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**COMBINED REPORT: FINAL DRAFT
SCOTTISH STAKEHOLDER TRACKING RESEARCH
2001 – 2021 (January 2022)**

PREPARED FOR: Scottish Qualifications Authority

**Scottish Stakeholder Tracking Research
2001 - 2021**

Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd

January 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National Qualifications Profile

- Levels of **prompted awareness** of National Qualifications in 2021 were highest – and were in this order – in relation to *Highers, HNCs/HNDs, Advanced Highers, SVQs, National 5s* and *National 4s*, with levels of prompted awareness of *National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3* and *PDAs* being lower but still relatively high in absolute terms.

- Those who believed that they *knew enough about* qualifications of which they were aware in 2021 were most likely to state this in relation to – and in this order – *National 5s, National 4s, Highers* and *National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3.*

Credibility of Scottish Qualifications

- Those qualifications of which respondents were aware in 2021 which were perceived as having highest credibility – and were in this order – *Highers, Advanced Highers, HNDs/HNDs* and *National 5s*, with lowest levels of perceived credibility being apparent in relation to – and in this order – *National 4s* and *National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3.*

- Over a third of respondents in 2021 stated that their overall views on the credibility of **all** of the qualifications they had heard of – taken together – had changed over the previous year, with 1 in 5 of these respondents stating that their views had become more positive and 4 out of 5 that their views had become less positive.

Developing the Young Workforce

- Over 4 out of 5 Schools, Colleges and Training Providers interviewed in 2021 collectively stated that they were aware of DYW, with this outcome being highest amongst Schools and Colleges.

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- Almost 3 out of 5 interviewed in Schools, Colleges and Training Providers interviewed in 2021 – who were aware of DYW – believed that they had a well-developed knowledge and understanding of it, although relatively few specifically stated that they had a very well-developed knowledge and understanding of DYW.

- On the basis of a statement read out to them – or respondents' previous knowledge of DYW – over two thirds of those interviewed in Schools, Colleges and Training Providers collectively believed that DYW was relevant to their centre (although relatively few specifically stated that they believed that it was very relevant to their centre) and a quarter believed DYW to be of little or no relevance to their centre.

- When those interviewed in Schools, Colleges and Training Providers were asked, if they wanted to find out more about DYW where they would go to source this information, the principal sources cited were *SQA* and *the Scottish Government*, with secondary mention being made in this regard of *Education Scotland, local colleges, Local Authorities* and *local schools*.

SQA Profile

- 9 out of 10 respondents in 2021 stated that they had heard of the Scottish Qualifications Authority, with two thirds of these respondents believing that they *knew enough* about the Authority.

- Less than 3 out of 5 respondents aware of SQA in 2021 believed the Authority to have high credibility, with a quarter believing SQA to have low credibility and 1 in 5 being unable to provide a response.

- When those stating their belief that SQA has high credibility were asked – on an unprompted basis – why they believed this to be the case, their primary responses focused around *SQA doing a good job*, with secondary unprompted mention being made here of SQA *being supportive and/or helpful, being a well-known and well-established organisation, being the principal awarding body in Scotland* and *having high standards.*

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- 2 out of 5 of those interviewed in 2021 stated that they had contacted SQA, with these respondents providing an average score of 7.0 out of a possible 10 in terms of the rating of their contacts. The highest ratings were found amongst Employers, Training Providers and Young Potential Candidates and lowest amongst Parents, Colleges and Schools.

- When those in the professional audiences – who provided a rating of 6 to 10 in terms of their contacts with SQA, i.e. a positive rating – were asked (on an unprompted basis) why they provided a positive rating, the principal responses were those of *SQA being helpful* and *questions being answered quickly* and, thereafter, *SQA being supportive* and *SQA being knowledgeable and/or informative*.

- Just over half of respondents in 2021 stated that they had had contact from SQA, with these respondents providing an average score of 7.4 out of a possible 10 in terms of the rating of these contacts. This average score was highest amongst Employers, Young Potential Candidates and Parents and lowest amongst Colleges and Schools.

- When those in the professional audiences were asked – again, on an unprompted basis – why they provided a rating of 6 to 10 here (i.e. a positive rating), their principal response was that of *SQA being helpful*, with secondary mention being made here of providing such a rating due to *SQA being supportive, SQA being knowledgeable and/or informative* and *questions being answered quickly by SQA*.

- Almost 3 out of 5 respondents in 2021 agreed with statements that SQA *can be trusted*, almost exactly half that SQA *enables organisations to carry out their role more effectively* and the same proportion that SQA *is a progressive organisation*.

- Around 1 in 10 respondents in 2021 strongly agreed with the statement that SQA *can be trusted*, with this applying to the same proportion of respondents in terms of strong agreement that SQA *is a progressive*

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organisation and *enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively*.

- 1 in 8 respondents in 2021 disagreed that SQA *can be trusted*, with this applying to around 1 in 7 respondents in terms of beliefs that SQA *enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively* and *is a progressive organisation*.

- Over 1 in 5 respondents in 2021 'didn't know' if SQA *enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively* or *is a progressive organisation*, with 1 in 6 respondents in 2021 not knowing if SQA *can be trusted*.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

This report details findings to emerge from the latest phases of a programme of research undertaken on an ongoing basis on behalf of the Scottish Qualifications Authority by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd. The fieldwork for these phases of the research was undertaken in 2021.

The purpose of the research is to provide SQA with ongoing information with respect to its performance in a number of key areas. This is achieved by means of three surveys per annum which incorporate *core questions* (i.e. questions which are asked in all survey phases) and *ad hoc questions* (i.e. questions which are specific to a survey phase).

Eight key Scottish Stakeholder groups are targeted in the research process:

- Young Potential Candidates (individuals aged between 14 and 18 inclusive)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (individuals aged between 19 and 34 inclusive)
- Mature Potential Candidates (individuals aged over 34 without secondary school-aged children)
- Parents/Carers (individuals with secondary school-aged children)
- Secondary Schools (all staff, including support staff)
- Colleges (all staff, including support staff)
- Training Providers (members of their management team)
- Employers (person responsible for training, recruitment or human resource development)

This report focuses on the core questions that were asked during the three survey phases in 2021.

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The Stakeholder Tracking Research is usually based around face-to-face interviews with the four *Public Audiences* (i.e. Young Potential Candidates, Intermediate Potential Candidates, Mature Potential Candidates and Parents) and structured telephone interviews with the four *Professional Audiences* (i.e. Secondary Schools, Colleges, Training Providers and Employers). However, due circumstances surrounding COVID-19, alternative methodological approaches had to be used in some instances.

The table below outlines the methodological approaches adopted for each of the eight audiences in 2021, together with the number of completed questionnaires/interviews achieved:

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Audience	Methodology/ Methodologies	Sample Size
Young Potential Candidates	Structured face-to-face interviews	126 interviews
Intermediate Potential Candidates	Structured face-to-face interviews	131 interviews
Mature Potential Candidates	Structured face-to-face interviews	129 interviews
Parents/Carers	Structured face-to-face interviews	127 interviews
Schools	Online questionnaire	290 completed questionnaires
Colleges	Online questionnaire	175 completed questionnaires
Training Providers	Online questionnaire/ structured telephone interviews	168 completed questionnaires/ interviews
Employers	Structured telephone interviews	292 interviews

It should be noted that, during the analysis process, weightings were applied to the outcomes for each of these Stakeholder groups in order to ensure that each group had an equal impact on survey outcomes.

As well as reporting statistically significant variances in findings through time, where possible and appropriate, the report also highlights statistically significant variances on the basis of the responses of the eight Stakeholder groups noted earlier.

In this context, it should be noted that, when considering the comparisons noted between 2020/21 and 2021/22, the research undertaken in both of these years took place before and after results day. Accordingly, respondents in both years would be responding without being fully aware of any issues that emerged as the results came out.

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2.0 NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE

"Have you heard of the following qualifications?"[1]

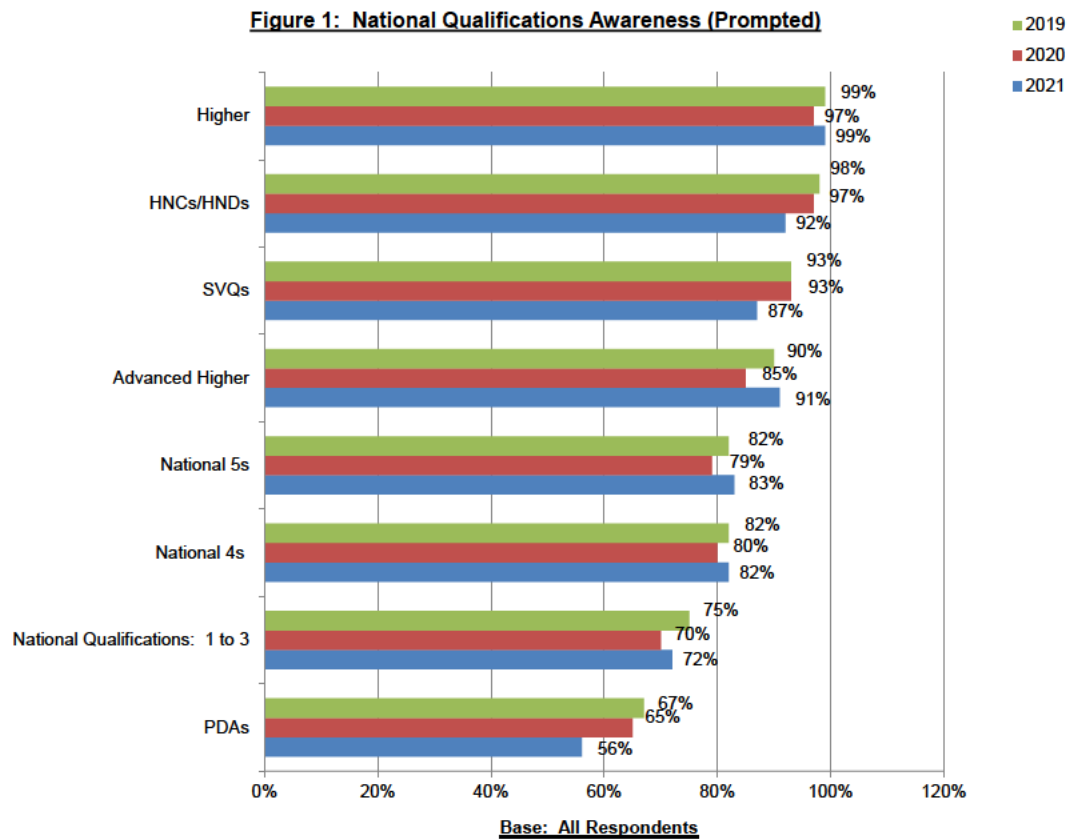**Figure 1: National Qualifications Awareness (Prompted)**

Figure 1 indicates that levels of prompted awareness of the National Qualifications in 2021 were highest in relation to:

- Highers (99%)
- HNCs/HNDs (92%)
- Advanced Highers (91%)
- SVQs (87%)
- National 5s (83%)
- National 4s (82%)

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[1] In all previous survey phases, respondents had been asked about their awareness of academic or vocational qualifications on an unprompted basis. However, due to the changed methodological approach adopted for a number of audiences in 2020 and 2021, the data provided was not comparable to that derived previously.

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Levels of prompted awareness of the remaining two types of National Qualifications were lower in relative terms but still relatively high in absolute terms, i.e.:

- National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 (72%)
- PDAs (56%)

Further examination of the data presented in Figure 1 indicated that levels of prompted awareness of each of the National Qualifications under consideration in 2021 were highest amongst the respondent types noted below (where notable variances were apparent):

- **National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3**: Young Potential Candidates (93%), Schools (91%), Parents (86%) and Training Providers (85%)
- **National 4s**: Schools (99%), Colleges (97%), Young Potential Candidates (97%), Training Providers (96%) and Parents (91%)
- **National 5s**: Young Potential Candidates (99%), Colleges (99%), Schools (99%), Training Providers (96%), Parents (88%) and Employers (62%)
- **Advanced Highers**: Schools (100%), Colleges (99%), Training Providers (98%), Employers (94%) and Parents (92%)
- **HNCs/HNDs**: Colleges (100%), Schools (100%), Training Providers (100%), Employers (100%) and Parents (94%)
- **PDAs**: Colleges (98%), Training Providers (93%) and Schools (81%)

Figure 1 also indicates that levels of prompted awareness of each of the National Qualifications under consideration changed little between 2020 and 2021. Nonetheless, there were notable falls in relation to prompted awareness of:

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- HNCs/HNDs (falling from 97% to 92%)
- SVQs (falling from 93% to 87%)
- PDAs (falling from 65% to 56%)

Indeed, it should be stressed that the fall in prompted awareness of PDAs since 2019 has been particularly notable (falling from 67% to 56% in 2021).

Furthermore, it should be noted that, between 2020 and 2021, the declines apparent in respect of prompted awareness of the three qualifications noted above were primarily driven by the audiences noted below:

- **HNCs/HNDs**: Intermediate Potential Candidates, Mature Potential Candidates and, thereafter, Young Potential Candidates
- **SVQs**: Intermediate Potential Candidates, Parents and, thereafter, Young Potential Candidates
- **PDAs**: Young Potential Candidates and, thereafter, Intermediate Potential Candidates and Schools

In addition, Figure 1 indicates that, between 2020 and 2021, there was a notable increase in prompted awareness of Advanced Highers (rising from 85% to 91%), with this being primarily driven by Intermediate and Mature Potential Candidates.

