

Spirit levels — Customised Award in the spirits industry



'The Scotch Whisky Association feels confident that, by being positioned on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the SIVQ will be respected as an industry standard with a national status. Employers will be able to recognise exactly what holders of the qualification have achieved and candidates will have a qualification with real weight and value.' Alison Galbraith (SWA)

SQA provided guidance for this process, which concentrated on the breadth and complexity of each unit, instead of just looking at the number of training hours. Units were levelled at SCQF levels 4, 5 or 6, with the result that overall the qualification is at SCQF level 5, which is comparable to an SVQ level 2.

Going forward

...and what did the industry think of the new qualification?

'We feel the new SIVQ better meets the needs of our organisation compared to other more generic qualifications, and we are currently planning a pilot with some of our employees.' Morag Mathieson (The Glenmorangie Company)

'A very workable and industry relevant qualification, which enables companies to robustly assess the competence of their workforce.'

'This qualification will give us credibility with HSE and SEPA in employing competent people.'

'It will give us something to help introduce changes and up-skill our staff.'

'Now we can recognise the important jobs that everyone in our company does.'

More information

If you would like to know more about Customised Awards or are interested in offering them to your staff, telephone our Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

A 'not so traditional' industry

Every year, thousands of tourists visit Scotland and take a tour of at least one whisky distillery, and there is always a part where producers explain exactly how the drink is made. Customers marvel at the scale of the processes and the subtle craft of producing such consistent quality, and wonder at the 'secret' methods and ingredients that deliver the unique flavour of any particular drink.

With a history stretching back over 500 years, Scotch whisky is the original sustainable industry — economically, socially and environmentally. Scotch can only be made in Scotland, a competitive edge which means international sales success, revenue and employment. And it's not just whisky — the gin and vodka industry is now one of the UK's fastest growing export industries of recent years. Gin has long been a high quality product associated with the UK; now over 70% of UK produced gin is exported to over 200 countries around the globe.

While tradition and heritage are cherished, distillers are successful modern businesses, innovating, investing in technology, and developing skilled workforces. A Customised Award — a qualification from SQA that is tailored to your organisation's or group's particular needs — can really help with this, as the members of the Distilling Industry Standards Working Group found out.

An award for the whole spirits industry

Spirits industry employers wanted a customised qualification which would not only set a new standard for the industry, but be flexible enough for individual companies to adapt it to suit their own unique methods and processes.

'We wanted a qualification which would represent a better fit to our processes and in a language which is understandable and relevant to our industry.' Bill Crilly (Edrington Group)

Representatives from spirits and spirit-based drink producers from all over the UK joined together to form the Distilling Industry Standards Working Group (DISWG).

'The industry was clear about what it wanted to achieve and this was defined at the start, ie project objectives, scope, timescale, budget, and project roles and responsibilities.'

'It was clear that the industry didn't have the resources, expertise or time internally to facilitate the review process. This meant choosing a consultant to do this for us. We treated this like a recruitment process and a recruitment team was set up to make up a 'specification' for the role and help us make an objective selection. I believe that choosing the right facilitator was key to the success of the project.' (Chairman DISWG)

So, with the help of a specialist consultant, they set about producing a Customised Award that would meet the needs of operatives in every aspect of the industry. This meant that the awards would need to be applicable to the production of a range of drinks (malt and grain whisky, gin, vodka, blended whisky, and ready-to-drink beverages) **and** to a range of jobs (distilling, malting, warehousing, bottling, packaging and more). The standard set by the new qualification would need to be high enough to challenge employers and employees to achieve the award, but not so high that smaller, rising organisations would be excluded. An SQA External Verifier was on hand to offer advice and guidance at every stage of this process.

Getting the industry to design the award

With the help of facilitators, the employers initially discussed what they wanted to achieve from a Customised Award for their workforce. They proposed that a Customised Award would:

- increase employee's skills and qualifications
- demonstrate competence in the workplace
- motivate those taking the qualifications
- catalyse a review and update work instructions and procedures
- improve standards and consistency between departments and between sites
- improve training by giving people a goal to achieve
- provide a standard recognised qualification for all staff
- establish a base line of process and product knowledge across all the staff

Employers were adamant that to achieve this, the Customised Awards would need to be:

- immediately relevant to spirits industry processes
- concise and simple to understand
- instantly recognisable and easy to apply to a site

The process

The first step was to send round a questionnaire to a large proportion of employers, asking them to describe what they wanted from an award. The consultant also asked the opinion of employers who had previously provided qualifications for their workforce and asked them what they believed they had achieved. They were also keen to consult with those who had previously rejected the idea — keen to know what had put them off and why. The response to the questionnaire was excellent and, as a direct result, representatives from all sectors of the industry then attended a series of one day workshops.

'One of the factors that made the project such a success was the importance placed on getting as many stakeholders involved in the process as possible — from front line operators, line managers, specialists, assessors, verifiers and of course SQA.' Glyn Cave (North British Distillery)

A series of units eventually emerged, and these were circulated around interested parties, edited and re-edited until there was a draft qualification that everyone was happy with. Again, SQA staff — the Customised Awards Manager and the External Verifier — were available at all stages for advice, and attended all the development meetings.

'Some of the most valuable contributions we had came from people who actually worked at the sharp end of the industry, they knew their work be it bottling line or warehouse, and they knew about best practice.' Jane Spurgeon (Facilitator)

Other useful contributions came from those who had already tried using qualifications in the workplace.

'My company's views were well received and due to our experience in other qualifications our opinion was often sought out.' Alexander Tweedie (Edrington Group)

The SIVQ

The Customised Award developed was called the SIVQ or Spirits Industry Vocational Qualification. The qualification has a choice of 44 separate units, each one describing a discrete activity relevant to the industry. The working group and the employers who were consulted wanted to have a 'pick-'n-mix' approach to the award, which meant that they could 'custom build' an award to suit their needs. There are two compulsory units which describe essential skills in health and safety and working with other people; 12 general units which represent transferable skills such as quality, security, materials movements; and finally 30 process units which describe every spirits industry related process including distilling, bottling, effluent treatment, warehousing and many more. Candidates will be able to achieve an SIVQ certificate by completing eight units; including the two compulsory units and at least one process unit.

Finding a level

Once the units were completed, the next stage was to compare the new spirits industry units with other qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework.