

An Evaluation of SVQ Criteria and Assessment Strategy Criteria: Results from External Focus Groups

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External perspectives on SVQ criteria: Findings from focus groups

Introduction

The criteria for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) were first written in 1993/1994, and with the exception of a few minor additions in relation to external quality control of assurance in 1999, no significant revisions to the criteria have taken place. The landscape of qualifications has changed dramatically since 1993 and the remit of SQA Accreditation has been extended, and in light of these changes, a review of the criteria is now required.

In order to tackle this issue, SQA Accreditation conducted an extended review of the SVQ criteria and the assessment strategy criteria but this report only addresses the former. It draws on empirical focus group data to review the *Awarding Body Criteria (2007) Appendix D: Criteria for Scottish Vocational Qualifications* in relation to current SVQs and specifically answers two research questions:

- 1 What are the characteristics, if any, of the SVQ criteria, which may be inflexible or hinder innovation?
- 2 What are stakeholders' perceptions of criteria, ie are they perceived to be restrictive, irrelevant or underdeveloped?

During an awarding body and sector skills council event, five parallel focus groups were conducted, obtaining the perspectives of 60 external stakeholders. Participants were prompted with a series of questions (see Appendix C) which covered both the original 2007 criteria (see Appendix A) as well as a 2011 draft version of the revised criteria (see Appendix B). The analysis and results from these focus groups are discussed throughout the remainder of this paper. This report focuses primarily on documenting external perspectives and a follow up report will be published which details how these findings were used to direct the further revisions of the criteria.

Section 1: Overall perception of the SVQ criteria

Participants provided varied opinions on the SVQ criteria, with some rather ambivalent and indifferent about the criteria's usability, while others were particularly vocal about their concerns and dissatisfaction. The members of the focus groups consisted of representatives from both awarding bodies and sector skills councils, and it was often the case that when respondents were uninterested in the criteria they were generally low users. These participants suggested that other members of their organisations would be better placed to comment. Alternatively, high users of the criteria were very clear about which criterion were essential to SVQ development, those which were ambiguous and caused confusion, as well as any criteria which they felt was unnecessary or inappropriate.

In general, participants felt that having criteria of some description was essential in order to standardise the qualifications being delivered, however there was a debate about the level of guidance that was required. Well-experienced participants indicated that it was not necessary to 'drip feed' qualification developers, while more inexperienced users from smaller organisations stated that they would find it useful to have a clear overview of all

aspects of the process. Thus, it was generally believed that the 'foundations' were there but the criteria needed 'tweaked'; the level of tweaking required depended upon the users experience with SVQ development and delivery.

Throughout the data several key issues were identified as part of the discussion. Participants were particularly vocal about:

- ◆ positive or negative aspects of the criteria
- ◆ areas for development
- ◆ roles and responsibilities of those providing and using the criteria
- ◆ the current economic situation

Section 2: Positive aspects of the criteria

From a qualification perspective, two key advantages were highlighted. Firstly, SVQs were praised for their ability to combine theory and practice and it was considered essential that this focus was not lost in any revision of the criteria. This came out of discussions around 'knowledge only' Units, when it was questioned whether knowledge only Units would be appropriate for future SVQs. Participants felt that this would lessen the benefits of a SVQ. Nevertheless, it was recognised that sectors have differing requirements and some sectors may require smaller bite-sized qualifications, but if these were developed they should be done so in a manner that does not detract from the essence of an SVQ. Secondly, participants were happy that because of the nature of SVQs they could be 'slotted together to form another qualification'. This provided opportunities for recognition of prior learner which was a good selling point for the qualification.

From a criteria perspective, with the exception of a few select criteria, participants were generally happy. In particular they suggested that three components were vital and should not be lost in any revisions of the criteria:

- ◆ external verification
- ◆ marketing plans
- ◆ relationship to the National Occupational Standards (NOS)

It was argued that these criteria helped maintain the quality and reputation of the qualification across the nation. In addition, it was argued the criteria in general were essential in order to standardise qualifications across all awarding bodies which also contributes to the good reputation of the qualification.

External quality control

In relation to external quality control, there was a consensus that it was essential and that it added value to the qualifications. It appeared that the value of external quality control significantly outweighed the cost associated with monitoring it and as a result participants were happy to continue to invest in this process. No participants indicated that it was unnecessary or inappropriate. One participant supported their arguments about its importance by indicating that 'we've all spent many years trying to build up credibility of competence based qualifications we don't want one bad experience . . . to ruin all that'.