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"Do you think you know enough about these qualifications?"

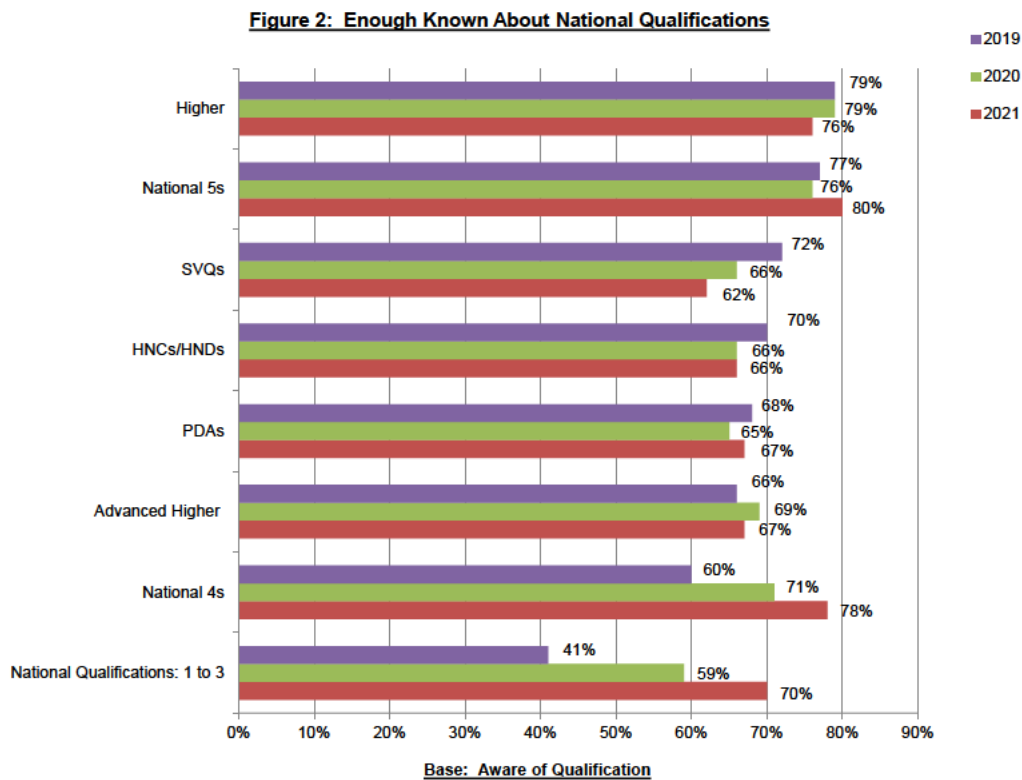**Figure 2: Enough Known About National Qualifications**

Figure 2 indicates that, in 2021, those who believed they *knew enough about* the qualifications of which they were aware were most likely to state this in relation to:

- National 5s (80%)
- National 4s (78%)
- Highers (76%)
- National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 (70%)

Thereafter, Figure 2 indicates levels of belief that enough is known about SVQs – amongst those aware of them (62%) – was lower than for all other qualifications (although only marginally in relation to some, such as PDAs and Advanced Highers – both 67%).

Further examination of the data presented in Figure 2 indicated that those **most likely** to believe that they *knew enough about* the qualifications of which they were aware are as noted below (where notable variances were apparent):

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- **National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3**: Young Potential Candidates (91%), Parents (78%), Intermediate Potential Candidates (74%) and Training Providers (71%)
- **National 5s**: Schools (95%), Colleges (91%) and Young Potential Candidates (89%)
- **Highers**: Schools (93%), Colleges (82%) and Parents (80%)
- **Advanced Highers**: Schools (88%) and Young Potential Candidates (82%)

It should also be noted that those **least likely** to believe that they knew enough about the qualifications of which they are aware are as noted below:

- **National 4s**: Mature Potential Candidates (65%) and Employers (53%)
- **SVQs**: Mature Potential Candidates (44%) and Schools (35%)

Figure 2 also indicates that the extent to which respondents believed that they *knew enough* about National Qualifications of which they were aware tended to change little between 2020 and 2021. However, there were clear patterns here in relation to changes between 2019 and 2021 for:

- **National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3**: rising from 41% to 70%
- **National 4s**: rising from 60% to 78%
- **SVQs**: falling from 72% to 62%

Further examination of the data here indicated that the changes noted above were primarily driven by the following audiences:

- **National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3**: Young Potential Candidates, Parents, Training Providers and, thereafter, Employers
- **National 4s**: Young Potential Candidates, Parents, Colleges and Schools

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- **SVQs**: Schools and, thereafter, Mature Potential Candidates and Employers

3.0   CREDIBILITY OF SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS

"How would you rate the credibility of these qualifications?"

Figure 3: Qualifications Credibility
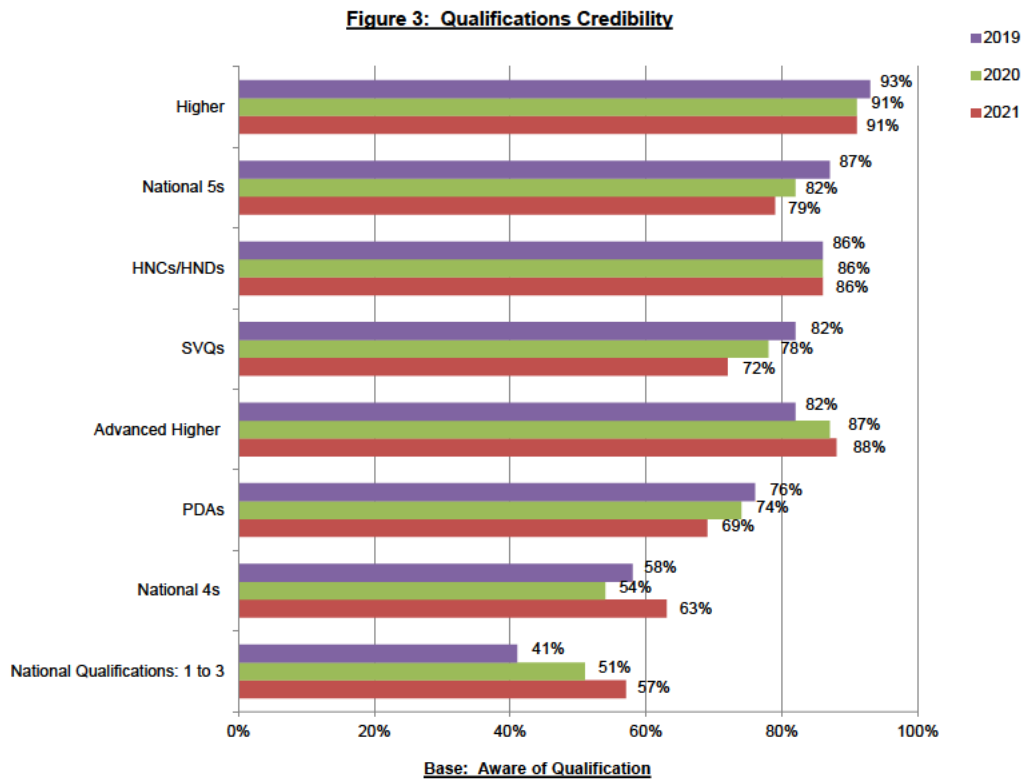

Base: Aware of Qualification

Figure 3 indicates that the qualifications of which respondents were aware in 2021 which were perceived as having the highest credibility were:

- Highers (91%)
- Advanced Highers (88%)
- HNCs/HNDs (86%)
- National 5s (79%)

Figure 3 also indicates that lowest levels of perceived high credibility were apparent in relation to:

- National 4s (63%)
- National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 (57%)

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It should also be noted that levels of perceived low credibility tended to be relatively minimal – typically ranging from 3% (for HNCs and HNDs) to 11% (for National 5s). However, in contrast, there were more notable beliefs that two sets of qualifications had low credibility, namely:

- National 4s (25%)
- National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 (21%)

The provision of *can't say* responses was low for most qualifications – ranging from 5% (for Highers) to 12% (for HNCs and HNDs). However, the qualifications for which there were the highest levels of *can't say* responses were:

- PDAs (22%)
- National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 (20%)
- SVQs (18%)

Further examination of the data indicated a number of interesting trends through time in terms of the perceived high credibility of a number of the National Qualifications under consideration, namely:
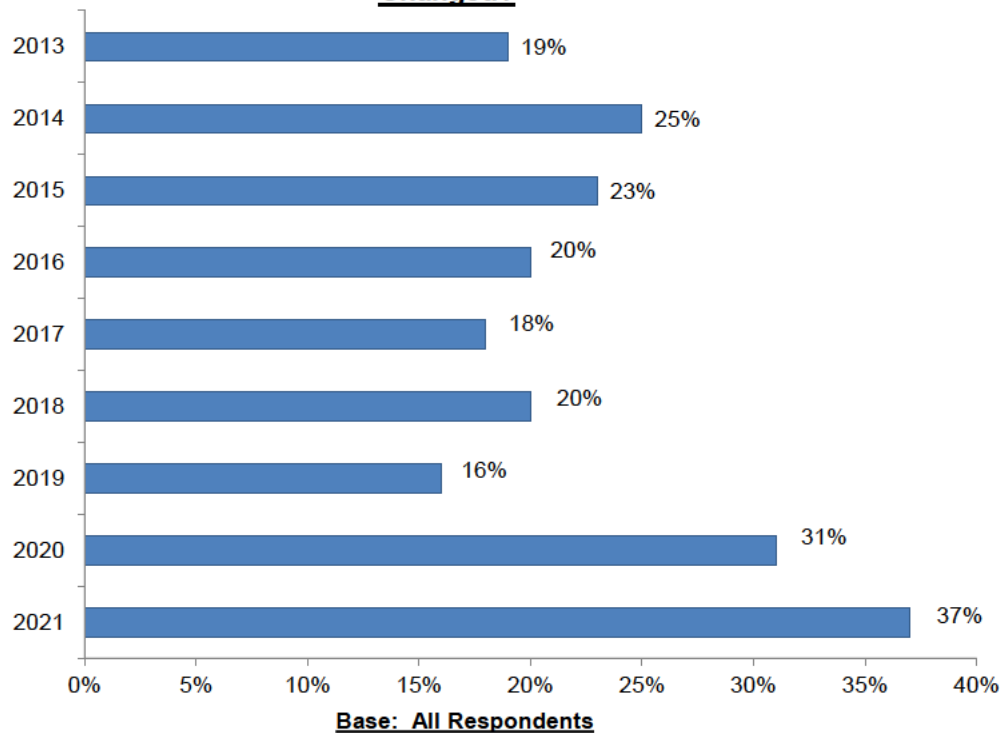
- Between 2019 and 2021, there was a notable decline in the perceived high credibility of *National 5s* (falling from 87% to 79%)
- During that time, there was also a notable decrease in the perceived high credibility of *SVQs* (falling from 82% to 72%)
- During that time there was also a notable decrease in the perceived high credibility of *PDAs* (falling from 76% to 69%)

In contrast, between 2020 and 2021, there was an increase in the perceived high credibility of National 4s (rising from 54% to 63%) which was primarily driven by Young Potential Candidates, Intermediate Potential Candidates, Parents and Training Providers, whilst there was even more notable increase in the perceived high credibility of National

Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 between 2019 and 2021 (rising from 41% to 57%).

"Have your overall views on the credibility of <u>all</u> of the qualifications you have heard of, taken together, changed over the last year?"

<u>Figure 4: Views on Qualification Credibility Changed?</u>

Year	Value
2013	19%
2014	25%
2015	23%
2016	20%
2017	18%
2018	20%
2019	16%
2020	31%
2021	37%

<u>Base: All Respondents</u>

From Figure 4, it can be seen that over a third of respondents in 2021 (37%) stated that their overall views on the credibility of **all** of the qualifications they had heard of – taken together – had changed over the previous year.

This figure is the highest found since 2013 (during which time it ranged from 16% to 31%) and, indeed, is higher than in 2020 (31%) and very significantly higher than the outcome found in 2019 (16%).

Further examination of the data presented in Figure 4 indicated that those most likely to state that their views on the credibility of **all** of the qualifications they had heard of – taken together – had changed over the previous year were:

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- Colleges (62%)
- Schools (56%)

It is also of interest to note that the significant increase in the extent to which views on qualification credibility across **all** qualifications had changed over the previous year was most notably driven by Colleges and Schools and, thereafter, Intermediate Potential Candidates, Mature Potential Candidates and Employers.

"Have your views on the overall credibility of these qualifications become more or less positive?"

