of the United Kingdom i.e.:

- England = 20%
- Wales = 20%
- Northern Ireland = 18%

“What would best describe your level of knowledge and understanding of the SQA and what it does?”

**Figure 30: Level Of Knowledge & Understanding Of SQA**



**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 29**

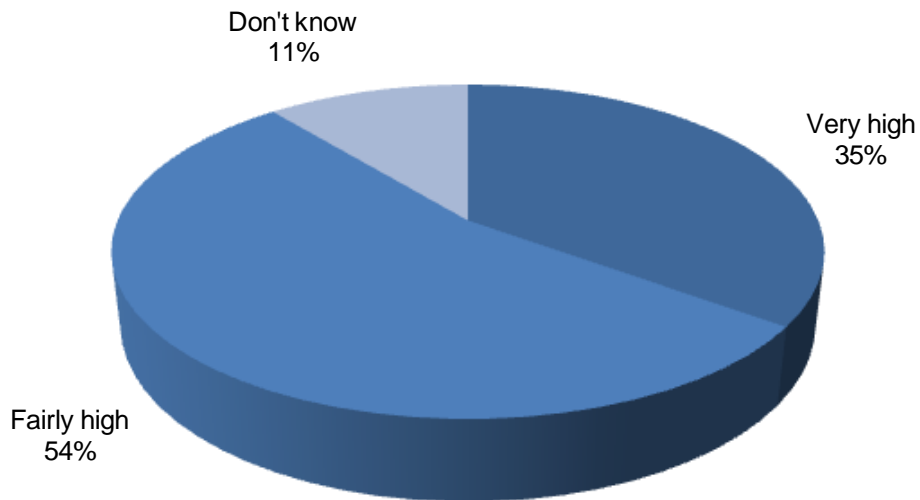
From Figure 30 it can be seen that approaching three quarters of employers aware of the SQA (72%) stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of the Authority and what it does – although only around a quarter (28%) specifically described their level of knowledge and understanding in this regard as being very well developed.

Further examination of the data indicates that outcomes here were relatively consistent across the UK i.e.:

- Northern Ireland = 74%
- England = 72%
- Scotland = 70%
- Wales = 70%

“How would you describe the credibility of the SQA?”

**Figure 31: Credibility Of SQA**



**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 29**

It is encouraging to note from Figure 31 that nearly 9 out of 10 employers aware of the SQA (89%) described the Authority as having high credibility, with a third (35%) specifically believing that the Authority had very high credibility.

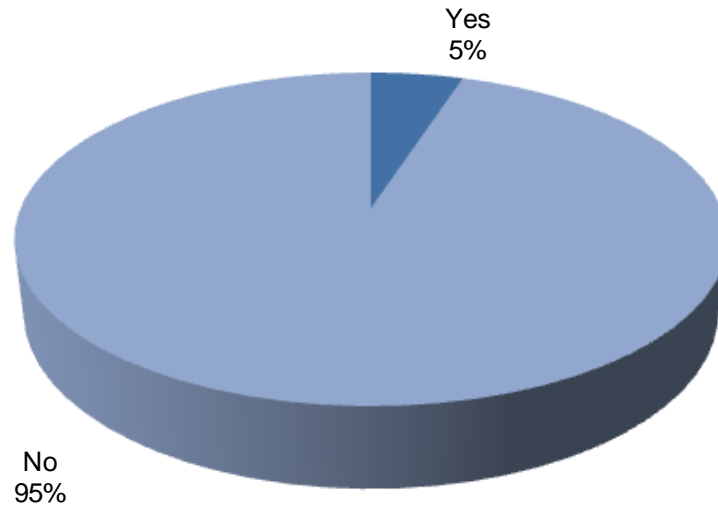
It should also be stressed that none of the employers interviewed who were aware of the SQA believed the Authority to have low credibility i.e. if employers did not believe the Authority to have high credibility, all provided a 'don't know' response here.

It should be noted that the sub sample of respondents is insufficient here to allow a meaningful breakdown of results. However, the indicative information gathered would strongly suggest that perceived high credibility of the SQA is consistent across the four countries within the UK.