In one focus group, one member indicated that it was essential to clarify whether the focus on external quality control of assurance would continue for SVQs because it was part of the bedrock that defined a SVQ. However, it should be noted that this was in response to the question about whether external quality control of assurance was still essential and the participant appeared concerned that if the focus on external quality control of assurance was removed from the criteria then it would change the nature of a SVQ. The participant did not raise this issue from the perspective that external quality control of assurance should be removed from the criteria.

While all participants supported the inclusion of external quality control of assurance as part of the criteria, one participant indicated that it was not a question of whether we *should* quality control but rather it was more important to include a criterion which requires evidence of *how* you quality control. It was clear to most that external quality control of assurance was taking place and that this did not need to be challenged but instead it was important to justify to SQA Accreditation whether this is being done to an appropriate standard.

Section 3: Negative aspects of criteria

Despite participants' general approval of the criteria, there were a few issues which were consistently raised. In particular, participants had concerns about the:

- ◆ presentation, order and layout of the current criteria
- ◆ inappropriate or irrelevant criterion
- ◆ focus on assessing in languages other than English

Presentation of criteria

There was an overwhelming consensus that the current SVQ criteria (2007) were difficult to navigate and poorly laid out. Participants indicated that the criteria did not follow any logical process because they neither traced the development and accreditation of a qualification from start to finish, nor separated out the roles and responsibilities of all relevant stakeholders, ie the awarding bodies, the sector skills councils and SQA Accreditation. In addition, participants felt that the wording of the criteria was often ambiguous and confusing and further clarification was required to ensure that readers understood the messages being put across. For example, participants indicated that they did not know how to measure 'significant long term demand'.

Participants felt that the 2011 draft criteria rectified the problems with the layout of the criteria but still did not adequately tackle the issue of ambiguous language. The response to the proposed criteria was positive and most stakeholders felt that they were a stark improvement on the 2007 criteria. Participants were happy that the revised criteria were developed according to the remit of the sector skills councils and the awarding bodies' roles and they indicated that it represented a more logical approach.

Despite improvements to the layout and ordering of the criteria, participants felt that the wording in some places required further revision. The table below summarises the recommended changes to the original and revised criteria.

Table 1: Proposed revisions to presentation and language

Criterion	Issue	Action required
Reference to NOS (Criterion 1.2.1)	Language — specifically use of the term 'based on'	Clarify what this means because it is too subjective.
Reference to Demand (Criterion 1.1.2)	Language — 'significant long term demand'	Clarify what level of demand is appropriate and how this is measured.
Revised Criteria — Bullet 6 under 'Each SVQ must:'	Titling convention	The understanding is that both SVQ level and SCQF level should be used until the new titling convention takes place but the revised criteria makes reference to one OR the other. Clarification is required about whether it's OR or both.
Preamble and subtitle	It makes reference to SQA accredited qualifications but then refers to SVQs throughout the document.	Clarification on the purpose of this document in terms of SVQs and wider qualification criteria is required. Participants requested further guidance/criteria for all other qualifications, alternatively they desired one overarching criteria for all qualifications.
1.2.3	Language — Reference to occupation	Use a more appropriate term such as role or task or remove it entirely.
2011 criterion 1.1	Language — Key interest group	Clarification of this meaning is required.

Inappropriate or irrelevant criteria

Three specific criteria in the original 2007 document were highlighted by participants as particularly inappropriate and were considered a hindrance. These were the focus on:

- ◆ progression
- ◆ demand
- ◆ Core Skills

Progression

Despite progression being a key concern for the Scottish Government, stakeholders were generally of the view that progression should not be the primary concern for SVQ development. It was demonstrated that the purpose of a SVQ was to provide a benchmark to measure competence, and for that reason the aim was not to foster progression. This was demonstrated as participants made comments like 'it's almost accrediting people's competence doing that role and then any progression after that is tenuous, it's about quality assuring and being competent'. Thus, while this may be a function of SQA Accreditation's

remit to promote progression, participants felt that it was unjust to make it a requirement of the criteria.

Furthermore, it was indicated that a criterion which focuses on progression is often inappropriate or unattainable because some qualifications do not afford progression routes, yet the qualification itself is vital to the sector — the SVQ in courts and tribunals was offered as an example in this area. Participants were concerned that accreditation of these vital qualifications could be compromised by the lack of progression opportunities. They indicated that should progression remain a criterion then it should be worded appropriately to support those qualifications where progression is not relevant.