Figure 5: Ways in Which Views On Qualification Credibility Have Changed?
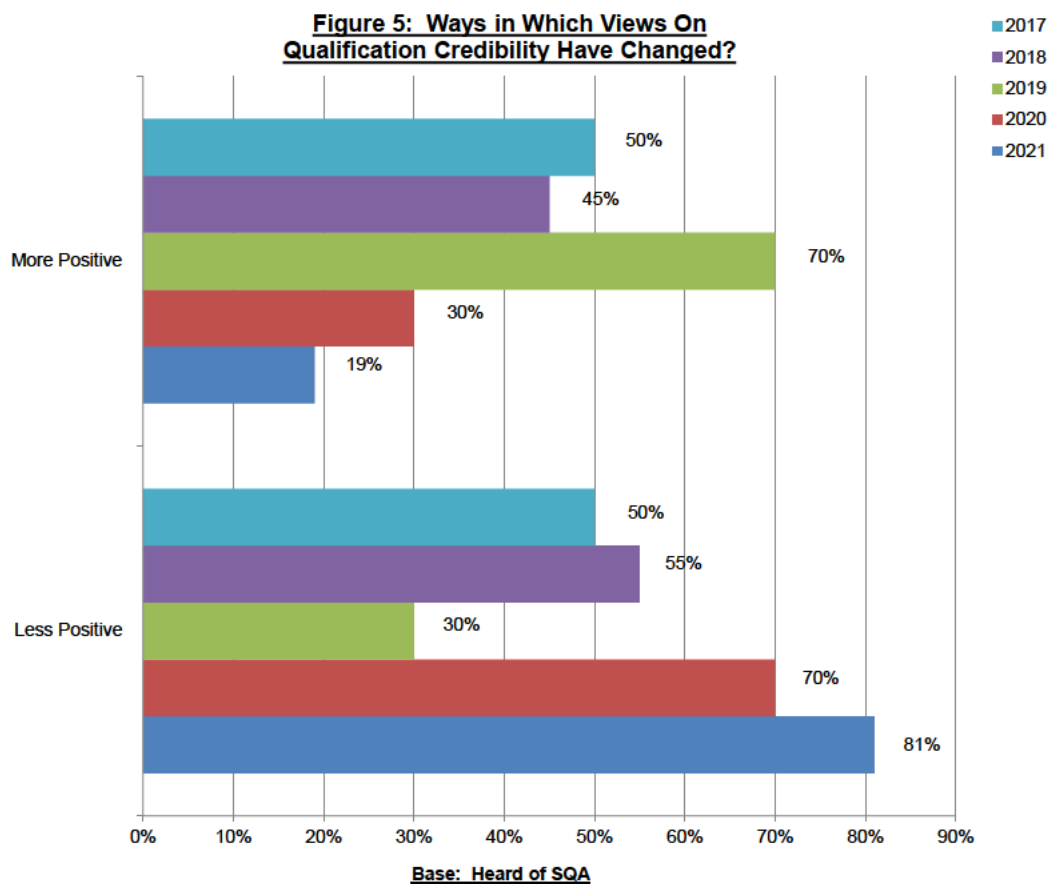
From Figure 5, it can be seen, in 2021 – amongst those whose views on the credibility of Scottish qualifications had changed over the previous year – 1 in 5 (19%) stated that their views had become **more positive**. This outcome continues to show a notable downward trend which has been apparent since 2019, at which time over two thirds of

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those whose views on the credibility of Scottish qualifications had changed over the previous year (70%) stated that their views had become **more positive**.

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here is insufficient to provide a statistically robust profile of outcomes by respondent type.

It should also be noted that the subsample of respondents whose views about the credibility of Scottish qualifications had become **more positive** is insufficient to allow the outcomes to a follow-up question – *"In what ways have your views about the overall credibility of these qualifications become more positive?"* – to be presented.

Figure 5 also indicates that 4 out of 5 respondents in 2021 (81%) – whose views on the credibility of Scottish qualifications had changed over the previous year – stated that their views had become **less positive**. This outcome also highlights a significant increase which has been apparent in this regard since 2019, at which time the percentage noting this was less than a third (30%).

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"In what ways have your views on the overall credibility of these qualifications become less positive?"

**Figure 6: Ways in Which Views Have Become Less Positive - 2021
(Unprompted)**
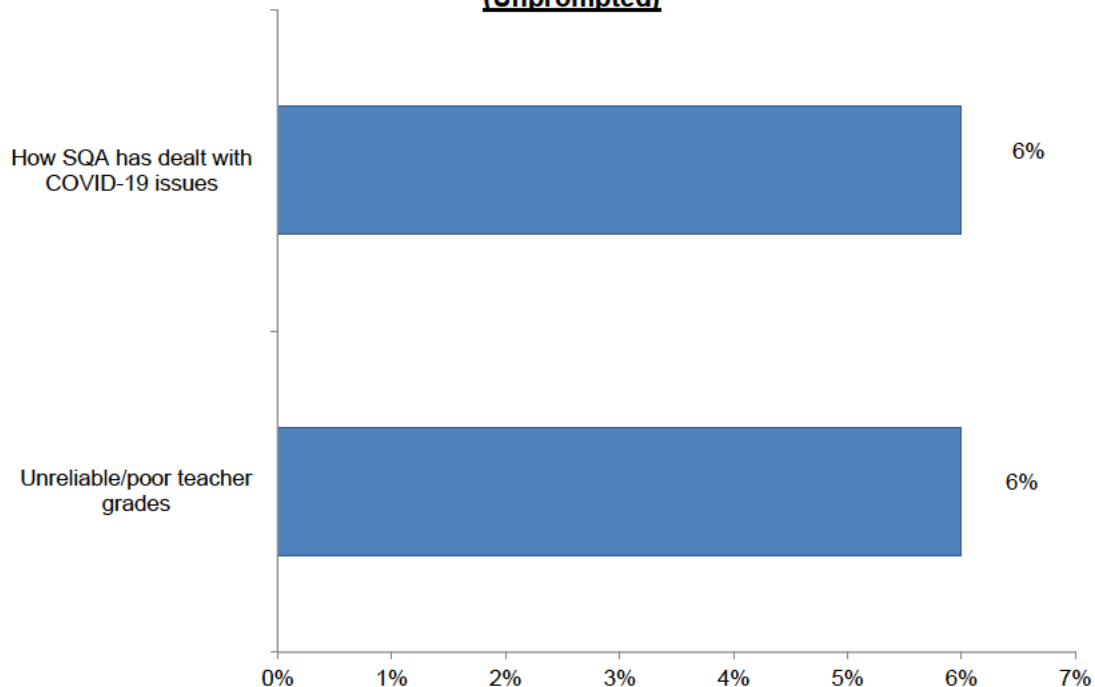
Base: Views Less Positive

From Figure 6, it can be seen that only two notable responses were provided when respondents were asked – on an unprompted basis – in what ways their views had become less positive:

- How SQA has dealt with COVID-19 issues (6%)
- Unreliable and/or poor teacher grades (6%)

It should be stressed that there was a long tail of other responses and that this was such that it was not possible to draw out any key themes from them.

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4.0 DEVELOPING THE YOUNG WORKFORCE PROFILE

Questions about Developing the Young Workforce were not asked during the Scottish Stakeholder Tracking Survey undertaken in 2020 and were only asked of those representing Schools, Colleges and Training Providers in 2021, having been asked of **all** audiences in both 2018 and 2019. Accordingly, comparisons cannot be drawn between the data collected in 2021 (having been asked of all audiences in both 2018 and 2019).

"Have you heard of Developing the Young Workforce – also known as DYW?"

Figure 7: Heard of Developing the Young Workforce

No
18%

Yes
82%
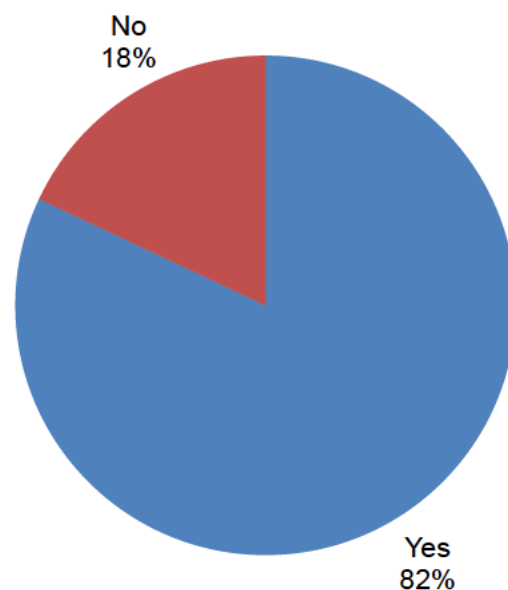
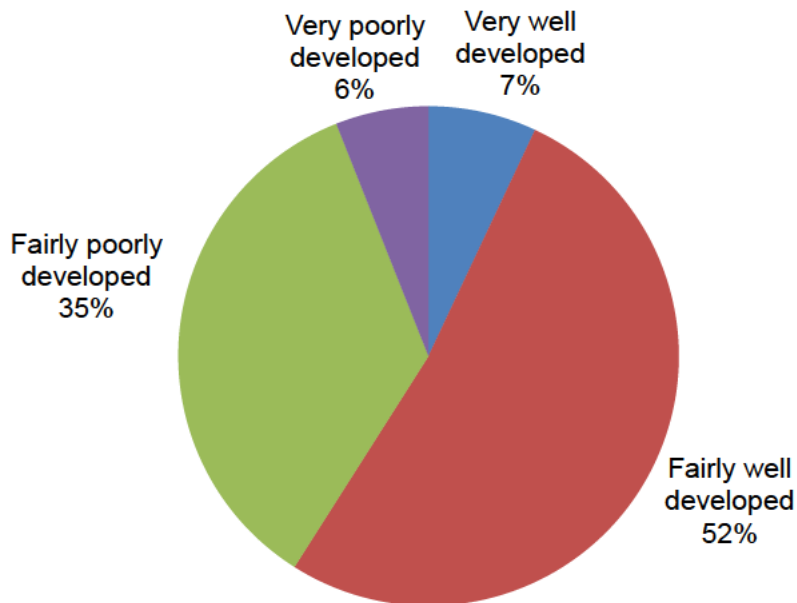**Base: Colleges, Schools & Training Providers**

From Figure 7, it can be seen that over 4 out of 5 Schools, Colleges and Training Providers interviewed in 2021 (82%) collectively stated that they were aware of DYW, with this outcome being highest amongst Schools and Colleges, i.e.:

- Schools (87%)

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- Colleges (85%)
- Training Providers (73%)

"How would you describe your level of knowledge and understanding of DYW?"

Figure 8: Knowledge & Understanding of DYW


Base: Aware of DYW

From Figure 8, it can be seen that almost 3 out of 5 of those interviewed in Schools, Colleges and Training Providers in 2021 (59%) – who were aware of DYW – believed that they had a **well-developed** knowledge and understanding of it, although relatively few (only 7%) specifically stated that they had a **very well-developed** knowledge and understanding of DYW.

Further examination of the data indicates that Schools were most likely to believe that they had a **well-developed** knowledge and understanding of DYW, i.e.:

- Schools (68%)
- Training Providers (57%)
- Colleges (52%)

"How relevant would you say DYW is to your centre?"

Figure 9: Perceived Relevance of DYW for Your Centre
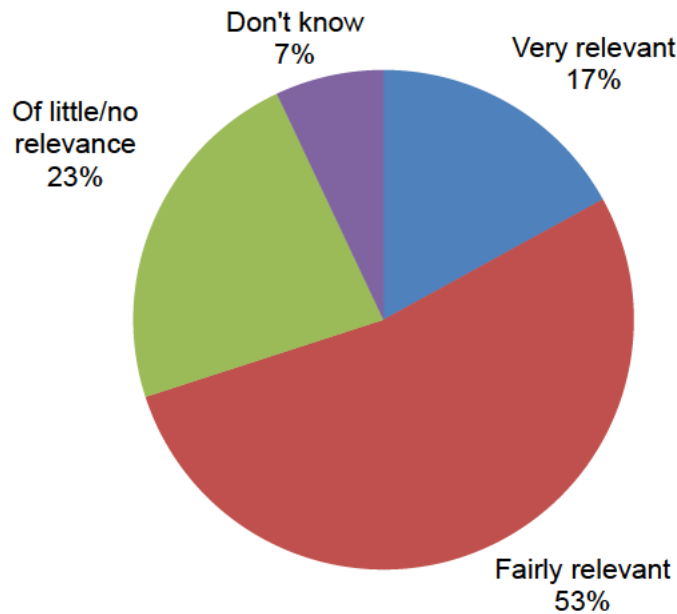
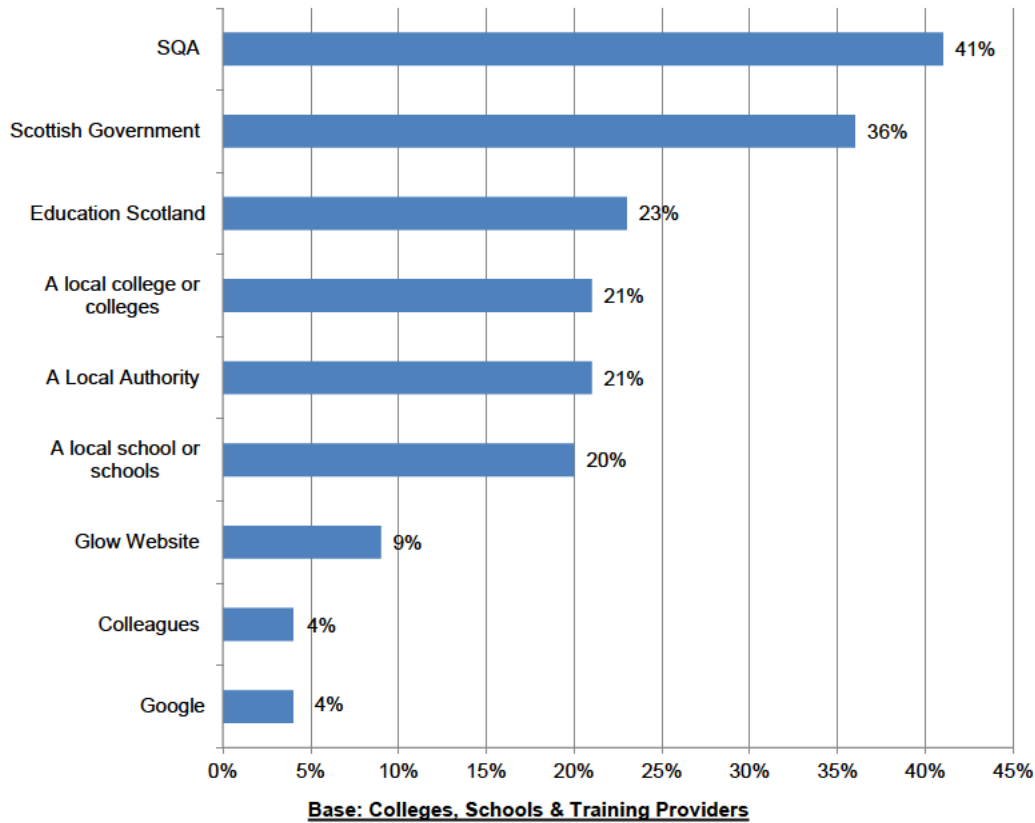**Base: Colleges, Schools & Training Providers**

