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REPORT (FINAL DRAFT)

KEY AUDIENCE RESEARCH – EMPLOYER AND TRAINING PROVIDER CENTRE AUDIENCES

February 2023

PREPARED FOR: Scottish Qualifications Authority

Report (Final Draft)

**Key Audience Research –
Employer and Training Provider Centre
Audiences**

Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd

February 2023

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ISO 9001
QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Contents

1.0   INTRODUCTION

This report details findings to emerge from research undertaken on behalf of SQA by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd.

The research focused on the derivation of information from four respondent types:

- Employers (individuals responsible for training, recruitment or HR)
- ETP learners (individuals engaged in learning through ETPs)
- ETP teaching professionals (individuals with teaching responsibilities within ETPs)
- ETP managers (individuals with ETP managers' roles in ETPs)

Data was collected during November and December 2022 by means of the administration of structured telephone interviews with employers and the administration of an online questionnaire with ETP learners, ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers.

A total of 159 structured telephone interviews were undertaken with employers, whilst the following number of online responses were achieved:

- 186 ETP learners
- 108 ETP teaching professionals
- 108 ETP managers

Equal weightings were applied to the respondent types on the following basis:

- Employers
- ETP learners
- ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers

Sections 2.0 to 6.0 inclusive detail findings in relation to:

- SQA profile

- SQA qualifications profile

- SQA contact and communication profiles

- SQA consultation and engagement profile

- SQA's values profile

Thereafter, Section 7.0 provides a number of key messages for SQA, which emerged from the research that was undertaken.

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2.0   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1   SQA Profile

- Overall, four out of five respondents rated SQA's credibility as being **high**, with one in ten respondents believing SQA to have **low** credibility

- For those stating their belief that SQA had high credibility, this was primarily due to 'SQA being a well-known and well-established organisation' and 'SQA having good and well recognised qualifications'

- Respondents provided an average score of 8.2 out of a possible 10 in terms of their satisfaction with SQA's performance overall

- Overall, approaching two thirds of respondents stated their belief that they 'knew enough about SQA'. However, approaching two thirds of these respondents stated that they had 'no desire to know more about SQA'

2.2   SQA Qualifications Profile

- Overall, respondents most commonly believed that they knew enough about qualifications – of which they are aware – in terms of SVQs, HNCs and HNDs, Highers, Advanced Highers and National 5s

- **Highest levels** of perceived credibility of qualifications – of which respondents were aware – related to Highers, Advanced Highers, HNCs and HNDs, SVQs, National 5s and PDAs

- Less than three out of ten respondents stated that their overall views on the credibility of all the qualifications they had heard of –

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taken together – had changed over the last year, with approaching one in six of these respondents stating that their views had become **more positive** and one in ten that their views had become **less positive**

2.3   SQA Contact and Communications Profiles

- Half of respondents stated that they had had contact from SQA (in the case of employers, ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers) or had contacted SQA (in the case of ETP learners), with these respondents providing an average score of 8.4 out of a possible 10 in terms of their contacts from or with SQA

- For those noting a positive rating of SQA contacts, this was primarily due to 'SQA's quick response to queries' and 'the helpfulness of SQA'

- Respondents provided average scores of 8.0 out of a possible 10 in terms of three aspects of their communications from or with SQA, namely 'how appropriate the level of detail was in these communications', 'the timeliness of communications' and 'the clarity of communications'

- An average score of 8.1 out of a possible 10 was provided by respondents in terms of their overall rating of their communications from or with SQA, with those providing a high rating number for SQA in terms of their overall satisfaction in this regard stating that this was primarily due to 'the clarity of SQA communications'

2.4   SQA Consultation and Engagement Profile

- When respondents were asked to rate how well SQA consults or engages with them (in the case of employers, ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers) and consults with themselves or

their peers (in the case of ETP learners), an average score of 7.7 out of a possible 10 was noted, with those providing a good rating of SQA in terms of its consultation and engagement stating that this was primarily due to SQA demonstrating 'a good level and quality of consultation and engagement'

2.5   SQA's Values Profile

- Three quarters of respondents agreed with the statement that 'SQA can be trusted'

- Approaching two thirds of respondents agreed with the statement that 'SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles effectively)

- Approaching three out of five respondents agreed with the statement that 'SQA is a progressive organisation'

- Levels of disagreement with each of the three statements under consideration were far more limited

- Relatively few respondents felt able to express an opinion with regard to agreement or disagreement with each of the statements under consideration, although almost three out of ten employers were unable to agree or disagree that SQA is an enabling organisation and one in five that it is a progressive organisation

