Quality assurance and validation

1 Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the quality assurance and validation process for the qualifications development programme within Curriculum for Excellence. It takes account of SQA's Qualifications Development Strategy, builds on the senior phase paper approved by the Management Board (August 2007) and takes account of processes used by Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS), as well as recent developments in governance of projects across the programme of work.

2 Overview

The purpose of the quality assurance and validation processes is to ensure that the next generation of National Qualifications is fit for purpose. The process will check:

♦ the purpose, quality and rigour of the qualifications development process

♦ the alignment of the qualifications with the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence and agreed qualifications design principles

♦ that roles, responsibilities and remits are clear

♦ that effective engagement has taken place

♦ the feasibility and practicality of implementation

3 Qualifications development

Positive and proactive engagement with stakeholders is a critical factor in ensuring the quality of the new and revised qualifications and their acceptance, adoption and implementation. The development process focusses on producing qualifications which are fit for purpose. The process of developing qualifications has to be open and transparent, and have proactive quality assurance built-in as an intrinsic part of the process.

The Curriculum for Excellence qualifications development model is a hybrid of previous qualifications development models. It has four important features:

♦ the role of providing subject expertise and the tasks of developing qualifications, assessments and writing specifications has been separated

- qualifications are being developed in a top down approach — starting with an overview of qualifications in curriculum areas; then determining suites of Courses required in that area; then developing individual Course requirements and, lastly, the requirements of individual Units
- 'front-ended' quality assurance is an integral part of the development process and permeates all stages
- engagement activities are clearly focused at each stage of the development process and targeted at key stakeholders relevant to that stage.

Effective knowledge management is a crucial part of this process. Collaborative social software is being used to enable efficient communication between working groups.

4 Stakeholder engagement

To help manage resources efficiently and to provide effective engagement with stakeholders, an engagement framework for qualifications has been developed that classifies stakeholders into appropriate groupings. This includes formally established SQA engagement groups and more targeted meetings with groups, organisations, and individuals. For example:

- Curriculum Areas Review Groups
- Qualifications Design Teams targeted engagement with relevant stakeholders (including learners)
- web-based feedback on individual Course developments from subject web pages

Engagement is underpinned by a communication plan and web pages which will keep all stakeholders updated on current qualification developments. Subject pages on the website are regularly updated following the work of formal curriculum area and subject based qualifications design teams and work groups. Classroom practitioners, in particular, are encouraged to subscribe to an update service for their subject and they will also be able to contribute feedback using a web-based comment/feedback facility.

More information on the roles and remit of formal engagement and quality assurance groups is given in Appendix 1.

5 Managing qualifications development

Within SQA, the development programme is overseen by the Programme Board. The Chair of the Programme Board, SQA's Director of Qualifications, is responsible for decisions about progress from stage to stage through the quality assurance process, ensuring consistency of the qualifications with SQA policy. The Programme Board is an SQA senior officer group, with representation from the Scottish Government.

New and revised qualifications are being developed by SQA's Curriculum for Excellence development team. The development team develops qualifications through engagement with Curriculum Area Review Groups (CARGs), Qualifications Design Teams (QDTs) and their Subject Working Groups (SWGs). The development team is responsible for ensuring that each individual qualification is designed in line with government and SQA policy and design principles.

The work of the development team is overseen by the Review of Courses Co-ordination Groups (ROCCGs). The ROCCGs provide initial sign-off against the key milestones. The ROCCGs also provide advice to the Programme Board about the suitability of outputs and deliverables. More information on ROCCGs is available in the appendix.
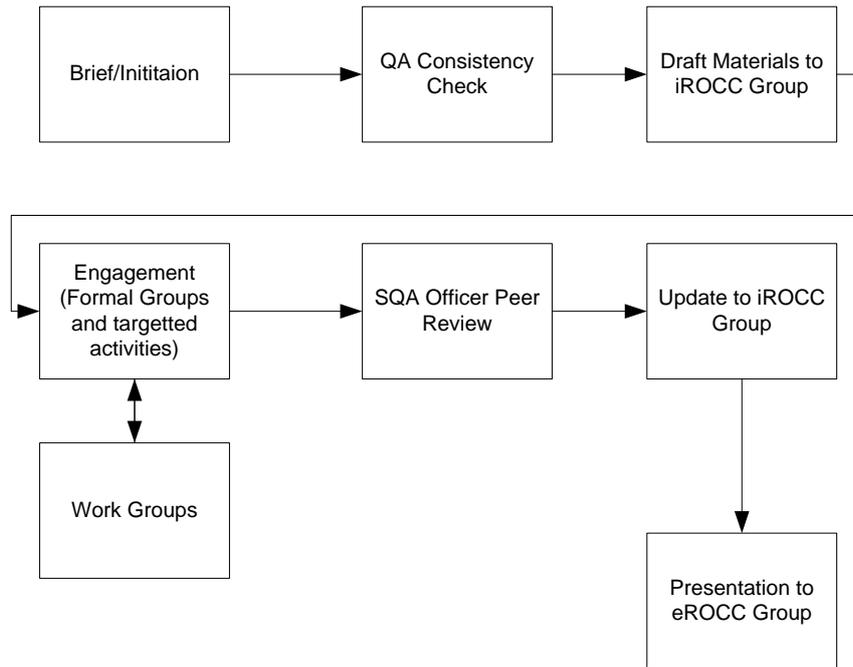
6 Quality assuring qualifications development