### 5.3 SQA Accreditation

*“Before today, had you heard of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 32: Heard of SQA Accreditation Before Today?**



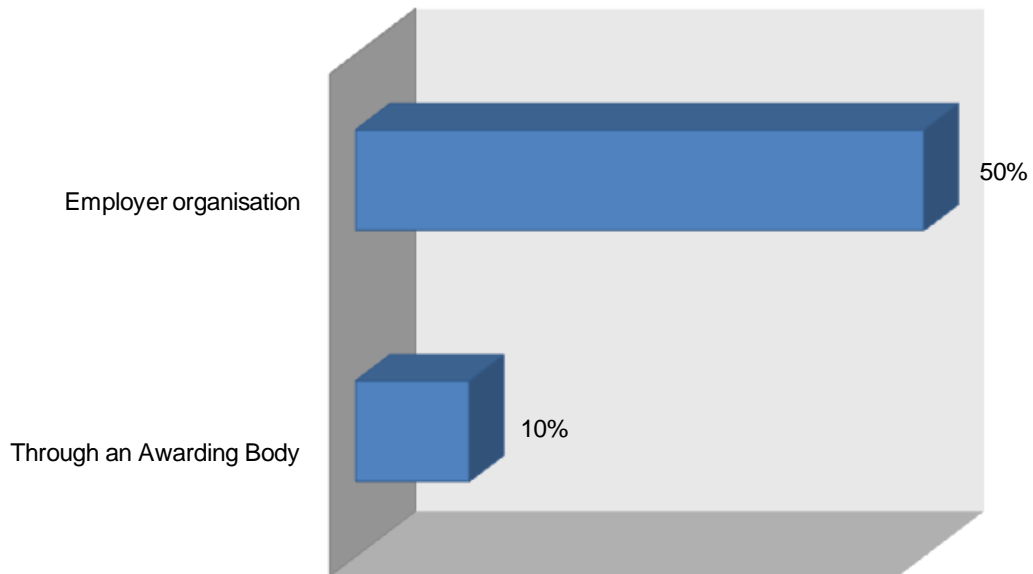
**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 29**

From Figure 32 it can be seen that very few employers interviewed (5%) stated that they had heard of SQA Accreditation.

Given the small proportion of employers aware of SQA Accreditation, it should be stressed that the outcomes presented below in relation to Figures 33-35 inclusive should be treated on a purely indicative basis.

*“How did you become aware of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 33: Source of Awareness of SQA Accreditation  
(Indicative Outcomes)**



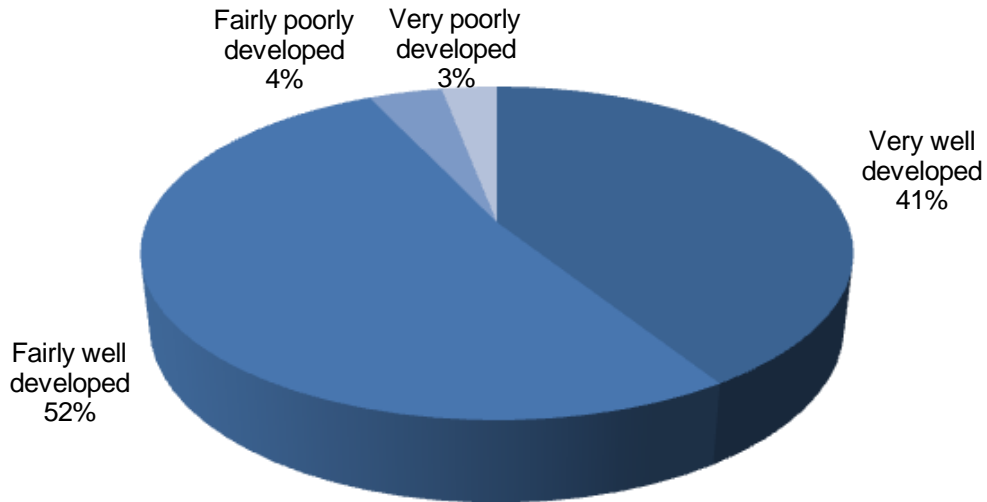
**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 32**

From Figure 33 it can be seen that amongst employers aware of SQA Accreditation, the principal source of their awareness was employer organisations (50%) and, thereafter, through an Awarding Body (10%).