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3.0 SQA PROFILE

3.1 SQA's Credibility

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

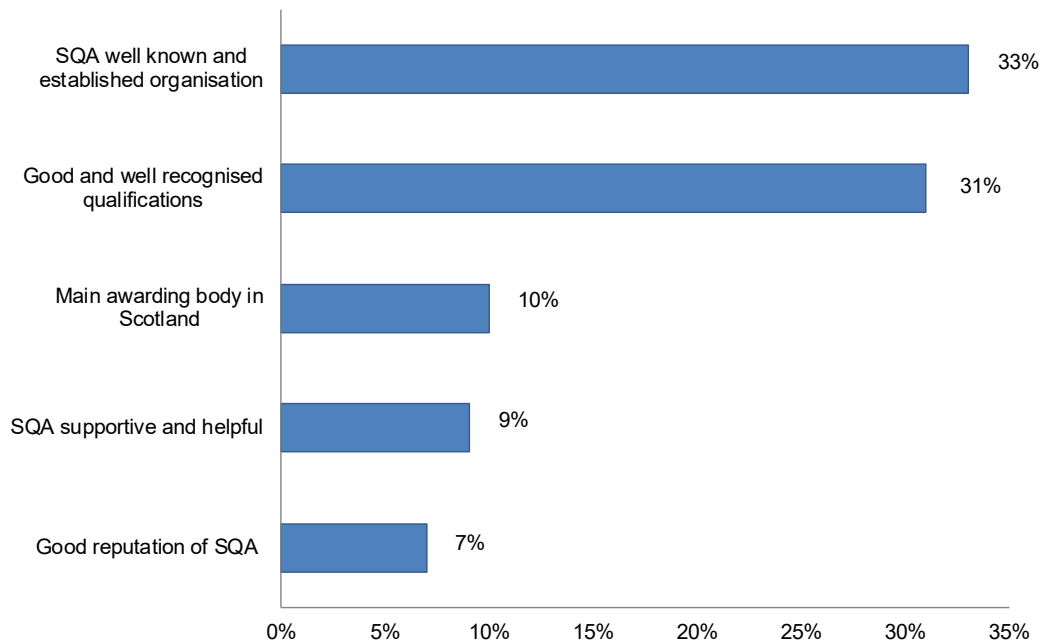**Figure 1: Rating of current credibility of SQA**
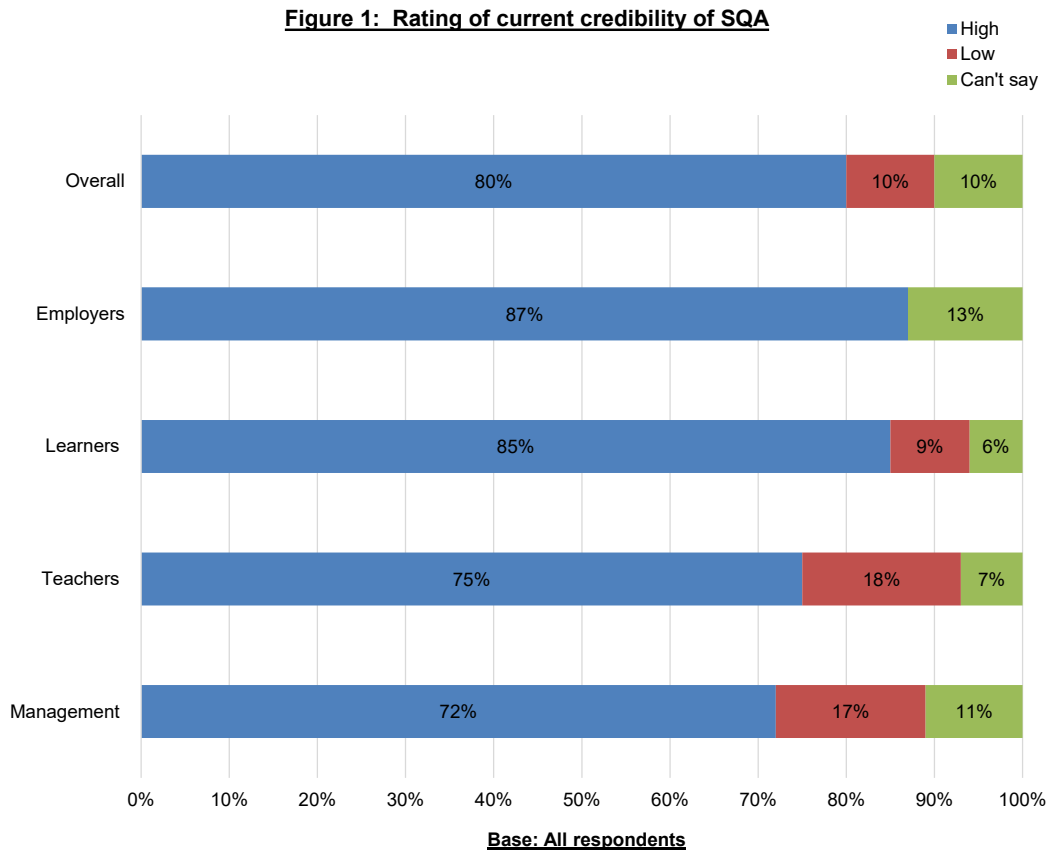
Overall, four out of five respondents (80%) rated SQA's credibility as being **high**, with this outcome being most notable amongst employers and ETP learners (87% and 85% respectively compared to 75% and 72% respectively for ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers).