Demand

Discussions around demand seemed to revolve around stakeholder's confusion about SQA Accreditation's role in this area. Participants believed it was the awarding bodies' and sector skills councils' roles to evaluate demand and establish whether it was sufficient to develop the qualification. Many participants indicated that 'it's up to the awarding body to determine whether demand is enough for them to go forward with the qualification development'. It was implied that SQA Accreditation making judgements about demand during submissions was inappropriate. Furthermore, it was suggested that the awarding bodies and sector skills councils should be trusted to act in a manner which is economically viable and suits the needs of the sector and as a result there should be a mutual understanding that awarding bodies and sector skills councils would only develop appropriate qualifications. For example one participant indicated that 'if an awarding organisation is going to put a tremendous amount of resource and investment into a product they're not going to do it lightly'. This view was not unanimous and some participants did see the value in keeping the focus on demand. However, in these cases, they tended to value the focus of demand for sector skills councils and awarding bodies rather than having to justify demand for accreditation purposes.

Participants made it clear that sector skills councils and awarding bodies should evaluate demand and in many cases they saw the justification of demand for accreditation as a duplication of effort. They did not clearly see any distinction between the evaluation of demand conducted by sector skills councils and the discussion of demand required for the submission. This is demonstrated in the example below.

Most of the SSCs put together a very coherent and comprehensive LMI for the presentation of the NOS. It seems strange that . . . we have to come up with a separate marketing plan which is going to be aligned with what they're doing anyway. We have to come up with our own evidence when we're actually working with them, for their efforts. So there seems a little bit of duplication and in some cases it causes a problem because if we go back to our employers and say you need support for this and they don't come back to us, we're stuck in a hard place.

While it was recognised that demand could not be overlooked, concerns were raised about the focus on numerical analysis of demand. Low predicted uptake figures were associated with low demand, however, for niche markets, participants felt that the absolute figures around uptake were irrelevant and misleading:

. . . sometimes we get too hung up in numbers you know...a lot of people say you shouldn't be less or if you've got less than 100 candidates you shouldn't be looking at it. But, I think there's sometimes holistic...arguments that . . . you're looking at either a very niche market or . . . in some sectors where you're never going to get huge numbers. But sometimes I think...if you're looking at it from a UK point of view there's a demand there but if you're just talking about Scotland on its own then the numbers don't look great but, you've got, you've got other concerns. And I know that's a rationale you can argue, in the submission, so I think sometimes the demand argument is sometimes too specific.

Thus, if demand remained a criterion for evaluation, stakeholders requested SQA Accreditation to take a more holistic perspective on demand and not rely on uptake figures alone.

Core Skills¹

Although the discussion was limited, a select few members voiced their dissatisfaction with the requirement to conduct Core Skills signposting. From a sector skills council and awarding body perspective, Core Skills added little value to the SVQ and it was implied that the process was a 'waste'. Participants could see the value in Core Skills mapping for Modern Apprenticeship (MA) Frameworks but they did not believe that this should result in a criterion for all SVQs because some would be self-funded and not related to an MA as shown in the quote below.

'...bits that kind of make your hair go grey and it's things like, you know Core Skills Mapping... And, whether you need that for every set of standards, I'm not convinced that you do.'

Assessment of other language

Some concerns were raised about the appropriateness of requiring that qualifications be assessed in English. For some stakeholders this caused concern in light of the increased international workforce in the UK, particularly in terms of Polish nationals. It was argued that participants had experience with Polish workers who were very competent in their job but did not speak English and if they had to complete the qualification in English this may affect their employment status. This reverted discussion back to questioning the purpose of an SVQ where it was concluded that SVQs should be about benchmarking competence. In general participants felt that competence was broader than being able to conduct their job in English; it was simply being able to complete the job. Specifically it was felt that language did not determine competence. However, it should be noted that these discussions revolved around examples from farming sectors where workers were in a confined area and not engaging with the general public.

'So, if they don't speak English you know. The certificate says it's been assessed in a . . . in a foreign language . . . There's no indication that they can do it in English, it's about competent performance, that's the issue and whether or not language determines competent performance? There is nothing in the standards that necessarily says they have to be able to speak a particular language

¹ In light of concerns raised about core skills — a project has been initiated by SQA Accreditation to evaluate core skills further.