*“How would you describe your level of knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation and what it does?”*

**Figure 34: Level Of Knowledge & Understanding Of SQA Accreditation (Indicative Outcomes)**

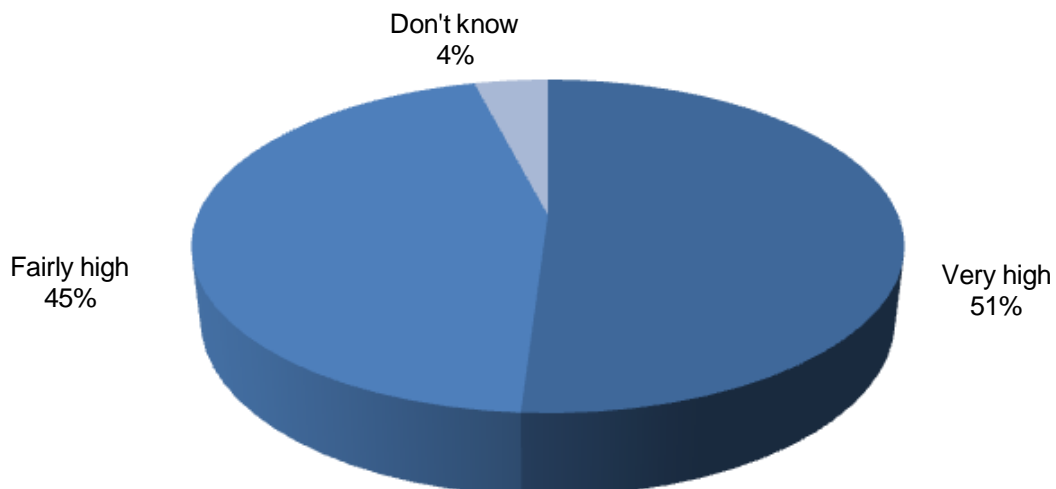


**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 32**

Figure 34 indicates that – amongst the small proportion of employers aware of SQA Accreditation – the vast majority (93%) stated that they had a well developed knowledge and understanding of SQA Accreditation and what it does.

*“How would you describe the credibility of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 35: Credibility Of SQA Accreditation (Indicative Outcomes)**



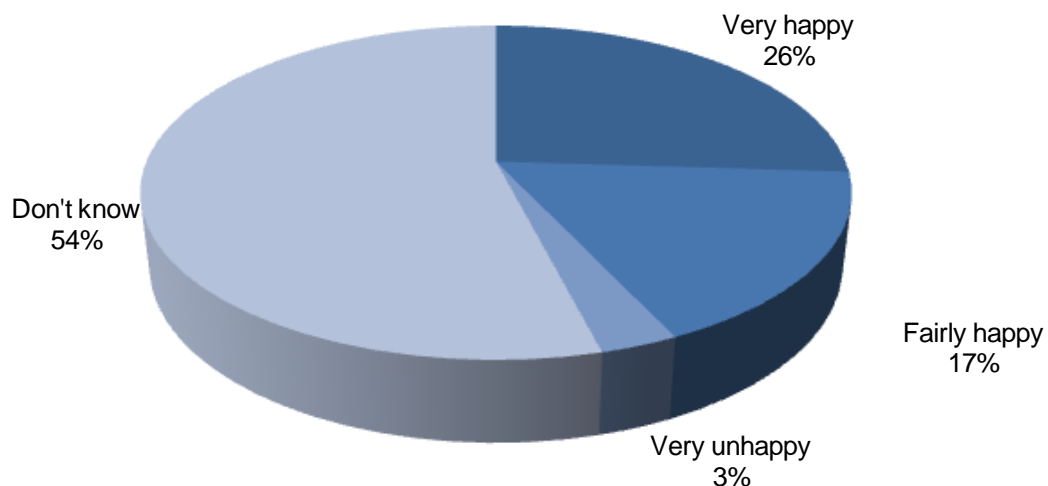
**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 32**

From Figure 35 it can be seen that – again, amongst the small proportion of employers aware of SQA Accreditation – almost all (96%) believed it to have high credibility.

All employers were read out the following statement – “SQA Accreditation can accredit all qualifications in Scotland other than degrees and qualifications awarded by universities”.

*“If people in your workforce were working towards a qualification in future, how happy would you be that it was accredited by SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 36: Happy For Qualification To Be Accredited by SQA Accreditation?**



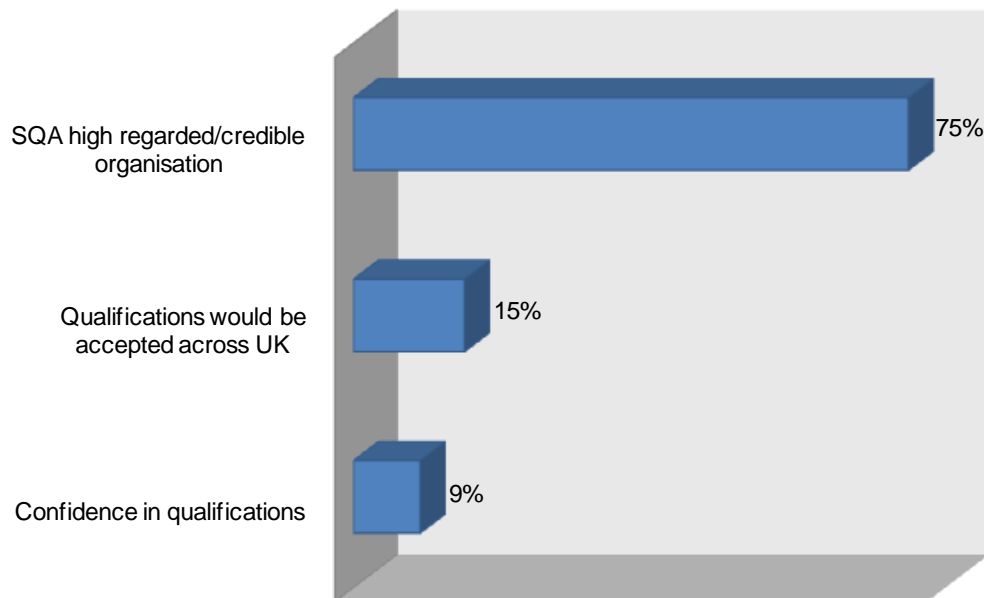
**Base: All Respondents**

Figure 36 indicates that over 2 out of 5 employers interviewed (43%) stated that they would be happy for qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working in future to be accredited by SQA Accreditation.

Indeed, it should be stressed that very few employers (only 3%) stated that they would be unhappy for qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working in future to be accredited by SQA Accreditation i.e. almost all remaining employers here provided a ‘don’t know’ response (54%).

*“Why would you be happy that these qualifications were accredited by SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 37: Reasons For Being Happy For Qualifications To Be Accredited By SQA Accreditation (Unprompted)**



**Base: 'Very/Fairly Happy' in Figure 36**

When employers stating that they would be happy for qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working towards in future to be accredited by SQA Accreditation were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, Figure 37 indicates that the overwhelming response elicited was that ‘SQA is a highly regarded and highly credible organisation’ (75%).

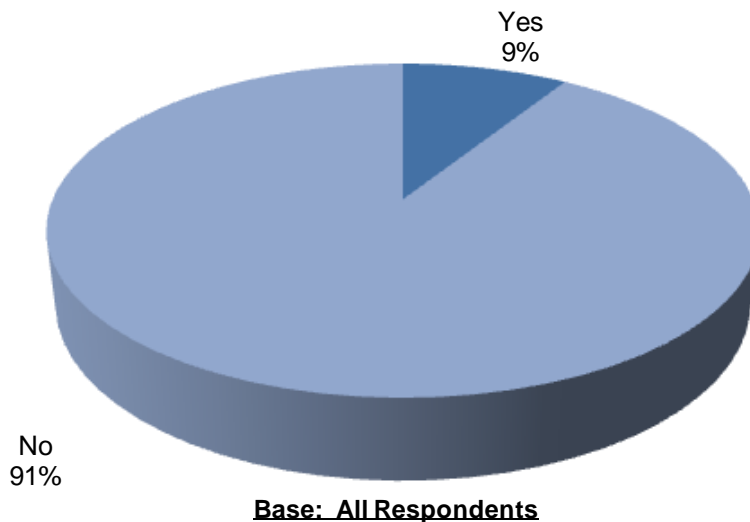
However, a small proportion of respondents made unprompted reference here to:

- Qualifications being accepted across the UK (15%)
- Having confidence in qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation (9%)

#### 5.4 **Accreditation of Qualifications by Other Accrediting Organisations**

*“If people in your workforce were working towards a qualification in future, would you prefer that it was accredited by another accrediting organisation?”*

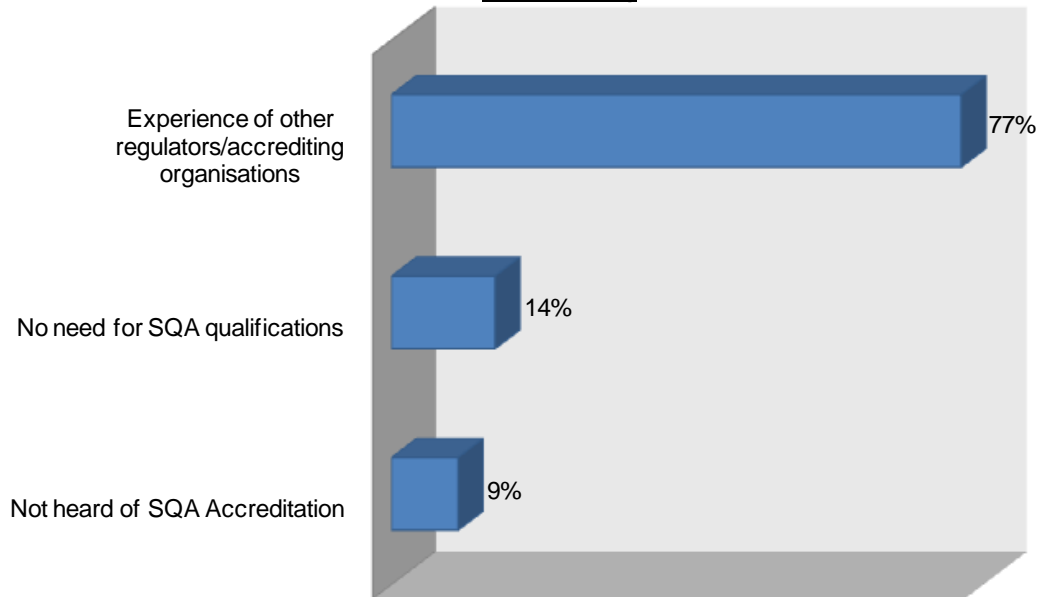
**Figure 38: Prefer Qualification To Be Awarded By Another Accrediting Organisation?**



From Figure 38 it can be seen that only around 1 in 10 employers (9%) stated that they would prefer another accrediting organisation to accredit qualifications towards which people in their workforce were working in future, with this primarily being a function (as indicated in Figure 39 below) of their 'experience of other regulators/accrediting organisations' (77%). Again, it should be stressed that the outcomes noted in Figure 39 below should be treated on a purely indicative basis due to the small sample of employers providing a response to this question.

*“Why would you prefer that this qualification was accredited by another accrediting organisation?”*

**Figure 39: Reasons For Preferring Qualification Accredited By Another Accrediting Organisation (Unprompted- Indicative Outcomes)**