Figure 1 also indicates that, overall, one in ten respondents (10%) believed SQA to have **low** credibility, with this outcome being far more prominent amongst ETP teaching professionals and managers (18% and 17% respectively).

'Why did you provide a high rating of SQA's credibility?'

**Figure 2: Reason for providing high rating of SQA credibility
(Unprompted)**

SQA well known and established organisation — 33%
Good and well recognised qualifications — 31%
Main awarding body in Scotland — 10%
SQA supportive and helpful — 9%
Good reputation of SQA — 7%

Base: Respondents believing SQA to have high credibility

When those stating their belief that SQA had **high** credibility were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, their **primary responses** focused around:

- SQA being a well-known and well-established organisation (33%)
- SQA having good and well-recognised qualifications (31%)

Thereafter, **more limited unprompted mention** was made here of:

- SQA being Scotland's main awarding body (10%)
- SQA being supportive and helpful (9%)
- SQA having a good reputation (7%)

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Further examination of the data indicated the following differences in terms of a number of the outcomes noted in Figure 2 being most prominently cited by the respondent types indicated:

- **SQA being a well-known and well-established organisation**: employers (46% compared to, for example, 19% and 16% respectively amongst ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers)
- **SQA having good, well-recognised qualifications**: employers (44% compared to, for example, 14% and 13% respectively for ETP managers and ETP teaching professionals)
- **SQA being supportive and helpful**: ETP learners (20% compared to, for example, 3% for employers)
- **SQA having a good reputation**: ETP managers (16% compared to, for example, 3% for employers)

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown. Indicatively, however, low ratings were primarily provided due to 'SQA's poor press coverage' and 'respondents' experience of SQA'.

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3.2   Satisfaction with SQA's Overall Performance

'How satisfied would you say you are with the performance of SQA overall, where '1' means 'completely dissatisfied' and '10' means 'completely satisfied'?'

**Figure 3: Satisfaction with SQA's overall performance - average scores**
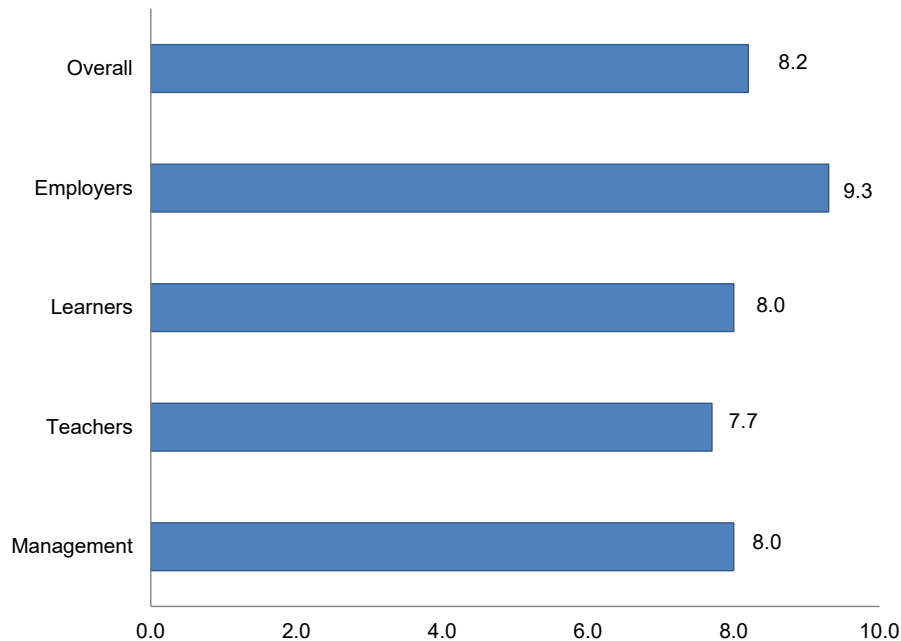
Base: All respondents

Overall, respondents provided an average score of 8.2 out of a possible 10 in terms of their satisfaction with SQA's performance overall, with this outcome being highest amongst employers (9.3) and varying little across the remaining three respondent types (from 7.7 to 8.0).

3.3   SQA Knowledge and Information Profile

'Do you believe you know enough about SQA?'