And I think it's an issue, particularly where you've got maybe an SVQ or ... to some extent a license to practice...then that certainly does cause issues with language where it's got to be assessed in English. They're already doing the job, they can do it perfectly well in their own language but because the assessment says it has to be in English then they can't undertake that qualification, so no it does certainly cause us problems.

Participants requested further clarification on this issue and they wanted any criterion around this area to be unambiguous and to appropriately guide operations. They felt the current criterion about assessing in language other than English did not provide this clarity.

Section 4: Areas for development

Participants were confident at highlighting areas where they felt improvement could be made to the criteria and also where additional information could be produced to make the process of SVQ development and delivery more transparent. It was indicated that six key areas of development would benefit users of the criteria:

- ◆ focusing on an implementation plan rather than just a marketing plan
- ◆ making credit rating an explicit criterion
- ◆ providing a Glossary of Terms
- ◆ using the term role or tasks instead of occupations
- ◆ more opportunities to align SVQ development with other frameworks, in particular the QCF
- ◆ providing guidance for qualifications other than SVQs

Implementation plan

Stakeholders indicated that the marketing plan was insufficient to ensure the success of the qualification and they suggested that in their current form the criteria 'don't [provide] anything in here about the conduit about actually getting the qualification into the market place'. In light of the understanding that some qualifications are being accredited and then not being implemented, participants indicated that it was essential for submissions to document the implementation strategy. It was argued that experience of having a well-defined and planned implementation strategy has significant benefits and has contributed to the success of some of the larger more recognised qualifications. Based on this experience, it was recommended that this be a new requirement to be considered by SQA Accreditation.

Credit rating

It was recognised that the 2007 criteria made no reference to the SCQF and this was considered essential for any revised criteria which may be developed. For example, they suggested that the SCQF is something else that's missing for this paper is reference to SCQF. In most cases this recommendation appeared to be related to updating the criteria rather than providing any additional benefit. It could be inferred from focus group transcripts that participants were aware that credit rating was now a requirement but the 2007 document did not indicate this. They did not discuss the usefulness of credit rating in any particular depth except to say that addressing SCQF in the criteria would be more appropriate than discussing progression. In reference to credit transfer, etc the credit and

levelling of a qualification supports some form of progression and can be used as part of credit transfer. In doing so it was also argued that a broader focus on progressions is required, so that progression is not just viewed as vertical movement up the qualifications ladder.

Glossary of Terms

More inexperienced members of the group who were new to qualification development requested an explanation of some of the terms in the criteria. 'Qualification structure' was one point that required clarification. One member of a focus group indicated that there were several terms that were not immediately clear to those outside the qualification development sector and, in order to make the criteria more readable, it was appropriate to develop a glossary of terms.

Occupations

In relation to criterion 1.2.3, few people felt that it was essential to retain the focus on occupations. Most participants recognised that this term was used because it related the National Occupational Standards; however they also recognised that some SVQ areas don't have clearly defined occupations. They suggested instead that the SVQ had a narrower focus.

It was proposed that alternative terminology may be better suited and words like 'role' and 'tasks' were suggested on more than one occasion. It was felt that role was more narrowly focused around a candidate job and did not have the same meaning as an occupation. In addition, the term profession was suggested but it was also recognised that this, like occupation, may not be broad enough to cover all SVQs.

One candidate asked if it was more appropriate to remove this reference all together and amend the criteria to simply read:

1.2.3 Assess the application of skills, knowledge and understanding to the standard required in the workplace.

Continuity between different frameworks and systems

Several references were made to the development of qualifications for the QCF. Members of the groups also indicated that their organisations were moving away from SVQs because of their inability to align with the QCF. In particular, for organisations offering qualifications across the four nations, the awarding bodies have received complaints that the qualifications differ and that their centres are finding it confusing to navigate between the different qualifications. As a result they have indicated that they are developing other competence based qualifications that they can align with QCF qualifications in order to promote consistency for candidates and centres.

Based on this issue, it was recommended that the development of SVQs should be more flexible to allow SSCs to develop SVQs which were similar in nature to QCF qualifications in order to ease delivery by centres.

I think, now because the QCF Units and the SVQ Units are looking so different then I would suggest that there possibly is a case for them to appear, perhaps more in line with a QCF Unit. Obviously they might be credit rated differently and they still need to take in the different criteria but for the employers that are working across the four nations, the message that we're getting all the time is that they want to have some consistency and if we can try and build that in as far as possible then I think it would help.

Despite this recommendation, few participants were able to indicate how this could be achieved.

Offering criteria and guidance for other qualifications

There was an obvious need for additional guidance or criteria which moved beyond SVQ development and delivery to incorporate other kinds of qualifications. In several focus groups, participants either asked if the criteria were going to remain specific for SVQs and whether there were plans underway to develop criteria for other qualifications, or specifically requested additional guidance which was broader than the SVQ criteria. In particular, participants wanted to know whether the revised criteria would be broadened to include Competence Based Qualifications 'CBQs'. On several occasions participants referred to 'CBQs' as a specific form of qualification and they desired similar criteria to the SVQ criteria for these qualifications. If separate criteria were not possible, they wished for SVQ criteria to be developed into more generic criteria for all qualifications. It appeared that CBQs were more transferrable out with the Scottish market and therefore offered greater freedom.

Section 5: Roles and responsibilities

In addition to the illogical presentation of SVQ criteria, participants were unclear about those criteria which were specific to awarding bodies and those relevant to sector skills councils. Thus, participants repeatedly asked for more clarification around roles and responsibilities and they wanted a clear division of labour in the criteria as shown below.

'That's one of the bits I'd like to see tweaked, would be to just kind of highlight a bit more, you know, the lead responsibility for the development of the standards and the setting of the assessment . . . you know, what we used to call the assessment requirements. But the actual setting the assessment strategy because I don't think that's, it doesn't really actually say, you know, who's responsible. So things like the role, the roles and responsibilities I think it would be useful to highlight.'

'I guess what I'm saying is that there's different audiences where you get different aspects of the criteria and perhaps you need to look at the, sort of, design and support of SVQs. Is the responsibility of the awarding bodies, but the NOS and the qualification structures and the consultation on those aspects of it which are UK wide and specifically you need to see consultation focused on SSCs.'

This clarification was requested for all aspects of the SVQ development and delivery including the development of assessment requirements. It was suggested as part of the focus groups that an Appendix E for SSCs may be particularly useful. Furthermore, on some

occasions it was unclear whether the criteria related to the actual development and delivery process or the submission process for accreditation. That is to say that when evidence was requested it was unclear whether the evidence should be submitted to SQA Accreditation or just to the awarding bodies, etc. Participants requested a more explicit discussion of each stakeholder's obligations during the development process.

Section 6: Economic constraints

The current economic climate was a major contributor to participants' perceptions of the criteria. In this time of budget constraints it was considered a 'waste of money' to complete Core Skills signposting and they repeatedly indicated that 'in purely economic terms, it costs a lot of money to do that'. Despite discussions around the importance of Core Skills for Modern Apprenticeship qualifications, participants felt that it was inappropriate to make Core Skills a requirement for other qualifications because resources could be more appropriately invested elsewhere.

Section 7: Summary and conclusions

The analysis of the qualitative data highlighted the value placed on SVQ criteria for standardising the qualifications and adding to the overall quality of the qualifications. It was indicated that having criteria results in higher standards of delivery, which in essence increased the reputation of SVQs. While issues have been raised around the criteria with a few amendments suggested, participants feel that the criteria could continue to aid the development and delivery of SVQs.

Where problems with the criteria were highlighted they generally related to those aspects of the criteria that held the greatest cost for SSCs and ABs; either in terms of time or financial cost. Participants wanted to ensure that their investments were justified and in some cases, specifically in relation to Core Skills, they felt that the benefit did not sufficiently balance their outlay. Participants were particularly interested in maintaining investment in areas which benefited the SVQ. In particular, the focus on external quality control was considered vital for improving the reputation of vocational qualifications and should be maintained.

The focus groups for this study were well received. Not only did participants in the focus groups indicate that 'this is great, it's usually Accreditation doing this to us' but respondents of the evaluation survey indicated that the discussion of the SVQ criteria was the most valuable part of the day. Thus, participants were particularly happy to be involved in the development of revised criteria and they were keen to be involved further in the form of a consultation. However, the focus groups covered a relatively small sample of participants (60 participants) and because these participants were self-selecting as part of a larger awarding body and SSC seminar, it was clear that some individuals were indifferent to the criteria and had little to contribute. As a result these findings provide a starting point for understanding perceptions of SVQ criteria and wider consultation is required before the revised criteria can be finalised.