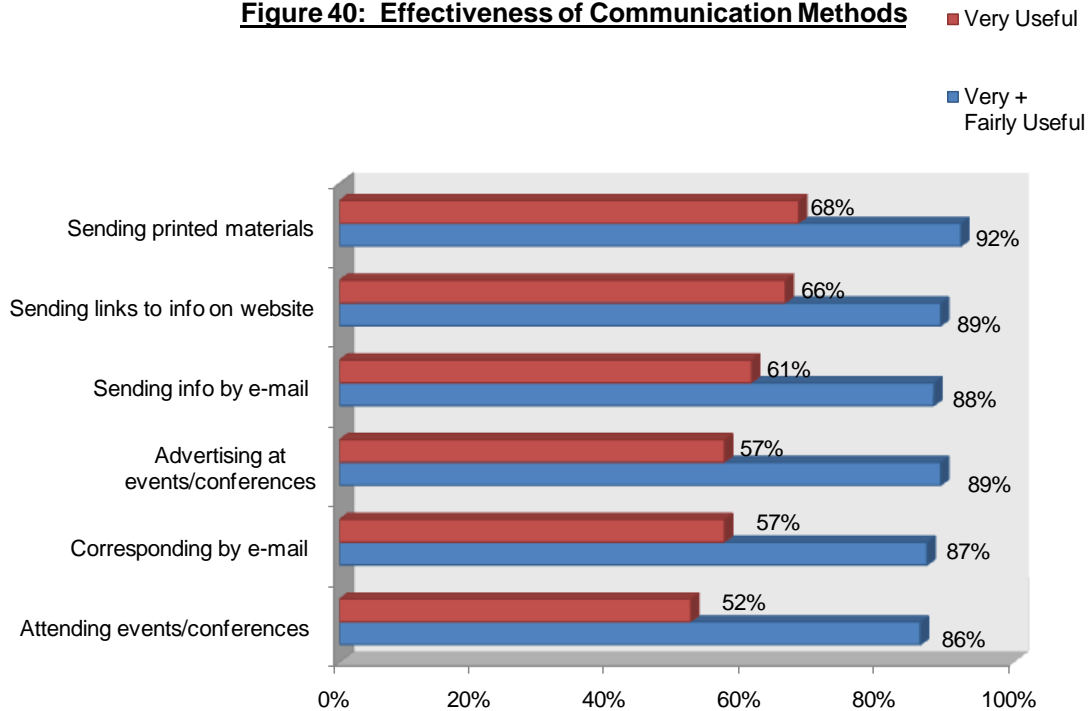


**Base: 'Yes' in Figure 38**

## 5.5 Communication Methods

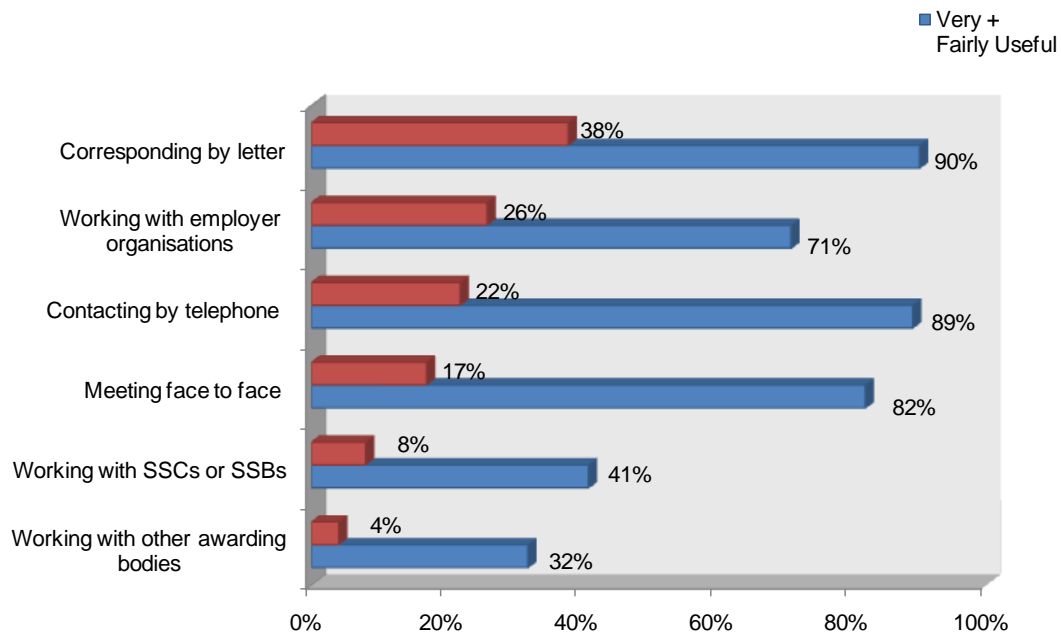
*“SQA Accreditation wants to encourage employers across the United Kingdom to use its services. How effective do you think each of the following would be as methods of encouraging you – as an employer – to consider using the services of SQA Accreditation?”*

**Figure 40: Effectiveness of Communication Methods**



**Base: All Respondents**

**Figure 41: Effectiveness of Communication Methods(cont'd)** ■ Very Useful



**Base: All Respondents**

From Figures 40 and 41 it can be seen that employers believed that a wide range of methods would be useful in terms of encouraging them to consider using the services of SQA Accreditation, including:

- Sending printed materials (92%)
- Corresponding by letter (90%)
- Advertising at events/conferences (89%)
- Contacting by telephone (89%)
- Sending links to information on its website (89%)
- Sending information by e-mail (88%)
- Corresponding by e-mail (87%)
- Attending events/conferences (86%)
- Meeting face to face (82%)

However, it is of particular interest to note that a number of communications emerged most notably in terms of being very useful as

means by which to encourage employers to consider using the services of SQA Accreditation, namely:

- Sending printed materials (68%)
- Sending links to information on its website (66%)
- Sending information by e-mail (66%)
- Advertising at events/conferences (57%)
- Corresponding by e-mail (57%)
- Attending events/conferences (52%)

Further examination of the data here indicates relatively few variations. However, it should be noted that:

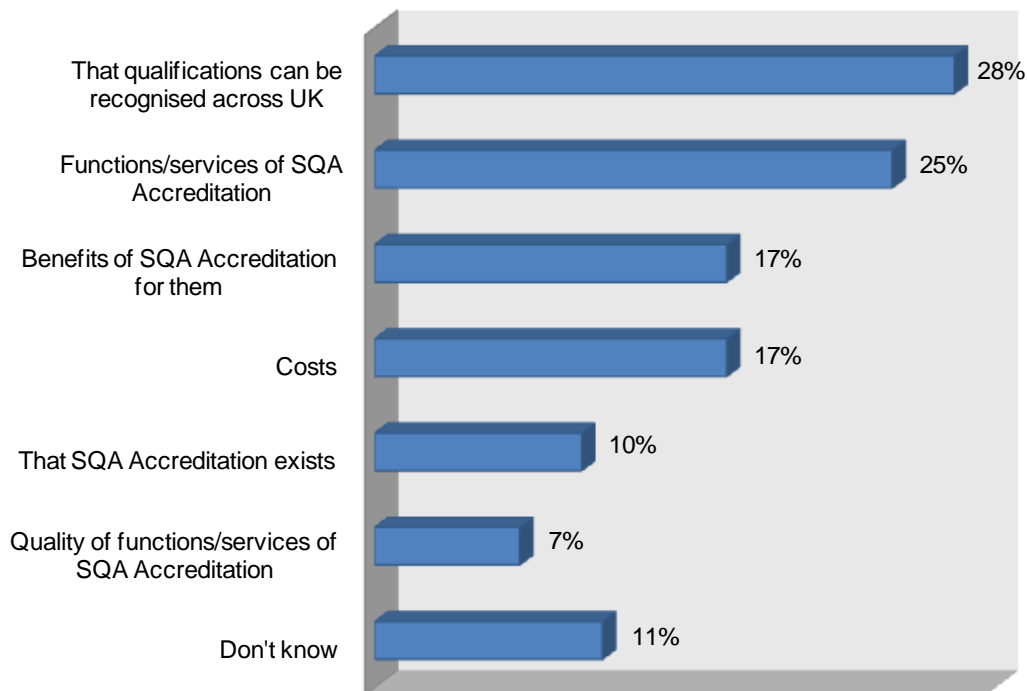
- Face to face meetings were seen as being least useful in Wales (67%)
- Working with other qualification Awarding Bodies was seen as being most useful in England (37%)
- Working with Sector Skills Councils or Standard Setting Bodies were seen as being most useful in England (46%)
- Working with employer organisations was seen as being most useful in Northern Ireland (20%)



## 5.6 Messages For Employers

*“What kind of messages do you think SQA Accreditation should be putting forward to employers in order to promote itself and its services?”*

**Figure 42: Messages SQA Accreditation Should Be Using (Unprompted)**



**Base: All Respondents**

When employers were asked – on an unprompted basis – what kind of messages they thought SQA Accreditation should be putting forward to employers in order to promote itself and its services, Figure 42 indicates that the two principal responses here related to:

- That qualifications could be recognised across the UK (28%)
- The functions and services of SQA Accreditation i.e. ‘what SQA Accreditation does’ (25%)

However, secondary unprompted mention was made of a range of other factors here, including:

- The benefits of SQA Accreditation for employers (17%)
- The costs associated with the functions and services of SQA Accreditation for employers (17%)
- That SQA Accreditation exists (10%)
- The quality of functions and services offered by SQA Accreditation (7%)

Further examination of the data indicates that the following outcomes were noted by employers in the countries noted:

- That qualifications could be recognised across the UK: employers in England and Wales (31% and 32% respectively)
- The functions/services of SQA Accreditation: employers in Northern Ireland (40%)
- The benefits of SQA Accreditation for employers: employers in Scotland and Northern Ireland (55% and 36% respectively)
- Costs of services/functions of SQA Accreditation: employers in England and Wales (19% and 26% respectively)
- That SQA Accreditation exists: employers in England (11%)
- The quality of functions/services offered by SQA Accreditation: employers in Wales (14%)