Figure 4: Enough known about SQA
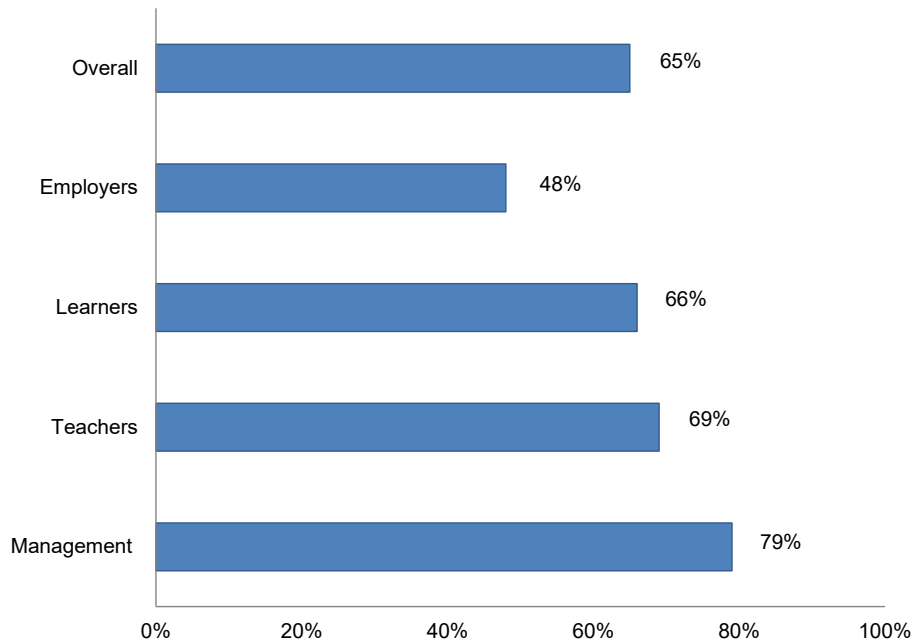
Base: All respondents

Overall, approaching two thirds of respondents (65%) stated their belief that they knew enough about SQA, with this outcome being highest amongst ETP managers and lowest amongst employers:

- ETP managers (79%)
- ETP teaching professionals (69%)
- ETP learners (66%)
- Employers (48%)

When those who did not believe that they knew enough about SQA were asked – on an unprompted basis – what they would like to know more about SQA, approaching two thirds (63%) stated that they had 'no desire to know more about SQA'.
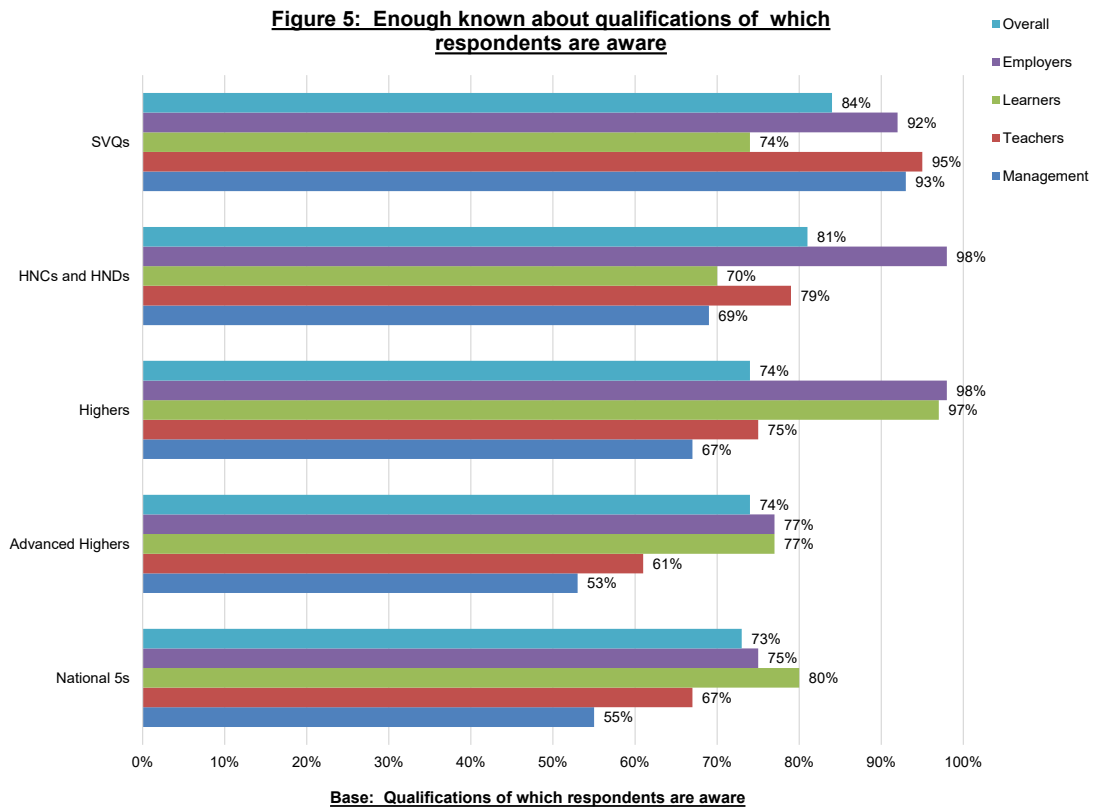
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Indeed, the only unprompted response that emerged with **any** prominence was a desire to know more about 'SQA systems' (6%), with this outcome being exclusively noted by ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers (41% and 27% respectively).

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown on the basis of respondent type. On an indicative basis, however, it should be noted that the citing of 'having no desires to know more about SQA' was exclusively by employers.
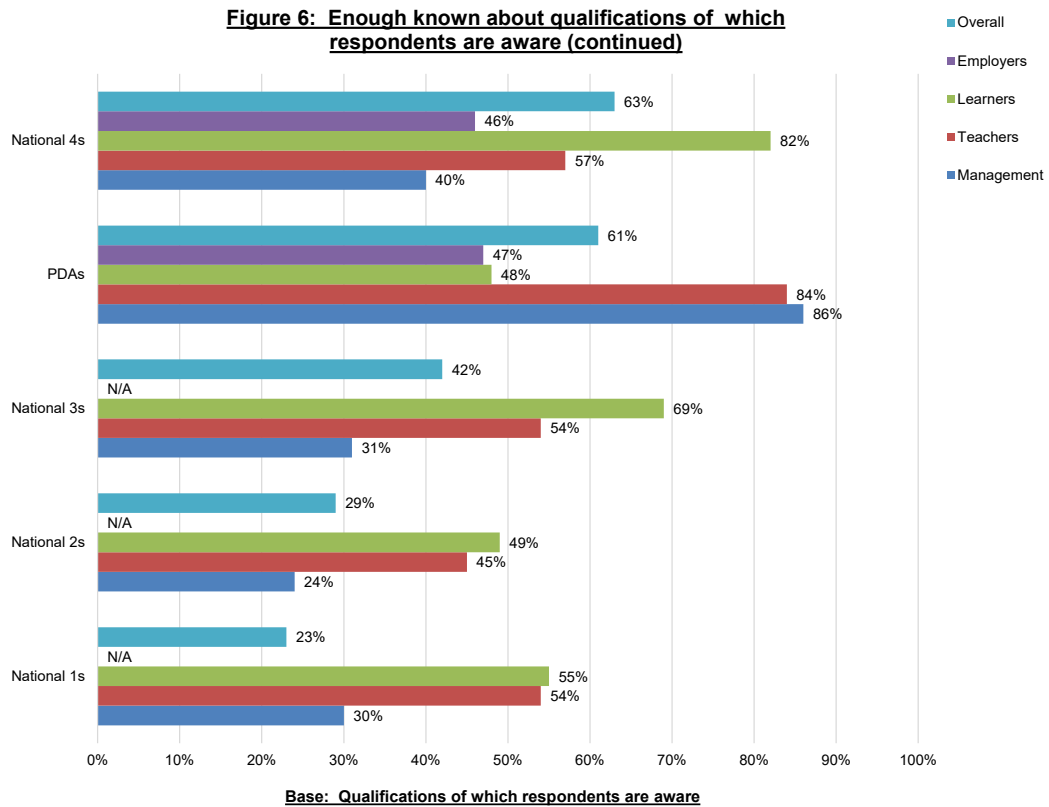
4.0   SQA QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE

4.1   Qualification Knowledge and Credibility[1]

'Do you think you know enough about the qualifications of which you are aware?'

Figure 5: Enough known about qualifications of which respondents are aware

Legend: Overall, Employers, Learners, Teachers, Management

SVQs: Overall 84%, Employers 92%, Learners 74%, Teachers 95%, Management 93%

HNCs and HNDs: Overall 81%, Employers 98%, Learners 70%, Teachers 79%, Management 69%

Highers: Overall 74%, Employers 98%, Learners 97%, Teachers 75%, Management 67%

Advanced Highers: Overall 74%, Employers 77%, Learners 77%, Teachers 61%, Management 53%

National 5s: Overall 73%, Employers 75%, Learners 80%, Teachers 67%, Management 55%

Base: Qualifications of which respondents are aware

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[1] The data presented regarding qualification credibility is based on those aware of a qualification who expressed an opinion regarding its credibility and excludes can't say responses. In the case of National 1s to National 3s, all employers provided a 'can't say' response.

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Figure 6: Enough known about qualifications of which respondents are aware (continued)

Base: Qualifications of which respondents are aware

Overall, respondents **most commonly believed** that they know enough about qualifications of which they are aware in relation to:

- SVQs (84%)
- HNCs and HNDs (81%)
- Highers (74%)
- Advanced Highers (74%)
- National 5s (73%)

Thereafter, **secondary reference** was made here to enough being known about two further qualifications of which respondents were aware, including:

- National 4s (63%)
- PDAs (61%)

Figures 5 and 6 also indicate the following notable differences here in terms of respondent type in terms of the greatest beliefs that enough is known about qualifications of which respondents were aware, namely:

- **National 1s**: ETP learners and ETP teaching professionals (55% and 54% respectively)
- **National 2s**: ETP learners and ETP teaching professionals (49% and 45% respectively)
- **National 3s**: ETP learners and, thereafter, ETP teaching professionals (77% and 60% respectively)
- **National 4s**: ETP learners (82%)
- **National 5s**: ETP learners and employers (80% and 75% respectively)
- **Highers**: employers and ETP learners (98% and 97% respectively)
- **Advanced Highers**: employers and ETP learners (both 77%)
- **SVQs**: ETP teaching professionals, ETP managers and employers (95%, 93% and 92% respectively)
- **HNCs and HNDs**: employers (98%)
- **PDAs**: ETP managers and ETP teaching professionals (86% and 84% respectively)

'How would you rate the credibility of qualifications of which you are aware?'

Figure 7: Perceived credibility of qualifications of which respondents are aware

Base: Qualifications of which respondents are aware
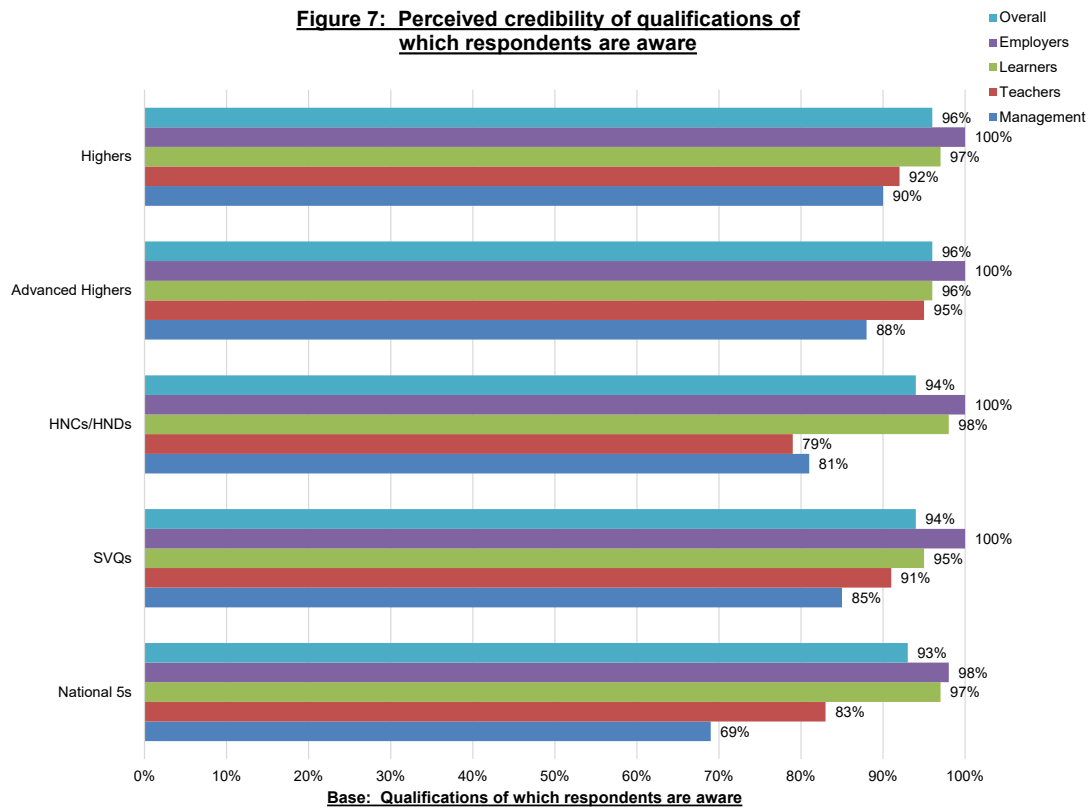
Figure 8: Perceived credibility of qualifications of which respondents are aware (continued)

Base: Qualifications of which respondents are aware
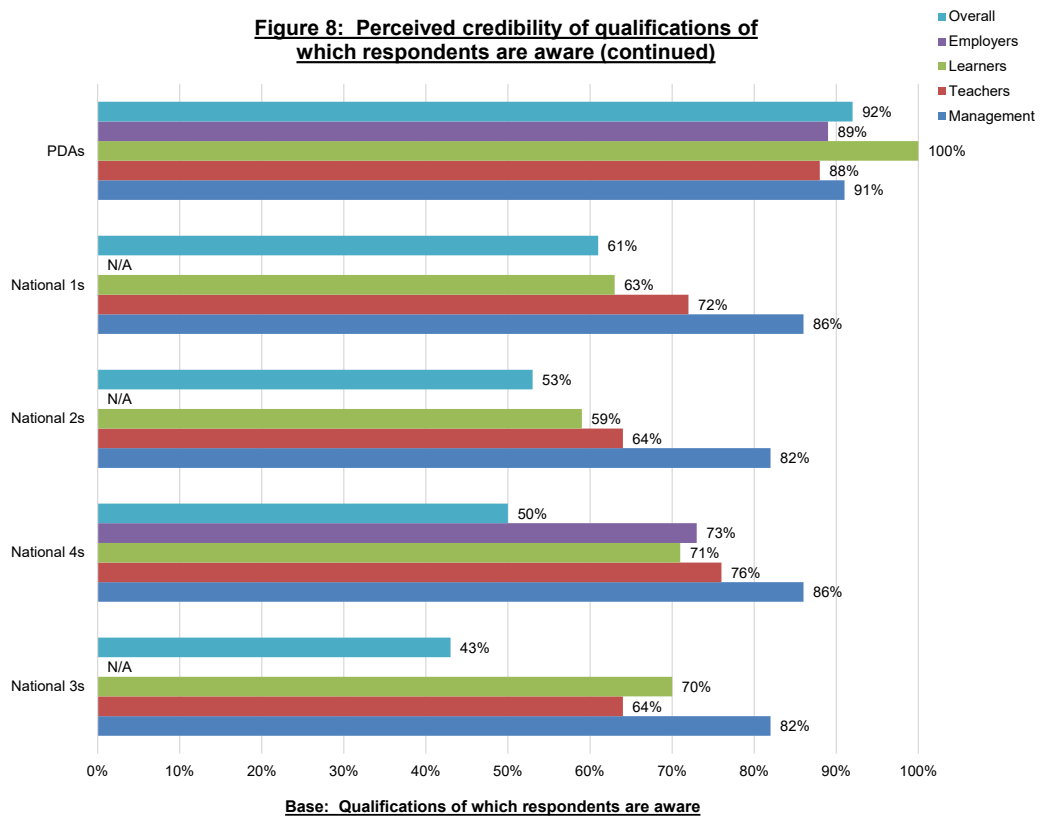
Overall, **highest levels** of perceived credibility of qualifications of which respondents were aware related to:

- Highers (96%)
- Advanced Highers (96%)
- HNCs and HNDs (94%)
- SVQs (94%)
- National 5s (93%)
- PDAs (92%)

Further examination of the data indicated the following notable differences in terms of highest perceived credibility being noted by the respondent types indicated in relation to qualifications of which they were aware:

- **National 1s**: ETP managers (86%)
- **National 2s**: ETP managers (82%)
- **National 3s**: ETP managers (82%)
- **National 4s**: ETP managers (86%)
- **National 5s**: employers and ETP learners (98% and 97% respectively)
- **Highers**: employers and ETP learners (100% and 97% respectively)
- **Advanced Highers**: employers, ETP learners and ETP teaching professionals (100%, 96% and 95% respectively)
- **SVQs**: employers (100%)
- **HNCs and HNDs**: employers and ETP learners (100% and 98% respectively)
- **PDAs**: ETP learners (100%)

4.2   Changes in Views About SQA Qualifications

Less than three out of ten respondents (28%) stated that their overall views on the credibility of all of the qualifications they had heard of – taken together – had changed over the last year, with this varying notably across the four respondent types:

- ETP learners (50%)
- ETP teaching professionals (34%)
- ETP managers (30%)
- Employers (3%)

'Have your overall views on the credibility of all of the qualifications you have heard of taken together changed over the last year?'