The process of developing qualifications is guided by the concept of 'front-ended' quality assurance. This involves proactive project planning, defining objectives and stating assumptions at the outset of projects.

'Front-ended' quality assurance requires:

♦ clear vision, purpose and values
♦ open communication and engagement
♦ collaborative working and knowledge management

There are a number of key stages in the quality assurance process for developing qualifications (see figure 1)

```
┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│ Brief/      │─────▶│ QA Consistency│────▶│ Draft Materials to│
│ Inititaion  │      │ Check        │      │ iROCC Group  │
└─────────────┘      └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘
                                                   │
      ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┘
      ▼
┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│ Engagement  │─────▶│ SQA Officer Peer│──▶│ Update to iROCC│
│ (Formal Groups│     │ Review        │    │ Group        │
│ and targetted│      └─────────────┘      └─────────────┘
│ activities) │                                  │
└─────────────┘                                  │
      ▲                                          ▼
      ▼                                   ┌─────────────┐
┌─────────────┐                           │ Presentation to│
│ Work Groups │                           │ eROCC Group  │
│             │                           │             │
└─────────────┘                           └─────────────┘
```

Figure 1 Quality assurance process

7 The role of Review of Courses Coordination Groups

The Review of Courses Co-ordination Groups (ROCCGs) oversees the quality of the final qualifications The internal SQA review group (iROCCG) has a particular focus on proactively monitoring progress on the 'front-ended' quality assurance. A strategic approach to qualifications development means a staged approach to producing materials. Course rationales and summaries will be produced and go through the quality assurance process before the more detailed Unit, support and assessment specifications are produced.

The external review group (eROCCG) has a particular focus on strategic matters and issues of overall coherence, balance and consistency across qualifications.

8 Validation

'Front-ended', proactive quality assurance is an integral part of the new qualifications development process and involves all aspects of the development stages from broad curriculum area initiation through to formal sign-off of individual qualifications. Materials will be produced, quality assured and made available for validation at key milestones throughout the process.

eROCCG will validate the:

♦ Curriculum area review report
♦ Curriculum area overview document and list of suites of courses
♦ Course rationale, summary and specification

eROCCG reports contain the decisions and recommendations of the group. The reports will summarise any validation outcomes and outline further actions required.

Appendix 1: Quality Assurance Groups — Roles and Remits

External Review of Courses Co-ordination Group (eROCCG) and Internal Review of Courses Co-ordination Group (iROCCG)

The Review of Courses Co-ordination Groups (ROCCGs) oversee the quality of the final qualifications There are two groups: an External Review of Courses Coordination Group (eROCCG) and an Internal Review of Courses Co-ordination Group (iROCCG).

The external review group (eROCCG) has a particular focus on strategic matters and issues of overall coherence, balance and consistency across qualifications. The internal SQA review group (iROCCG) has a particular focus on proactively monitoring quality assurance progress.

Curriculum Area Review Group (CARG)

Curriculum Area Review Groups (CARGs) work with SQA in each curriculum area. Each CARG is made up of representatives from partner organisations, stakeholders, teachers, and parents. These groups offer guidance and advice on the development of qualifications.

Qualifications Design Team (QDT)

Qualifications Design Teams (QDTs) are working on the design of qualifications within individual subjects such as Physics, History, English, Music etc. They are made up of nominated subject experts, from Local Authorities, colleges, universities and employers. They have an important part to play in quality assuring qualification developments and provide a forum for specialists to evaluate draft arrangements, specifications and support materials.

Subject Working Group (SWG)

Subject Working Groups (SWGs) carry out discrete pieces of work, for example the rationale and course summary, Unit specification or Unit support packs for a particular subject area. They are directed by the relevant QDTs who are working on the design of qualifications within individual subjects.