

SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles (2014)

The Scottish Qualifications Authority

The Scottish Qualifications Authority has two distinct functions, SQA Accreditation and SQA Awarding Body.

1 About SQA Accreditation

SQA Accreditation independently accredits and quality assures qualifications and regulates approved awarding bodies, thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies and government.

The work of SQA Accreditation is overseen by the Accreditation Committee (AC) which was established by the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. AC is accountable to Scottish Ministers and ensures that there are appropriate governance mechanisms in place with regards to SQA's functions. It delegates the responsibility for decision making on all Accreditation and Regulation operational activity to the Accreditation Co-ordination Group (ACG).

Our work is divided into two main areas: Accreditation and Regulation.

The Accreditation section has responsibility for:

- Advising standard setting organisations in the development of National Occupational Standards and qualifications and supporting them through the qualification product approval process
- Supporting and assisting awarding bodies through the accreditation process
- Reviewing accreditation submissions
- Working with awarding bodies and standard setting bodies to determine Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework credit rating and supporting them through the credit rating approval process

The Regulation section has responsibility for:

- Conducting awarding body audits and ensuring they remain compliant with the Regulatory Principles
- Carrying out provider monitoring activity
- Reviewing the Quality Enhancement Rating of awarding bodies
- Supporting new awarding bodies through the approval process
- Reviewing awarding body self-assessment reports or action plans.
- Investigating complaints and compliance issues and cases of malpractice or maladministration

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2 How we quality assure

We ensure that SQA approved awarding bodies remain compliant by continually monitoring their performance against our Regulatory Principles. We do this by using robust quality assurance processes such as awarding body audits, self-assessment, risk profiling, provider monitoring, reviewing and evaluating accreditation submissions. These approaches help us ensure compliance, maintain standards over time and protect learner interests.

Approved awarding bodies must ensure that their business practices, their qualifications and the practices of their providers comply with the Regulatory Principles, Regulatory Principles Directives and the clauses within their legal arrangements with SQA Accreditation.

SQA Accreditation publicly reports its regulatory activities and, where appropriate, requires awarding bodies to take responsibility to resolve and prevent issues which do not meet our regulatory requirements.

3 Who are the SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles (2014) for?

The SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles (2014) are intended for use by existing organisations to ensure ongoing compliance, new organisations seeking approval as an awarding body, awarding bodies seeking accreditation of qualifications and by providers delivering SQA accredited qualifications.

4 How the Regulatory Principles work

SQA Accreditation has designed the Regulatory Principles to encompass the five key principles of better regulation to ensure that we are transparent, accountable, proportionate, consistent and targeted in carrying out our regulatory duties.

There are 15 Regulatory Principles in total, each one defining a standard which awarding bodies must meet in order to be compliant. There is also Supplementary Information which will assist awarding bodies in meeting the Regulatory Principles.

In some cases, the Supplementary Information is prescriptive, however, it is not an exhaustive list and it is still acceptable for awarding bodies to demonstrate that they meet the Regulatory Principles through other sources of evidence or business practices.

Where appropriate awarding bodies must meet the requirements of the Regulatory Principles Directives which contain specific criteria that awarding bodies must adhere to when meeting the relevant Regulatory Principle. These can be found on the SQA Accreditation website - www.sqa.org.uk/accreditation.

Regulatory Principle	Supplementary Information
<p>1. The awarding body shall have clearly defined and effective governance arrangements.</p>	<p>The awarding body must demonstrate effective governance arrangements, which support awarding body functions. Consideration should be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • key committees and groups, • partnership arrangements, • conflicts of interest, • policies and procedures, • organisational structure. <p>The awarding body must nominate an Accountable Officer and deal with SQA Accreditation in an open and co-operative way and disclose anything which SQA Accreditation would reasonably expect to be made aware.</p>
<p>2. The awarding body shall ensure it has the necessary resources to effectively carry out its operational functions to meet regulatory requirements.</p>	<p>The awarding body must demonstrate that it has effective:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership and expertise, • quality management systems and procedures, • technology, • human resources, • financial resources, • and other physical resources, <p>in order to carry out its operational functions.</p>
<p>3. The awarding body shall have clearly defined business planning processes which show evidence of management commitment, decision making and ongoing review.</p>	<p>The awarding body's objectives must be clearly defined, measurable, show evidence of review and give consideration to SQA accredited qualifications.</p> <p>The awarding body must demonstrate that it employs robust processes to protect its own business interests, as well as the interests of its providers and learners and have systems in place to manage risk including business continuity and financial planning.</p>