All respondents were read out the following statement about DYW – *"Developing the Young Workforce is a Scottish Government initiative to reduce youth unemployment by creating a world-class vocational education system".* On the basis of hearing this statement – and/or their previous knowledge of DYW – Figure 9 indicates that over two thirds of those in Schools, Colleges and Training Providers who were interviewed in 2021 (70%) collectively believed that DYW was **relevant** to their centre, with 1 in 6 (17%) respondents specifically stating that they believed it was **very relevant** to their centre.

Figure 6 also indicates that approaching a quarter of respondents here (23%) believed DYW to be of **little or no relevance** to their centre.

Further examination of the data indicated that those interviewed in Colleges and Schools were most likely to believe DYW to be relevant to their centre (76% and 72% respectively compared to 61% for Training Providers).

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"If you wanted to find out more about DYW, where would you go to source this information?"

**Figure 10: Potential Sources of Information
to Find Out More About DYW**

Base: Colleges, Schools & Training Providers

When those interviewed in Schools, Colleges and Training Providers were asked if they wanted to find out more about DYW, where they would go to source this information, Figure 10 indicates that the **principal sources** cited were SQA (41%) and the Scottish Government (36%).

Thereafter, **secondary mention** was made of sourcing such information through:

- Education Scotland (23%)
- A local college or colleges (21%)
- A Local Authority (21%)
- A local school or schools (20%)

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Further examination of the data indicated that the following future sources of information about DYW were cited by the audiences indicated:

- **SQA:** Colleges and Training Providers (46% and 45% respectively)
- **The Scottish Government:** Colleges (45%)
- **Education Scotland:** Schools and Colleges (34% and 30% respectively)
- **A Local Authority:** Schools (26%)
- **A local school or schools:** Schools (32%)
- **A local college or colleges:** Colleges (34%)
- **Glow website:** Training Providers and Schools (13% and 12% respectively)
- **GTCS's Teaching Scotland magazine:** Schools (10%)

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5.0   SQA PROFILE

"Have you heard of the Scottish Qualifications Authority – also known as the SQA?"

Figure 11: SQA Awareness
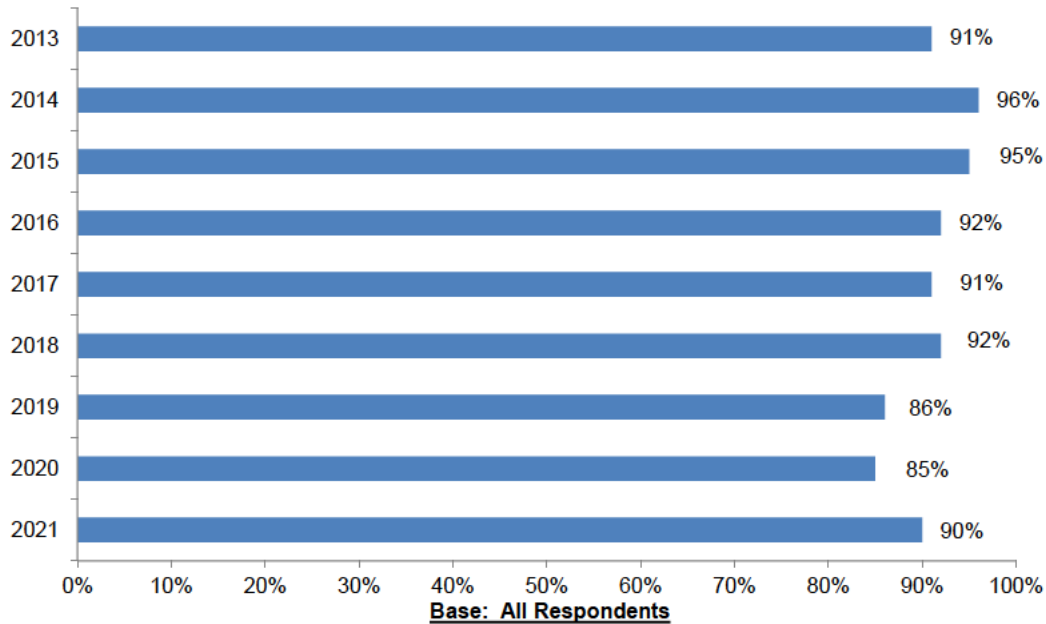
From Figure 11, it can be seen that 9 out of 10 respondents in 2021 (90%) stated that they had heard of the Scottish Qualifications Authority. This outcome reverses a downward trend which had been apparent in this regard between 2018 and 2020 (from 92% to 85%).

Further examination of the data indicated that awareness of SQA was high across all audiences with one exception, namely Mature Potential Candidates (63% of whom stated that they were aware of SQA compared to between 80% and 100% for the remaining audiences). Indeed, it should be stressed that all or virtually all respondents in five audiences stated that they had heard of SQA (ranging from 96% for Young Potential Candidates to 100% for Colleges, Schools, Employers and Training Providers.

"Do you think you know enough about the SQA?"

Figure 12: Enough Known About the SQA?
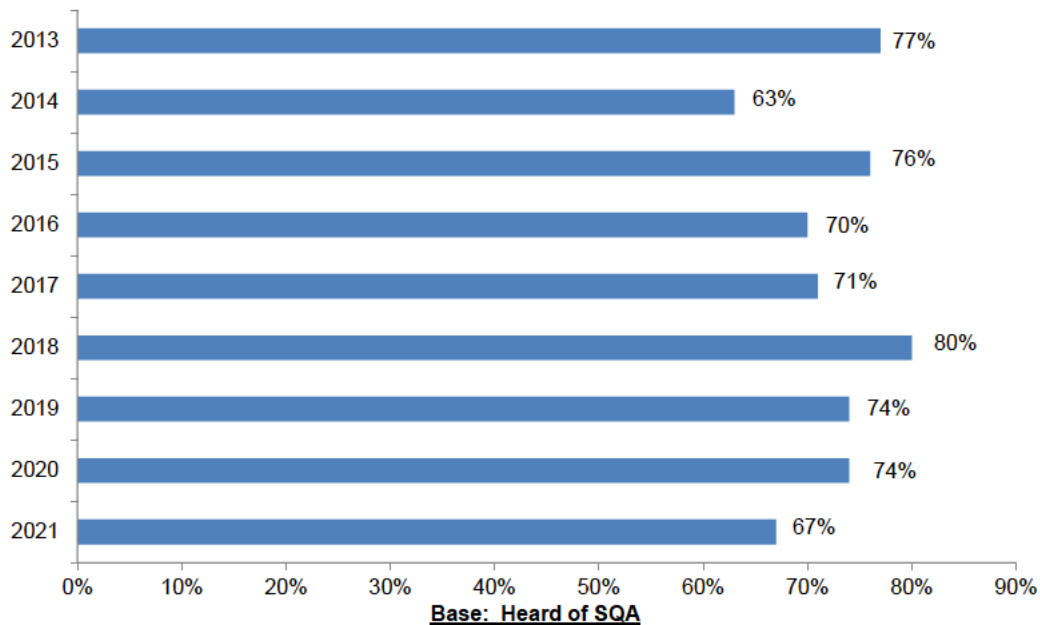

Base: Heard of SQA

Figure 12 indicates that two thirds of respondents in 2021 – who were aware of SQA (67%) – believed that they *knew enough about* the Authority. This outcome is notably lower than that found in both 2019 and 2020 (both 74%) and very notably lower than the outcome found in 2018 (80%). Indeed, it is one of the lowest figures found since 2013, with the previous lowest figure being found in 2014 (63%).

Further examination of the data presented in Figure 12 indicated that, in 2021, perceptions that *enough was known about SQA* were highest amongst Schools, Colleges and Training Providers and lowest amongst Employers, i.e.:

- Colleges (93%)
- Schools (93%)
- Training Providers (91%)
- Young Potential Candidates (69%)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (53%)
- Parents (52%)
- Mature Potential Candidates (47%)
- Employers (30%)

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"How would you rate the current credibility of the SQA?"

Figure 13: SQA Credibility

Base: Heard of SQA
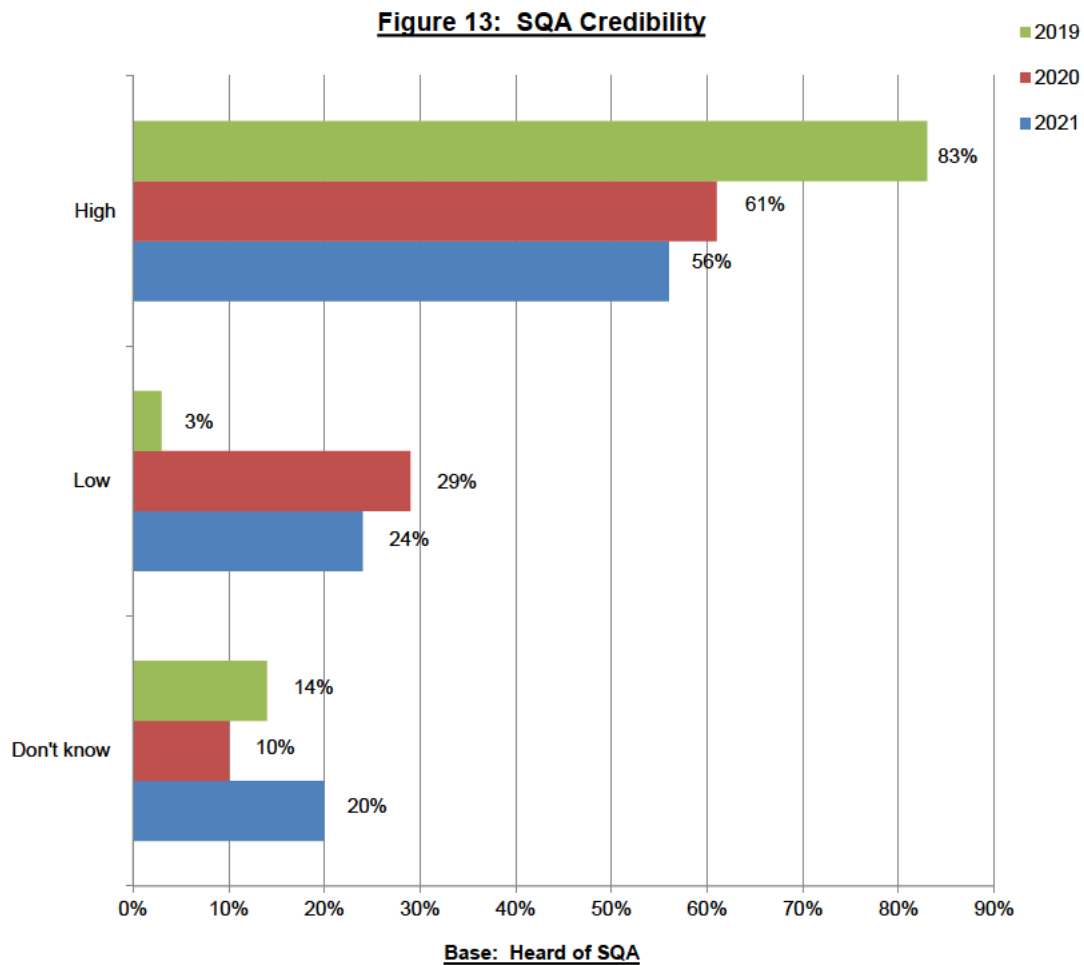
From Figure 13, it can be seen that less than 3 out of 5 respondents aware of SQA in 2021 (56%) believed the Authority to have high credibility. This outcome continues a notable downward trend in this regard which has been apparent since 2019 (at which time 83% of respondents aware of SQA believed the Authority to have high credibility).

It is also of interest to note from Figure 13 that, between 2020 and 2021, there was also a notable fall in perceptions of low credibility of SQA amongst those aware of the Authority (falling from 29% to 24%) and that, during that time, there was a notable increase in the provision of *can't say* responses here (rising from 10% to 20%). Accordingly, the falls in the perceived high **and** low credibility of SQA between 2020 and 2021 were a function of increasing *can't say* responses during that time.

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Further examination of the data presented in Figure 13 indicated that perceptions of high SQA credibility in 2021 were highest amongst Training Providers and, thereafter, Parents and Young Potential Candidates and lowest amongst Employers, i.e.:

- Training Providers (82%)
- Parents (68%)
- Young Potential Candidates (63%)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (56%)
- Mature Potential Candidates (54%)
- Schools (47%)
- Colleges (46%)
- Employers (31%)

Further examination of the data here indicated that the most notable levels of perceived low credibility of SQA were found amongst Colleges and Schools, with lowest levels of perceived low credibility being found amongst the public audiences, i.e.:

- Colleges (53%)
- Schools (51%)
- Employers (18%)
- Training Providers (17%)
- Young Potential Candidates (15%)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (13%)
- Mature Potential Candidates (12%)
- Parents (6%)

Finally, with reference to perceived credibility of SQA amongst those aware of the Authority, *can't say* responses were highest amongst Employers and lowest amongst Schools, Colleges and Training Providers, i.e.:

- Employers (51%)

- Mature Potential Candidates (33%)

- Intermediate Potential Candidates (30%)

- Parents (26%)

- Young Potential Candidates (22%)

- Schools (3%)

- Colleges (1%)

- Training Providers (1%)

"Why did you provide this rating?"

Figure 14: Reason for Providing High Rating of SQA Credibility (Unprompted) - 2021
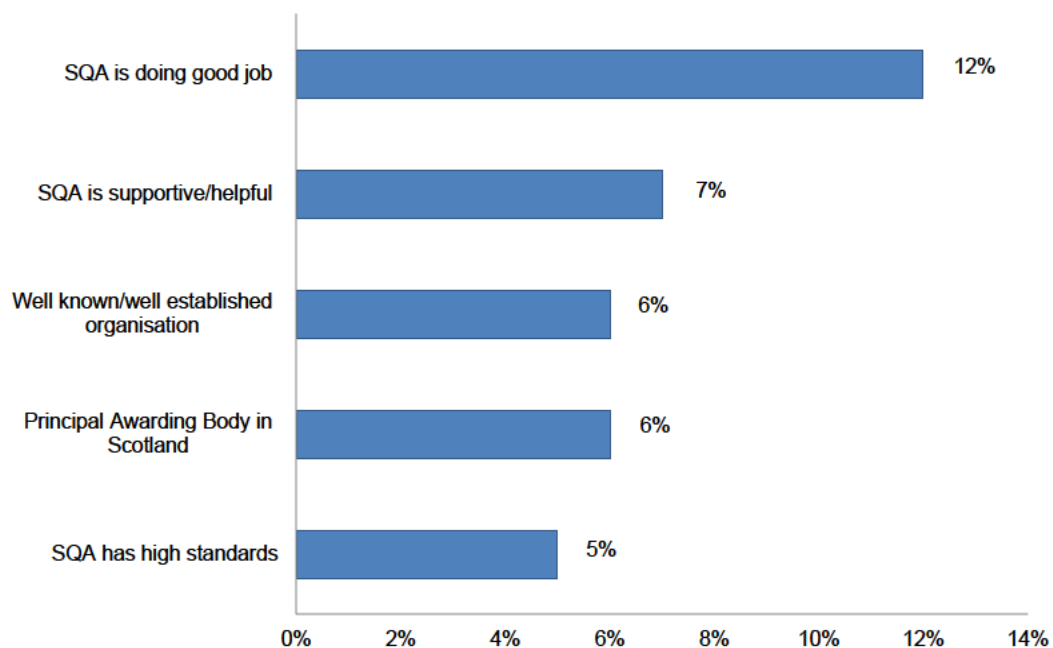
Base: Very High/Fairly High in Figure 13

Figure 14 indicates that when those stating their belief that SQA has high credibility were asked – on an unprompted basis – why they believed this to be the case, their **primary responses** focused around *SQA doing a good job* (12%).

Thereafter, **secondary unprompted mention** was made here of:

- SQA being supportive and/or helpful (7%)
- SQA being a well-known and well-established organisation (6%)
- SQA being the principal awarding body in Scotland (6%)
- SQA having high standards (5%)

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown of responses on the basis of respondent type. However, on an **indicative basis**, the following outcomes are worthy of note:

- **SQA doing a good job**: highest amongst Employers (33%)
- **SQA being supportive/helpful**: Schools, Colleges and Training Providers (16%, 16% and 15% respectively)
- **SQA being a well-known/well-established organisation**: Colleges, Schools, Training Providers and Employers (18%, 12%, 12% and 10% respectively)
- **SQA being the principal awarding body in Scotland**: Colleges, Training Providers, Schools and Employers (16%, 15%, 12% and 12% respectively)
- **SQA having high standards**: Intermediate Potential Candidates, Mature Potential Candidates and Young Potential Candidates (12%, 11% and 9% respectively)

"Why did you provide this rating?"

**Figure 15: Reason for Providing Low Rating of SQA Credibility
(Unprompted) - Highly Indicative (2021)**
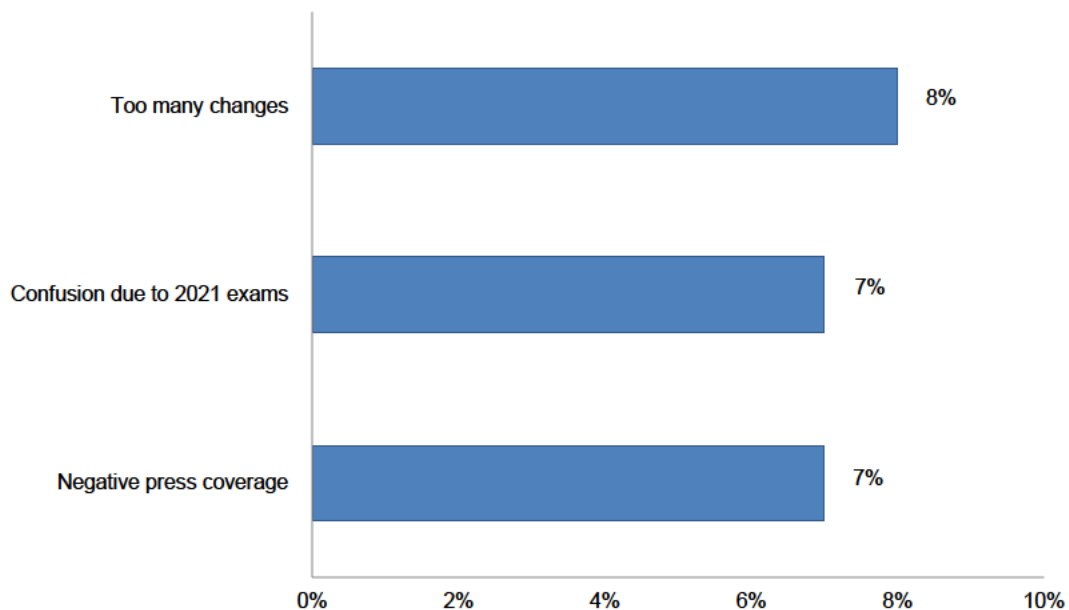
Base: Very Low/Fairly Low in Figure 13

The outcomes presented in Figure 15 are highly indicative in nature due to the small subsample of respondents who believed SQA to have low credibility. Nonetheless, it is worthy of note that the principal responses here focused around:

- There being too many changes in the last year (8%)
- Confusion around the 2021 exams (7%)
- Negative press coverage (7%)

It should also be noted that, due to the small subsample here, it is not appropriate to provide a breakdown of findings on the basis of respondent type.

A number of questions were asked about contact with SQA in 2021. These questions were also asked in 2018 and 2019 but not in 2020. Accordingly, the data presented here in 2021 has been compared with 2018 and 2019.

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"Have you contacted SQA?"

Figure 16: Contacted SQA
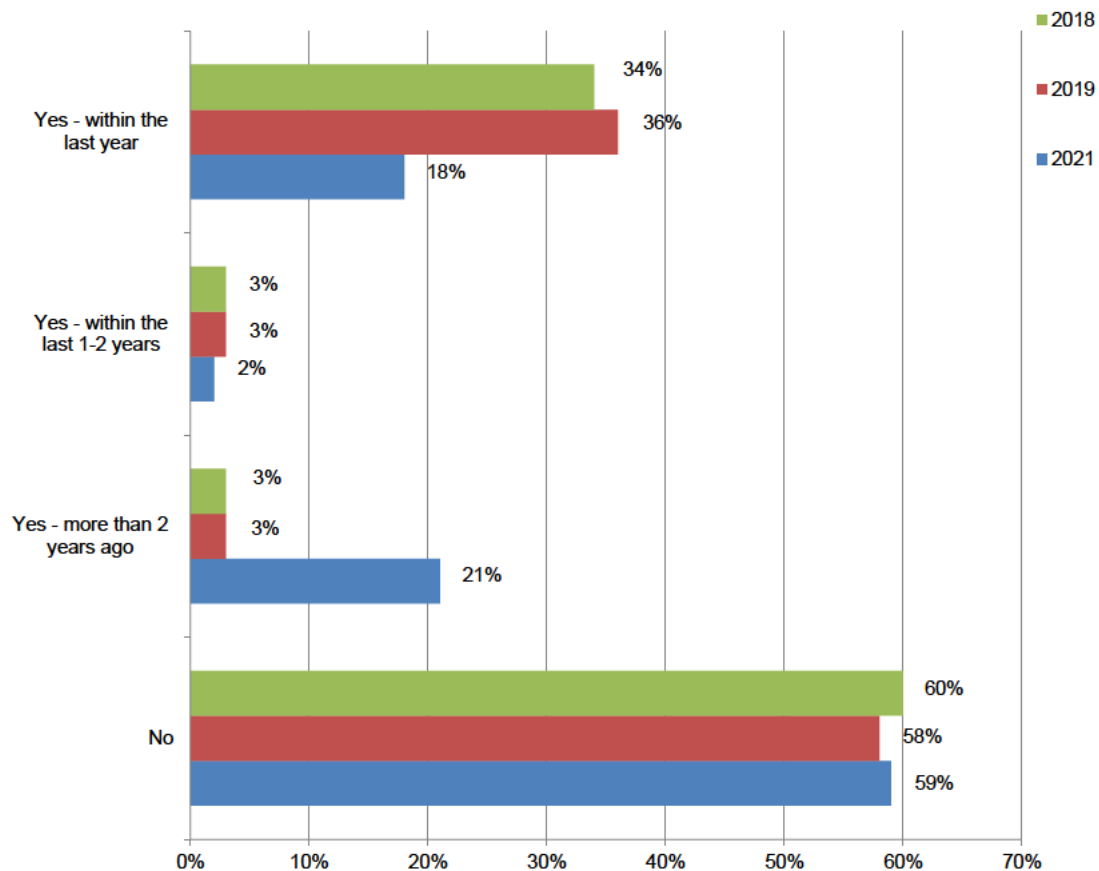
Base: All Respondents

From Figure 16, it can be seen that, overall, the percentage of respondents who had contacted SQA was similar between 2018 and 2021 (ranging from 40% to 42%). However, in 2021, there was a significant fall in the percentage of respondents stating that they had contacted SQA *within the last year* (i.e. 34% and 36% respectively in 2018 and 2019 compared to 18% in 2021).

In contrast, between 2018 and 2021, there was a very significant increase in respondents stating that they had contacted SQA *more than two years ago* (i.e. from 3% in both 2018 and 2019 to 21% in 2021).