Appendix A: Awarding Body Criteria (2007) Appendix D: Criteria for Scottish Vocational Qualifications

Overview

Standards setting bodies (SSCs and SSBs) are responsible for agreeing with the regulatory bodies (SQA, QCA, CCEA and DCELLs) how National Occupational Standards will be used in the development of SVQs and NVQs. To be recognised as a SVQ, all proposed qualifications must be accredited by SQA in accordance with the criteria for SVQs. These criteria are linked to the *SQA Awarding Body Criteria (2007)* and, therefore, both should be read in conjunction with each other.

Proposals for accreditation or re-accreditation of SVQs must meet the requirements of SQA Accreditation as outlined in the Accreditation/Re-accreditation Submission Form.

These criteria and procedures also apply to proposals for accreditation or re-accreditation of SVQ Units.

SVQ design and support

1.1 For an SVQ to be accredited:

- 1.1.1 the organisation offering the SVQ must be approved by SQA as an SVQ awarding body
- 1.1.2 there must be clear evidence that the SVQ awarding body has the support of the key interest groups which will enable it to operate effectively in the occupational sector in Scotland.
- 1.1.3 there must be clear evidence of significant long term demand and support from Scottish employment interests for the SVQ
- 1.1.4 the target market in Scotland must be identified and there must be a plan for marketing the SVQ in Scotland
- 1.1.5 there must be evidence of progression opportunities in Scotland

1.2 Each SVQ must:

- 1.2.1 be based on approved National Occupational Standards defined by a standards setting body
- 1.2.2 be written in the form of Units and Outcomes
- 1.2.3 assess the application of skills, knowledge and understanding in a specific occupation to the standard required in the workplace
- 1.2.4 be specified at a level consistent with published descriptions

1.3 An SVQ awarding body must adopt the SVQ qualification structure specified by the standards setting body and approved by the regulatory bodies. This must include:

- 1.3.1 the title of the SVQ
- 1.3.2 the level of the SVQ
- 1.3.3 which Units must be achieved and which are either optional or additional
- 1.3.4 how the content of the National Occupational Standards maps to the relevant Core Skills and whether discrete Core Skills Units should form part of the SVQ

Exceptionally, where the SVQ awarding body considers there are particular reasons for departing from the agreed structure, the need for an alternative must be justified in terms of there being evidence of significant, long term demand and support from Scottish employment interests.

Assessment

1.4 Assessment methods and processes must:

- 1.4.1 be fit for purpose, rigorous, reliable and compatible with Unit accumulation
- 1.4.2 be free from any barriers which unnecessarily restrict access — the only exceptions to this would be where statutory restraints require some restrictions to be defined
- 1.4.3 take account of the needs of the variety of organisations and individuals who are expected to use it
- 1.4.4 include arrangements for candidates who have particular assessment requirements
- 1.4.5 seek to encourage simple and practicable assessment and discourage unnecessary bureaucracy

1.5 An SVQ awarding body must submit detailed proposals for assessment and guidance for each SVQ accreditation proposal which must adopt the general principles for assessment and external quality control specified by the relevant standards setting body, and approved by the regulatory bodies including:

- 1.5.1 how external quality control of assessment will be achieved. This will normally be through the use of independent assessment. Where independent assessment is not recommended within the standards setting body's assessment strategy, alternative equally effective measures must be given where aspects of the SVQ must always be assessed through performance in the workplace, the extent to which simulated working conditions must be used to assess competence and any characteristics that simulation should have, including definitions of what would constitute a 'realistic working environment' for the SVQ concerned the specification of the occupational expertise required of assessors and verifiers how the knowledge, understanding, skills and outcomes are to be assessed
- 1.5.2 the amount and type of evidence to be collected

1.6 An SVQ awarding body must be in a position to provide assessment opportunities for candidates throughout Scotland.

1.7 Assessment carried out in a language other than English must provide clear evidence that the candidate is also competent in English to the standard required for competent performance throughout the United Kingdom.

Quality assurance mechanisms

1.8 An SVQ awarding body must show how it's existing quality assurance mechanisms will be applied for each SVQ accreditation proposal. In particular arrangements for:

1.8.1 ensuring the quality and consistency of assessment provided at any location and between locations. SVQ awarding bodies must use the SVQ Centre Approval Criteria when approving all centres to offer the SVQs and must ensure that centres meet these criteria in full before they are allowed to submit claims for certificates. ensuring the system for recording evidence and for recording assessment and verification decisions is reliable, auditable and manageable.