Regulatory Principle	Supplementary Information
<p>4. The awarding body shall continually review the effectiveness of its business services, systems, policies and processes.</p>	<p>The awarding body must demonstrate it has systems in place which facilitate continual improvement and show evidence of regular ongoing review and evaluation of its key business activities.</p> <p>The findings from ongoing review must result in an annual self-assessment of the awarding body's operations in relation to SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements.</p> <p>The awarding body must take appropriate measures to identify business risk and where appropriate take preventative or corrective action.</p> <p>The awarding body must demonstrate that it conducts its operations ethically and takes account of all relevant legislation.</p>
<p>5. The awarding body shall provide clear information on its procedures, products and services and ensure that they are accurate and appropriate to SQA accredited qualifications.</p>	<p>The awarding body must demonstrate that its procedures, products and services are clear and that providers are aware of what is expected of them in terms of resources and requirements.</p> <p>The awarding body must demonstrate that its policies, processes, systems, fees, guidance and publications, including those provided by its providers, make appropriate reference to SQA accredited qualifications and SQA Accreditation.</p> <p>The awarding body must demonstrate how it effectively promotes SQA accredited qualifications.</p>
<p>6. The awarding body and its providers shall maintain accurate documents, records and data.</p>	<p>The awarding body must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate it has systems in place for the version control of documents, • specify the type of records and data it holds and their associated retention periods including records which must be held by providers, • have robust arrangements and agreements in place with third parties or service providers where applicable, • ensure the accuracy and currency of information shared with SQA Accreditation.

Regulatory Principle	Supplementary Information
<p>7. The awarding body shall have effective arrangements for communicating with its staff, stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.</p>	<p>The awarding body must demonstrate how it communicates effectively with staff, providers, learners, external stakeholders and SQA Accreditation.</p> <p>The awarding body must demonstrate how it promotes an understanding of SQA accredited qualifications and the role of SQA accreditation.</p>
<p>8. The awarding body shall ensure that SQA Accreditation is granted access to all information pertaining to SQA accredited qualifications.</p>	<p>The awarding body is responsible for ensuring that SQA Accreditation has access to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • awarding body premises and staff, • providers, assessment locations and learners where appropriate, • third parties and service providers where applicable, • documents, records and data, <p>for the purposes of quality assurance.</p> <p>The awarding body must also make all providers, delivering accredited qualifications, aware of SQA Accreditation's right of access.</p>
<p>9. The awarding body shall ensure that it has robust systems and processes for the identification, design, development, implementation and review of qualifications, which meet the needs of users.</p>	<p>With specific regard to SQA accredited qualifications, the awarding body must demonstrate the application of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identifying the need/demand for a qualification, • designing and developing qualifications which are fit for purpose (including identification of appropriate assessment methods and quality assurance systems), • maintaining and reviewing qualifications.

Regulatory Principle	Supplementary Information
<p>10. The awarding body shall ensure that it has the necessary arrangements and resources for the effective delivery, assessment and quality assurance of SQA accredited qualifications.</p>	<p>To demonstrate the effective delivery of its qualifications the awarding body must develop and implement assessments which are fit for purpose, rigorous and reliable. The awarding body should consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the type of qualification, • methods of assessment, • conditions of assessment, • resources (including the roles, responsibilities and requirements of the personnel involved in delivery and assessment and also any technical or physical resources required), • evidence requirements (including the type, amount and standard of evidence to be produced), • assessment principles or requirements for the qualification (e.g. assessment strategies, assessment principles/requirements or any awarding body devised assessment criteria or guidelines). <p>The awarding body must demonstrate it has an effective and appropriate quality assurance system which ensures the quality and consistency of assessment provided over time, at any location and between locations. The awarding body should consider the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the type of qualification, • methods of assessment, • conditions of assessment, • resources (including the roles, responsibilities and requirements of the personnel involved in quality assurance and also any technical or physical resources required), • frequency of quality assurance activity, • quality assurance principles or external quality control requirements for the qualification (e.g. assessment strategies, assessment principles/requirements or any awarding body devised criteria or guidelines).

Regulatory Principle	Supplementary Information
<p>11. The awarding body shall ensure that its qualifications and their assessment are inclusive and accessible to learners.</p>	<p>The awarding body must demonstrate how its equality and diversity policies comply with relevant legislation.</p> <p>The awarding body must demonstrate it has a clear process for reasonable adjustments and special considerations.</p> <p>Where appropriate, the awarding body must define any barriers, requirements or conditions which could affect standards.</p> <p>The awarding body must demonstrate that there are no unnecessary barriers to entry or assessment.</p>
<p>12. The awarding body and its providers shall have open and transparent systems to manage complaints.</p>	<p>The awarding body and its providers must deal with complaints on an equitable basis, in line with its published procedures and timescales, and without unreasonable delay.</p> <p>Awarding body personnel, providers and learners must be made aware of how and when they can complain to SQA Accreditation and where appropriate the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO). Where a complaint is upheld, the awarding body and/or provider must take appropriate, preventative and/or corrective action.</p>
<p>13. The awarding body and its providers shall have clear, fair and equitable procedures to manage appeals.</p>	<p>The awarding body and its providers must have clearly defined processes to deal with appeals for services that it offers.</p> <p>Consideration should be given to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how, when and the circumstances under which an appeal can be made, • timescales for appeals, • independent review. <p>Where a referral is made to SQA Accreditation, we may undertake activities to assess the effectiveness of the Awarding Body and/or the provider's appeals process to ensure they are in line with regulatory requirements.</p> <p>Where SQA Accreditation raises any concerns the Awarding Body and/or provider must take appropriate, preventative and/or corrective action to prevent re-occurrence.</p> <p>The awarding body and its providers should ensure that their documentation is clear that SQA Accreditation is unable to overturn assessment decisions or academic judgements.</p>

Regulatory Principle	Supplementary Information
<p>14. The awarding body and its providers shall ensure that it has safeguards to prevent and manage cases of malpractice and maladministration.</p>	<p>The awarding body and its providers must have clearly defined processes to deal with malpractice and maladministration. The awarding body must inform SQA Accreditation when any cases, or suspected cases, of malpractice and/or maladministration are discovered.</p> <p>The awarding body and its providers must develop and implement corrective action plans to prevent further occurrence.</p>
<p>15. The awarding body and its providers shall have effective, reliable and secure systems for the registration and certification of learners.</p>	<p>The awarding body and its providers must maintain systems which hold secure information on learner achievement and progress and comply with relevant legislation.</p> <p>The awarding body must ensure that qualification and Unit certificates (including replacements):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meet SQA Accreditation's minimum requirements, • reflect learner achievement, • are only issued on the basis of a valid claim, • are designed to protect against fraudulent use, • have published timescales for issue, • are revoked where fraud or malpractice has been identified. <p>The awarding body must seek approval from SQA Accreditation prior to processing certificate claims for expired qualifications.</p>

SQA Accreditation Definitions	
Term	Definition
Accountable Officer	The responsible individual nominated by the awarding body to deal with SQA Accreditation.
Assessment methodology	The approach to assessment of a qualification eg observation, oral questioning, examination or a combination of such methods.
Assessment principles	Requirements and recommendations specified by a standard setting body/regulatory body/awarding body in relation to the assessment and quality assurance of units and qualifications.
Assessment strategy	Requirements and recommendations specified by a Sector Skills Council (SSC) in relation to the assessment and external quality control of one or more SVQs. Specific to, and mandatory for, SVQs but may also be used with other types of qualifications.
Conflict of interest	A situation in which an individual, or organisation, has competing interests or loyalties.
Continual improvement	An ongoing process through which an awarding body increases its effectiveness and/or efficiency to fulfil its policies and objectives
Expired qualifications	Qualifications which have gone beyond their certification end date (finish date).
Learner	Candidate, student, individual undertaking a SQA accredited qualification.
Maladministration	Any actions, neglect, default or other practice that compromises the accreditation or quality assurance process including the integrity of accredited qualifications, the validity of any certificates, or the reputation and credibility of SQA Accreditation
Malpractice	Any deliberate actions, neglect, default or other practice that compromises the accreditation or quality assurance process including the integrity of accredited qualifications, the validity of any certificates, or the reputation and credibility of SQA Accreditation
Partnership	A 'partnership' is where two or more organisations work together to fulfil SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements. In doing so, those bodies involved in the partnership carry out awarding body functions and must have significant, clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

SQA Accreditation Definitions	
Term	Definition
Provider	Organisation(s) or individual(s) responsible for delivery and/or assessment of SQA accredited qualification(s). A provider may constitute a centre, tutor, examiner or assessment location.
Reasonable adjustments	Arrangements which are approved in advance of an examination or assessment process to allow achievement to be demonstrated by the candidates with either a permanent or long-term disability or learning difficulty, or a temporary disability, illness or disposition.
Relevant legislation	Any law, legislation or standards which has an impact on the awarding body's operating environment.
Regulatory Principle Directives	Specific published criteria that awarding bodies must adhere to.
Regulatory requirements	Regulatory Principles, Regulatory Principles Directives and the clauses within legal arrangements with SQA Accreditation.
Regulatory Principles	What we quality assure against.
Self-assessment	A method used by approved awarding bodies to assess their own ability to meet the requirements of the regulatory principles.
Special considerations	A post assessment adjustment to a learner's mark or grade to reflect temporary illness, temporary injury or any other indisposition at the time of assessment.
Supplementary information	Information provided to assist awarding bodies in meeting the Regulatory Principles.
Third parties and service providers	Any person(s) or organisation(s) that has arrangements or agreements in place which contribute to awarding body activities.