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It is also of interest to note that highest levels of contact with SQA were noted by those interviewed in Training Providers, Colleges and Schools and that this outcome was significantly higher than for any of the other audiences, i.e.:

- Training Providers (94%)
- Colleges (86%)
- Schools (79%)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (13%)
- Young Potential Candidates (12%)
- Mature Potential Candidates (10%)
- Employers (10%)
- Parents (10%)

Further examination of the data indicated that those most likely to have contacted SQA *within the last year* were those in Training Providers and, thereafter, those in Schools and Colleges, with Employers being least likely to have contacted SQA *within the last year*, i.e.:

- Training Providers (45%)
- Schools (29%)
- Colleges (27%)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (11%)
- Mature Potential Candidates (9%)
- Young Potential Candidates (8%)
- Parents (6%)
- Employers (1%)

*"Overall, how would you rate the contact or contacts you made with SQA on a scale from 1 to 10, where '1' is **very poor** and '10' is **very good**?"*

Figure 17: Rating of Contact(s) With SQA
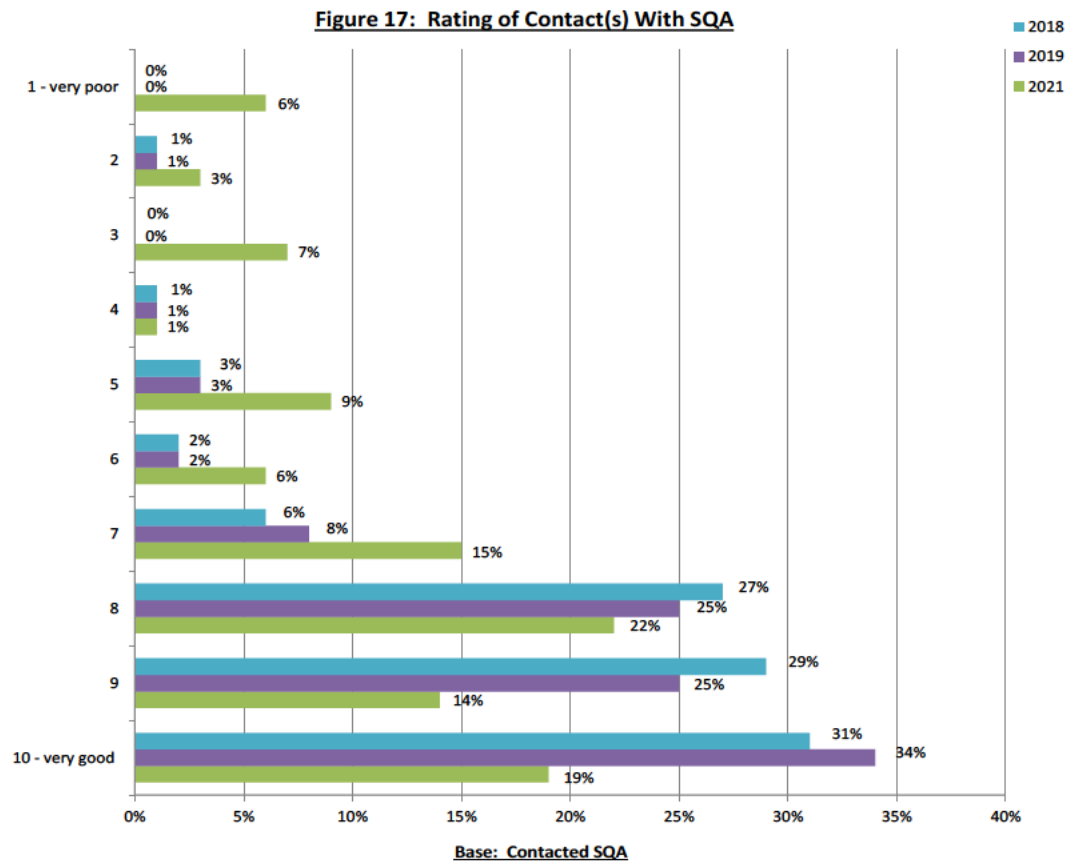
When those who had contacted SQA were asked to rate their contact or contacts on a scale from 1 to 10 (where '1' was **very poor** and '10' was **very good**), an average score of 7.0 out of a possible 10 was noted. This average figure was highest amongst Employers, Training Providers and Young Potential Candidates and lowest amongst Parents, Schools and Colleges, i.e.:

- Employers (8.3 out of a possible 10)
- Training Providers (7.5)
- Young Potential Candidates (7.5)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (7.4)
- Mature Potential Candidates (7.1)
- Parents (6.9)
- Schools (6.9)
- Colleges (6.5)

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It is of interest to note that the average score found in 2019 was 8.6 out of a possible 10 (compared to 7.0 out of a possible 10 in 2021). In addition, between 2019 and 2021, there was a decrease in the average scores provided by all audiences, with this being most notable amongst Parents, Schools and Colleges and least apparent amongst Employers, i.e.:

- Parents (falling from 9.5 to 6.9 out of a possible 10)
- Schools (falling from 8.7 to 6.9)
- Colleges (falling from 8.1 to 6.5)
- Employers (falling from 8.5 to 8.3)

"Why did you choose this rating number?"

Figure 18: Reason for Providing Good Rating of Contact With SQA (Unprompted) - 2021
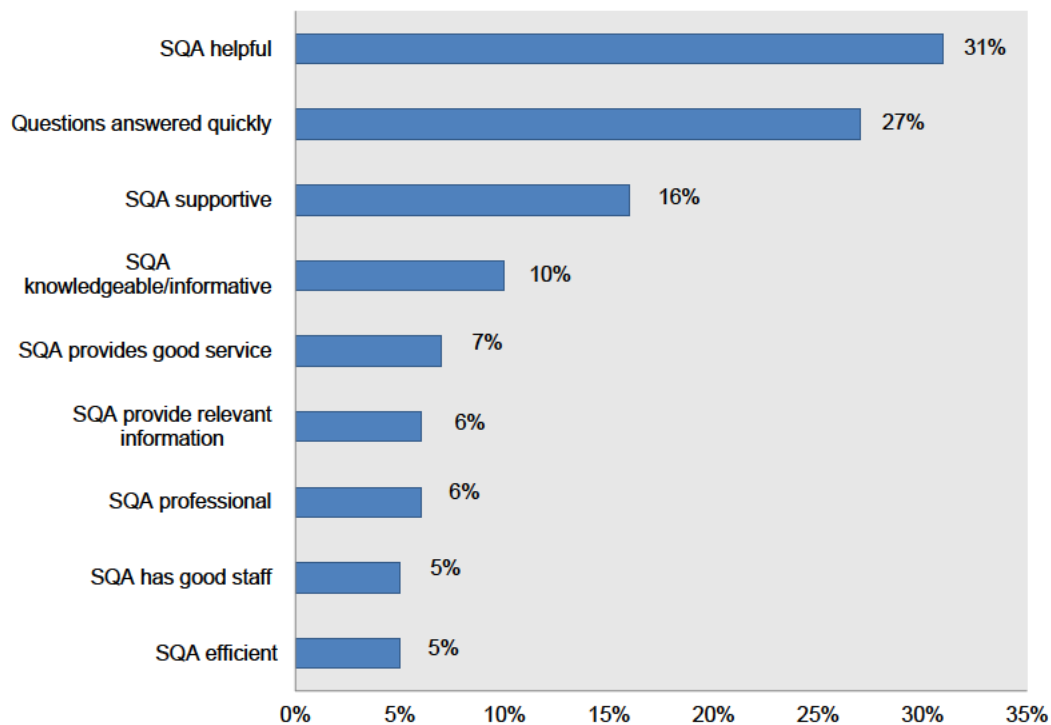
Base: Professional Audiences Only - Rating 6 to 10 in Figure 17

From Figure 18, it can be seen that, amongst those in the professional audiences who provided a rating of 6 to 10 in terms of their contacts with SQA were asked – on an unprompted basis – why they provided this positive rating, the **principal responses** were those of:

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- SQA being helpful (31%)
- Questions being answered quickly (27%)

Thereafter, **secondary mention** was made of a number of other factors, including:

- SQA being supportive (16%)
- SQA being knowledgeable and/or informative (10%)

The subsample of respondents here is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown of these responses on the basis of professional audience types.

"Have you had contact from SQA?"

Figure 19: Contact From SQA

Base: All Respondents

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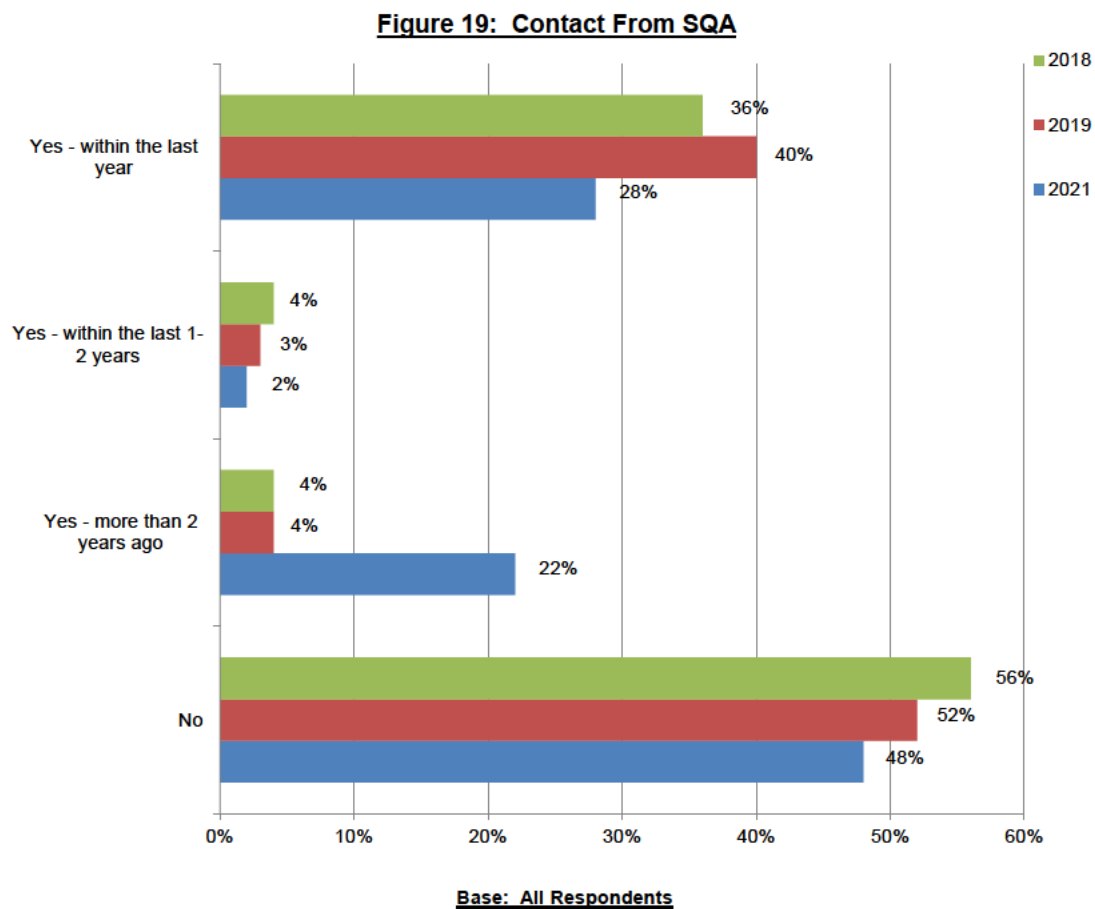
From Figure 19, it can be seen that, overall, just over half of respondents (52%) stated that they had had contact from SQA. This figure is only marginally higher than that found in 2019 (47%) but is notably higher than that found in 2018 (44%).

It is of interest to note from Figure 19 that the outcome here for those who had contact from the Authority *within the last year* is significantly lower than those found in both 2018 and 2019 (28% compared to 36% and 40% respectively).

In contrast, during that time, there was a notable increase in those stating that they had contact from the Authority *more than two years ago* (from 4% in both 2018 and 2019 to 22% in 2021).

Further examination of the data here indicated that levels of contact from SQA are substantially higher amongst Training Providers, Schools and Colleges than they are amongst the remaining audiences, i.e.:

- Training Providers (94%)
- Schools (84%)
- Colleges (82%)
- Young Potential Candidates (45%)
- Parents (32%)
- Intermediate Potential Candidates (30%)
- Mature Potential Candidates (26%)
- Employers (10%)

It is also of interest to note that highest levels of contact from SQA *within the last year* were found amongst Training Providers and were very significantly lowest amongst Employers, i.e.:

- Training Providers (46%)
- Young Potential Candidates (38%)
- Schools (35%)

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- Colleges (32%)

- Parents (29%)

- Intermediate Potential Candidates (23%)

- Mature Potential Candidates (21%)

- Employers (1%)

*"Overall, how would you rate the contact or contacts you had from SQA on a scale from 1 to 10, where '1' is **very poor** and '10' is **very good**?"*

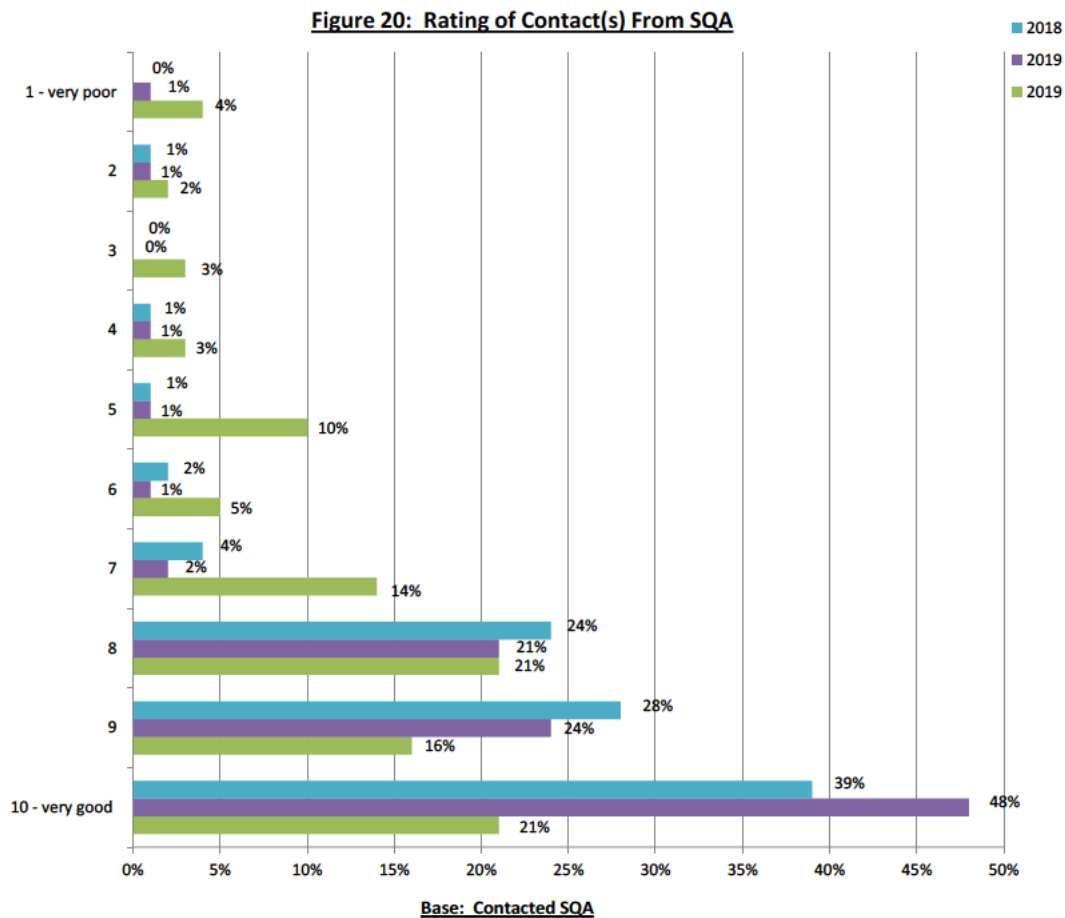Figure 20: Rating of Contact(s) From SQA

Figure 20 provides a very largely positive profile of contacts from SQA, with an average score of 7.4 out of a possible 10 being noted. This average score was highest amongst Employers, Young Potential Candidates and Parents and lowest amongst Colleges and Schools, i.e.:

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- Employers (8.5)

- Young Potential Candidates (8.4)

- Parents (8.3)

- Intermediate Potential Candidates (7.8)

- Training Providers (7.8)

- Mature Potential Candidates (7.6)

- Colleges (6.8)

- Schools (6.3)

It is of interest to note that the average score in 2019 was 9.0 out of a possible 10 (compared to 7.4 in 2021). Indeed, between 2019 and 2021, there was a notable decrease in the average scores provided by each of the eight audiences, although this was least likely to be the case amongst Employers, i.e.:

- Young Potential Candidates (falling from 9.4 to 8.4 out of a possible 10)

- Intermediate Potential Candidates (falling from 9.3 to 7.8)

- Mature Potential Candidates (falling from 9.4 to 7.6)

- Parents (falling from 9.6 to 8.3)

- Colleges (falling from 8.7 to 6.8)

- Schools (falling from 8.7 to 6.3)

- Employers (falling from 8.7 to 8.5)

- Training Providers (falling from 8.9 to 7.8)

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"Why did you choose this rating number?"

**Figure 21: Reasons for Choosing High Rating of Contacts from SQA
(Unprompted) - 2021**
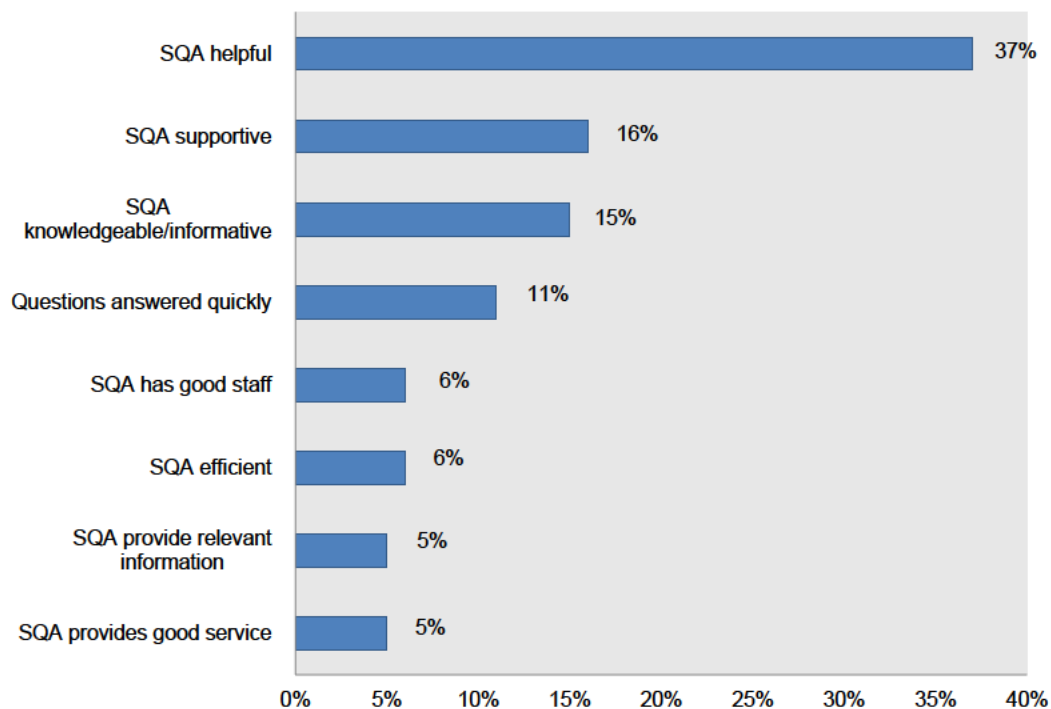
**Base: Professional Audiences Only - Rating 6 to 10 in Figure 20**

When those in the professional audiences were asked – on an unprompted basis – why they provided a rating of 6 to 10 (i.e. a positive rating), Figure 21 indicates that the **principal response** was that of *SQA being helpful* (37%).

Thereafter, **secondary mention** was made in this regard of choosing a high rating of contacts from SQA due to:

- SQA being supportive (16%)
- SQA being knowledgeable and/or informative (15%)
- Questions being answered quickly by SQA (11%)

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown to be provided on the basis of professional audience type.

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"How strongly would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about SQA?"

Figure 22: SQA Profile - Agree/Agree + Strongly Agree
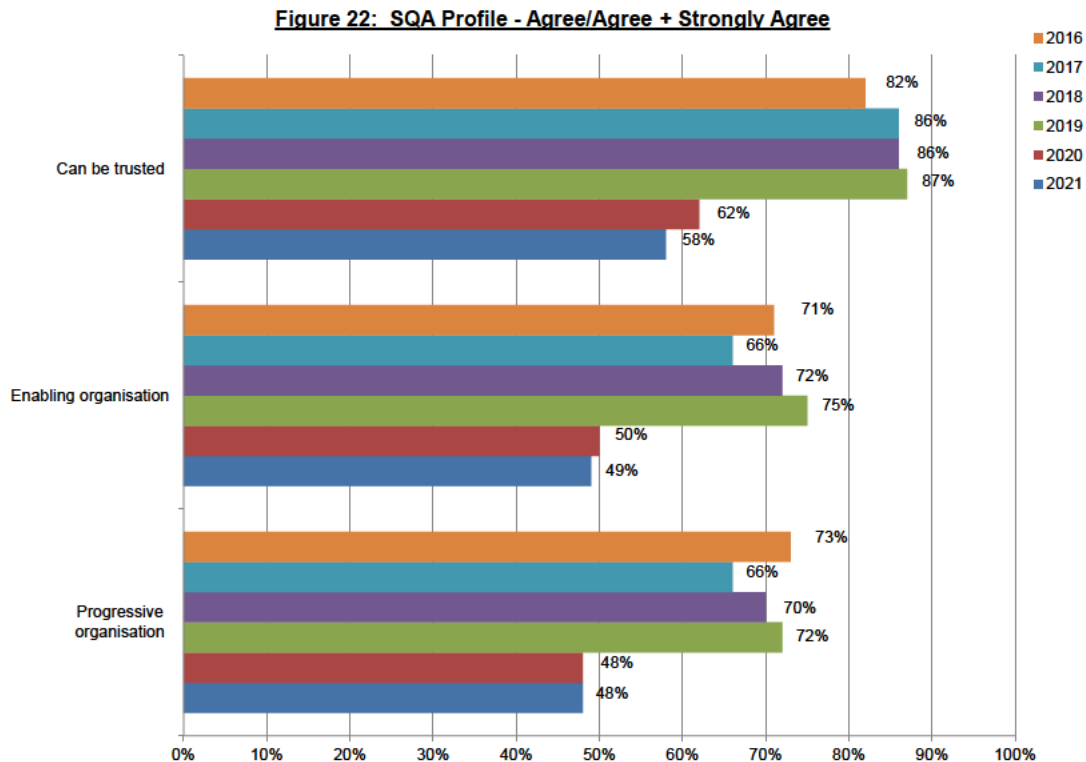
Base: All Respondents

When respondents in 2021 were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with three statements about SQA, Figure 22 indicates that:
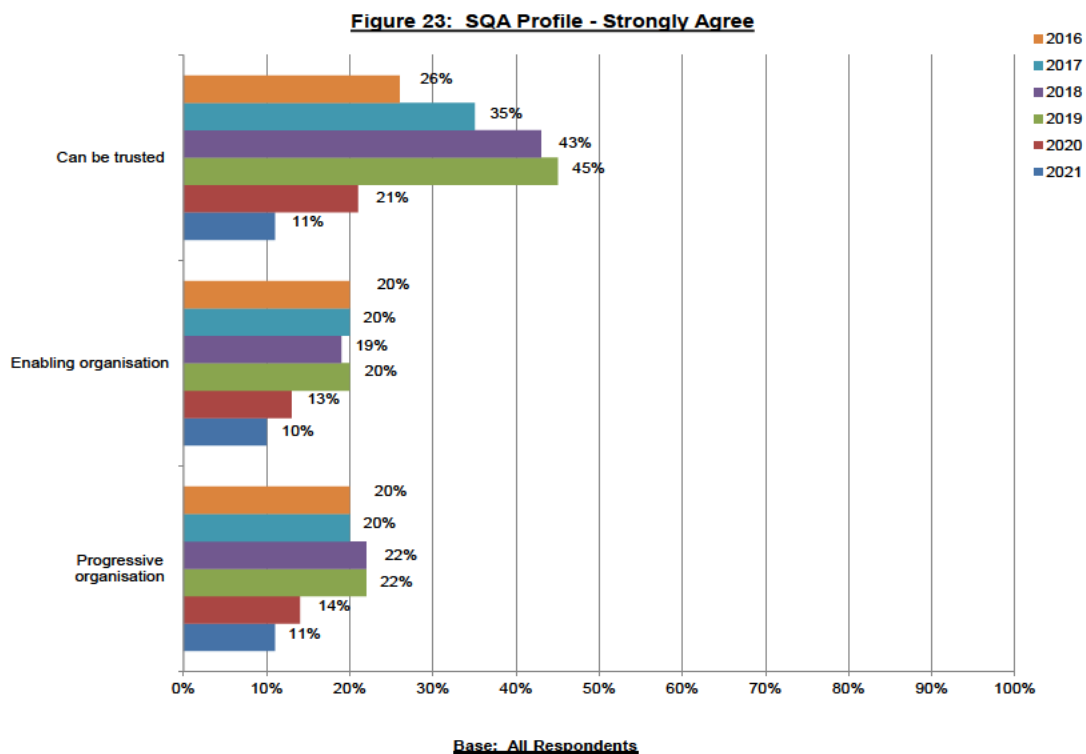
- Almost 3 out of 5 respondents believed that SQA can be trusted (58%)
- Almost exactly half of respondents believed that SQA enables organisations to carry out their role more effectively (49%)
- Nearly half of respondents agreed that SQA is a progressive organisation (48%)

Further examination of the data for 2021 here indicated that **agreement** with each of these statements was highest amongst the audiences noted below:

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- **SQA is a progressive organisation**: Parents (61%), Young Potential Candidates (60%) and Intermediate Potential Candidates (57%)

- **SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively**: Parents (61%) Training Providers (61%), Young Potential Candidates (56%) and Intermediate Potential Candidates (56%)

- **SQA can be trusted**: Young Potential Candidates (70%) and Parents (87%)

Further examination of the data for 2021 also indicated here that **disagreement** was highest amongst the audiences noted below:

- **SQA is a progressive organisation**: Schools (57%), Colleges (40%) and, thereafter, Training Providers (20%)

- **SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively**: Schools (59%) and, thereafter, Colleges (36%) and Training Providers (24%)

- **SQA can be trusted**: Schools (55%) and, thereafter, Colleges (25%)

Figure 23: SQA Profile - Strongly Agree

Legend: 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021

Can be trusted: 26%, 35%, 43%, 45%, 21%, 11%

Enabling organisation: 20%, 20%, 19%, 20%, 13%, 10%

Progressive organisation: 20%, 20%, 22%, 22%, 14%, 11%

Base: All Respondents

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From Figure 23, it can be seen that around 1 in 10 respondents in 2021 (11%) **strongly agreed** with the statement that SQA *can be trusted.* This figure is significantly lower than that found in 2020 (21%) and is very significantly lower than those found between 2017 and 2019 (ranging from 35% to 45%).

Figure 23 also indicates that around 1 in 10 respondents specifically **strongly agreed** that SQA *is a progressive organisation* and *enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively* (11% and 10% respectively).

Further examination of the data for 2021 here indicated that **strong agreement** with each of these statements was highest amongst the respondent types noted below:

- **SQA is a progressive organisation**: Parents (23%), Intermediate Potential Candidates (20%) and Young Potential Candidates (17%)
- **SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively**: Parents (23%), Intermediate Potential Candidates (18%) and Young Potential Candidates (15%)
- **SQA can be trusted**: Parents (25%), Intermediate Potential Candidates (19%), Young Potential Candidates (18%) and Mature Potential Candidates (14%)

**Figure 24: SQA Profile - Disagree & Strongly Disgree**
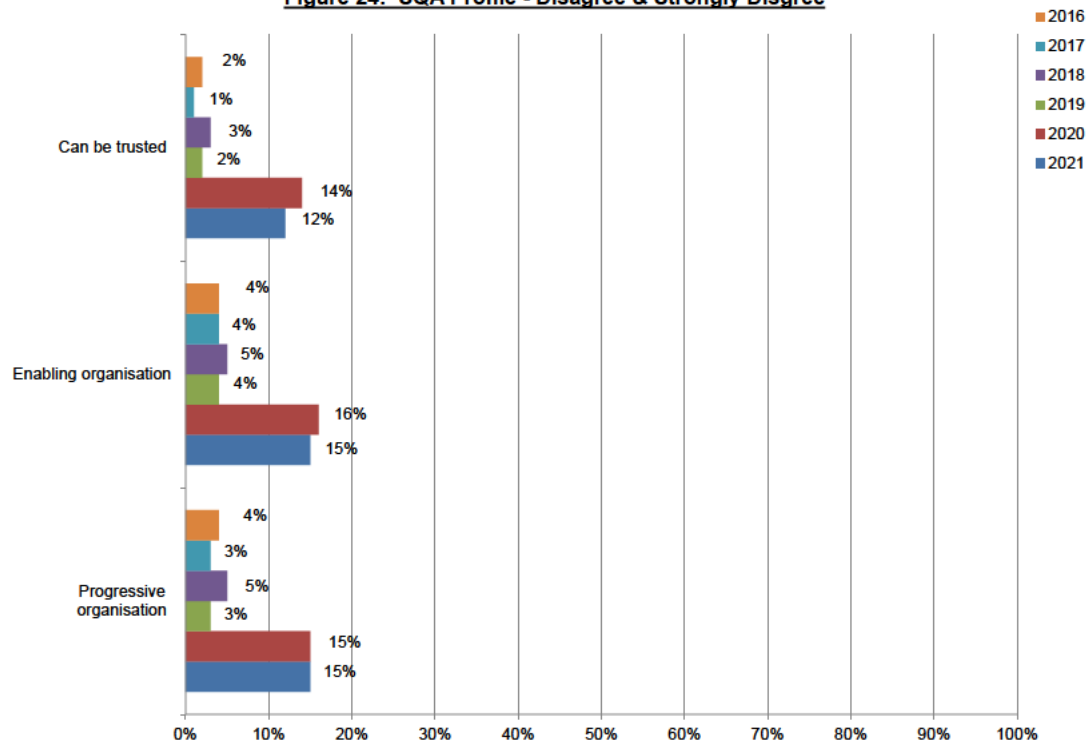
Base: All Respondents

From Figure 24, it can be seen that 1 in 8 respondents in 2021 (12%) **disagreed** that SQA *can be trusted*, with around 1 in 7 **disagreeing** that SQA *enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively* and that SQA *is a progressive organisation* (both 15%).

In all three cases, these figures are either identical or extremely similar to those found in 2020 (ranging from 14% to 16%) but continue to be notably lower than those found between 2016 and 2019 (typically ranging from 1% to 5%).

It should also be noted that levels of **disagreement** with each of these three statements were highest amongst the respondent types noted below:

- **SQA is a progressive organisation**: Schools (57%), Colleges (49%) and, thereafter, Training Providers (20%)
- **SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively**: Schools (59%) and, thereafter, Colleges (36%) and Training Providers (24%)
- **SQA can be trusted**: Schools (55%) and, thereafter, Colleges (25%)

Figure 25: SQA Profile - Don't Know

Base: All Respondents
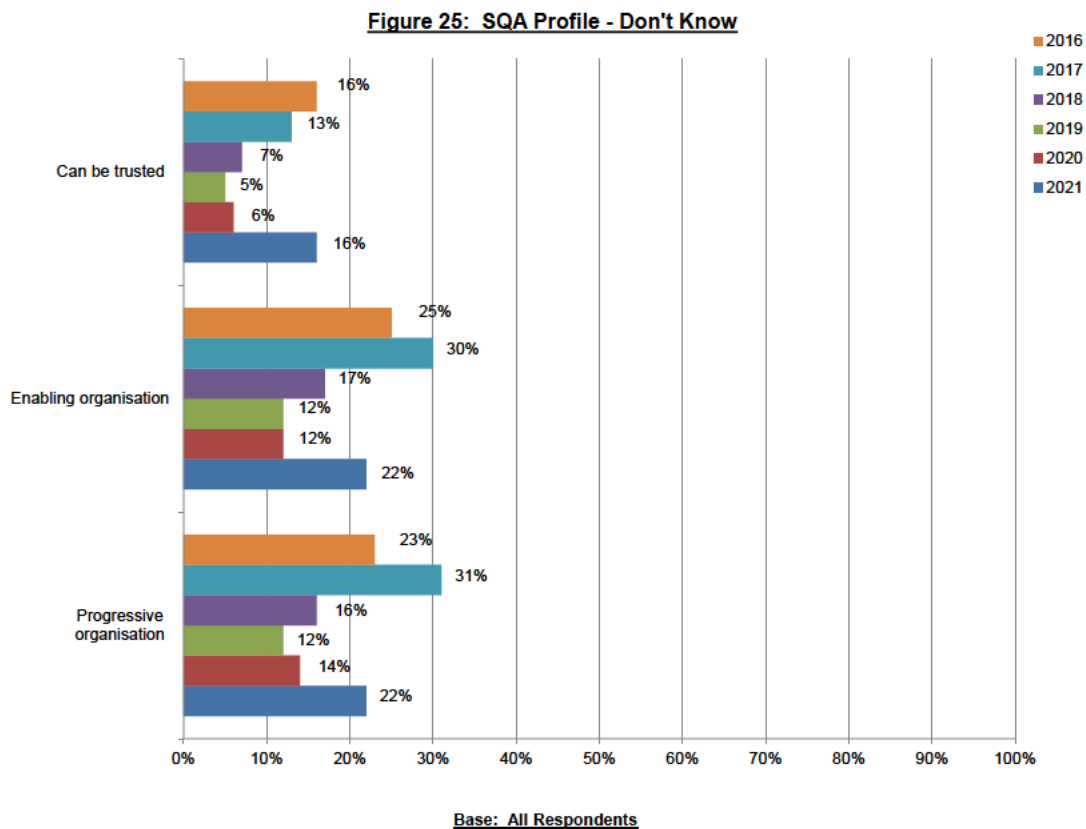
From Figure 25, it can be seen that over 1 in 5 respondents in 2021 *didn't know* if SQA:

- Enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively (22%)
- Is a progressive organisation (22%)

In addition, 1 in 6 respondents in 2021 (16%) *didn't know* if SQA *can be trusted*.

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In all three cases, these outcomes were higher than was the case in 2020, i.e.:

- SQA can be trusted (rising from 6% to 16%)
- SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively (rising from 12% to 22%)
- SQA is a progressive organisation (rising from 14% to 22%)

It should be noted that the provision of *don't know* responses were highest amongst the respondent types indicated below:

- **SQA is a progressive organisation**: Employers (33%), Parents (30%), Intermediate Potential Candidates (29%), Mature Potential Candidates (28%) and Young Potential Candidates (25%)
- **SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively**: Mature Potential Candidates (40%), Parents (31%), Intermediate Potential Candidates (30%), Young Potential Candidates (26%) and Employers (26%)
- **SQA can be trusted**: Parents (28%), Mature Potential Candidates (25%), Intermediate Potential Candidates (22%) and Employers (21%)

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6.0   KEY MESSAGES FOR SQA

6.1   National Qualifications Profile

1. As has been the case over many years, awareness of National Qualifications continues to be high, although, over the last year, there were notable falls in levels of prompted awareness of PDAs, SVQs and HNCs/HNDs.

2. Most of those aware of a qualification continue to believe that they knew enough about it, particularly in relation to National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3, National 4s, National 5s and Highers. Although beliefs that enough is known about National Qualifications changed little between 2020 and 2021, since 2019, there has been an increasing belief that this is the case in relation to National Qualifications at Levels 1 to 3 and National 5s, but a declining belief that this is the case in relation to SVQs.

6.2   Credibility of Scottish Qualifications

3. The perceived credibility of Scottish qualifications continues to be high, particularly in terms of National 5s, Highers, Advanced Highers and HNCs/HNDs. However, there are a number of interesting emerging variations through time in respect of a number of qualifications.

4. Since 2019, there has been a notable increase in respondents stating that their views on qualification credibility had changed over the previous year and, during that time, there has been a notable downward trend amongst such respondents in terms of their views becoming more positive.

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6.3 Developing the Young Workforce

5. Levels of awareness of DYW continue to be high amongst Schools, Colleges and Training Providers (particularly amongst the first two of these audiences) and most of those aware of DYW believe that they had a well-developed knowledge and understanding of it (with this being most likely to be the case amongst Schools).

6. Over two thirds of those interviewed in Schools, Colleges and Training Providers in 2021 collectively believed that DYW was relevant to their centre (with this most likely to be the case amongst Schools and Colleges).

7. Schools, Colleges and Training Providers collectively would be most likely to source information about DYW in future from SQA and, thereafter, Education Scotland, local colleges, Local Authorities and local schools.

6.4 SQA Profile

8. Levels of awareness of SQA continued to be very high in 2021 (and, indeed, reversed a downward trend which had been apparent in this regard over the three previous years), with levels of awareness being high across all audiences (with the exception of Mature Potential Candidates).

9. A notable majority of those aware of SQA believe they know enough about the Authority (particularly amongst the professional audiences). However, the outcome in this regard in 2021 was one of the lowest found since 2013.

10. Although a majority of those aware of SQA believed the Authority to have high credibility, there has been a notable downward trend in this regard since 2019. Interestingly, however, there has also been a

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notable fall in perceptions of low credibility amongst those aware of SQA during that time. Both of these declines were a function of respondents being increasingly unable to express an opinion about the Authority.

11. Perceptions of high SQA credibility tend to be most notable amongst Training Providers and least notable amongst Schools, Colleges and Employers (with Schools and Colleges being far more likely to believe the Authority to have low credibility). In these regards, however, it should be stressed that many of those in some audiences felt unable to express an opinion with regard to the credibility of SQA (particularly Employers and, thereafter, to a lesser extent, some elements of the public audiences).

12. Those who believe SQA to have high credibility primarily hold these views because they believe that SQA is doing a good job and also due to a range of other attributes of the Authority (i.e. its supportiveness, helpfulness, being well known/well established, being the principal awarding body in Scotland and having high standards).

13. Overall, the percentage of respondents who had contacted SQA at some time changed little between 2018 and 2021, with highest levels of contact in the most recent survey being made by Training Providers, Colleges and Schools. Overall, ratings of these contacts were high (but were lowest amongst Parents, Schools and Colleges), with high ratings principally being a function of SQA being viewed as helpful, answering questions quickly and, thereafter, being supportive, knowledgeable and informative (as noted by the professional audiences interviewed).

14. Overall, just over half of respondents had contacted SQA (with levels of such contacts being highest amongst Training Providers, Schools and Colleges). The rating of these contacts from SQA was high

(although lowest amongst Colleges and Schools), with positive ratings of SQA primarily being due to beliefs that SQA is helpful and also that, in contacts from SQA, the Authority has been supportive, knowledgeable and informative, and has answered questions quickly.

15. Most respondents in 2021 believed SQA can be trusted, but only half that it is an enabling organisation and that it is a progressive organisation (with there being a trend towards those in the public audiences being more likely to believe that SQA possesses/ demonstrates these attributes). Relatively few respondents in 2021 did not believe that SQA possessed/demonstrated these attributes. Where this was the case, this tended to be amongst those in the professional audiences.

16. Finally, in this regard, it should be noted that, between 2020 and 2021, there was an increase in the extent to which respondents felt unable to comment with regard to SQA possessing/demonstrating these attributes (with the extent to which this was the case in 2021 tending to be highest across a range of different public and professional audiences).

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