For further guidance on SQA's requirements for quality assurance mechanisms please refer to the *SQA Awarding Body Criteria (2007) — Statement of Excellence 5- Assessment and Verification, Key Goal 21*. The *SVQ Centre Approval Criteria (2005)* are detailed in appendix B of the *SQA Awarding Body Criteria (2007)*.

Appendix B: Awarding Body Criteria (2011) Appendix D: Criteria for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (Revised)

Awarding Body Criteria 2007 (revised January 2011)²

Appendix D

Criteria for SQA Accredited Qualifications

Overview

Sector skills councils and standards setting organisations are responsible for developing National Occupational Standards (NOS). Qualification products, ie qualification structures, assessment strategies and Core Skills signposting are developed from NOS and considered for approval by SQA Accreditation.

To be recognised as a SVQ, approved qualification structures must be accredited by SQA Accreditation in accordance with the criteria for SVQs. These criteria are linked to the SQA Awarding Body Criteria and, therefore, both should be read in conjunction with each other. Proposals for accreditation, or re-accreditation of SVQs or SVQ Units, must meet the requirements of SQA Accreditation as outlined in the Accreditation/Re-accreditation Submission Form.

For an SVQ to be accredited an awarding body must be approved by SQA Accreditation.

Each SVQ must:

- ◆ be based on approved National Occupational Standards as defined by a sector skills council or standards setting organisation
- ◆ be written in the form of Units and Performance Criteria and knowledge and understanding
- ◆ assess the application of skills, knowledge and understanding as specified in the National Occupation Standards
- ◆ be credit rated at a level consistent with SCQF level descriptors
- ◆ include the approved title of the SVQ
- ◆ include the approved SCQF level or the level of the SVQ
- ◆ include which Units must be achieved and which are either optional or additional
- ◆ show how the content of the National Occupational Standards signposts to the relevant core skills and whether discrete Core Skills Units should form part of the SVQ

² These criteria are presented here as a summary of what was discussed during focus groups. They are still subject to change based on the findings of this report and future consultation.

1 SVQ development and support

During development of the qualification products, the sector skills council/standards setting organisation must:

- 1.1 provide clear evidence that the qualification has support of the key interest groups which will enable the qualification to be operated effectively in the occupational sector in Scotland, there must be clear evidence of demand and support from Scottish employment interests for the SVQ
- 1.2 work with awarding bodies to ensure that the SVQ is capable of being assessed and delivered in the workplace

2 Accreditation: Awarding bodies must identify

- 2.1 the target market in Scotland and provide a plan for marketing the SVQ in Scotland
- 2.2 progression opportunities in Scotland, where possible

3 Implementation: Awarding bodies must:

- 3.1 adopt the approved SVQ qualification structure developed by the SSC/SSO and approved by SQA Accreditation
- 3.2 exceptionally, where the SVQ awarding body considers there are particular reasons for departing from the agreed structure, the need for an alternative must be justified in terms of there being evidence of demand and support from Scottish employment interests
- 3.3 if credit and level has been previously approved, adopt the values assigned

4 Assessment

An awarding body must submit detailed proposals for assessment and guidance for each SVQ accreditation proposal.

An awarding body must:

- 4.1 ensure that assessment methods and processes meet the requirements of the approved Assessment Strategy
- 4.2 detail how External Quality Control of assessment will be achieved
- 4.3 provide details of the type of evidence to be collected

Appendix C: SVQ Criteria Focus Group Topics — Revised 17.01.11

Questions about the original 2007 criteria

SVQ development

- ◆ Do any SVQ criteria cause problems for SVQ development, and in what way?
- ◆ Are there any particular issues with specific criteria in relation to SVQ development?
- ◆ Are there any criteria you find particularly useful in relation to SVQ development?
- ◆ Do you feel the SVQ criteria would be useful for non-SVQ development?
- ◆ Do you feel that non-SVQ principles may be useful for SVQ development?
- ◆ How useful do you think it is that qualifications need to be based on units and outcomes specifically?

SVQ delivery

- ◆ Discussion around external quality control and criteria 1.5 and whether this criteria is now redundant.
- ◆ Referring specifically to criterion 1.2.3 — does the term occupation fit well here? Can you suggest any alternatives?

Questions about the revised criteria

- ◆ What are your overall views of this revised criteria and would they work from your own experience of SVQ development and delivery?
- ◆ What impact will criteria 4.2 have on your working practices?