Figure 9: Changes in overall views re all qualifications respondents aware of
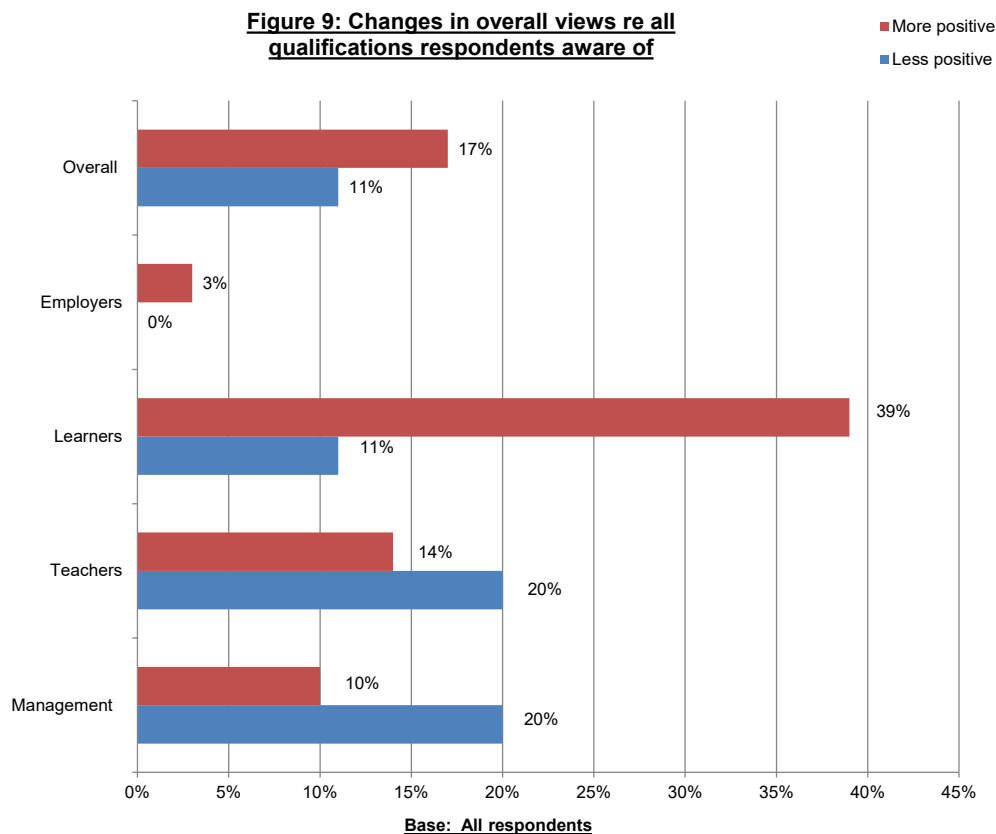
Amongst those whose overall views on the credibility of all qualifications they had heard of had changed over the last year, for

approaching one in six (17%), their views had become 'more positive' and, for one in ten (11%), their views had become 'less positive'.

Figure 9 also highlights the following outcomes here:

- That ETP learners were almost four times more likely to state that their views had become 'more positive' rather than 'less positive' (39% compared to 11%)
- That ETP teaching professionals were slightly more likely to state that their views had become 'less positive' rather than 'more positive' (20% compared to 14%)
- That ETP managers were twice as likely to state that their views had become 'less positive' (20% compared to 10%)
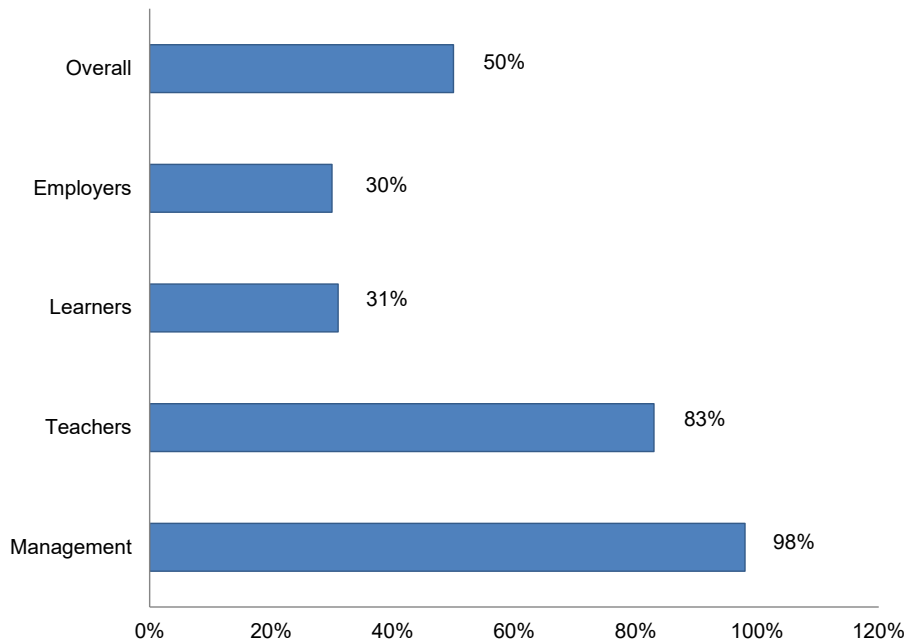
It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown on the basis of respondent type.

5.0   SQA CONTACT AND COMMUNICATIONS PROFILES

5.1   Contact Profile

'Have you had contact from SQA or have you contacted SQA?'

Figure 10: Have had contact from SQA or have contacted SQA
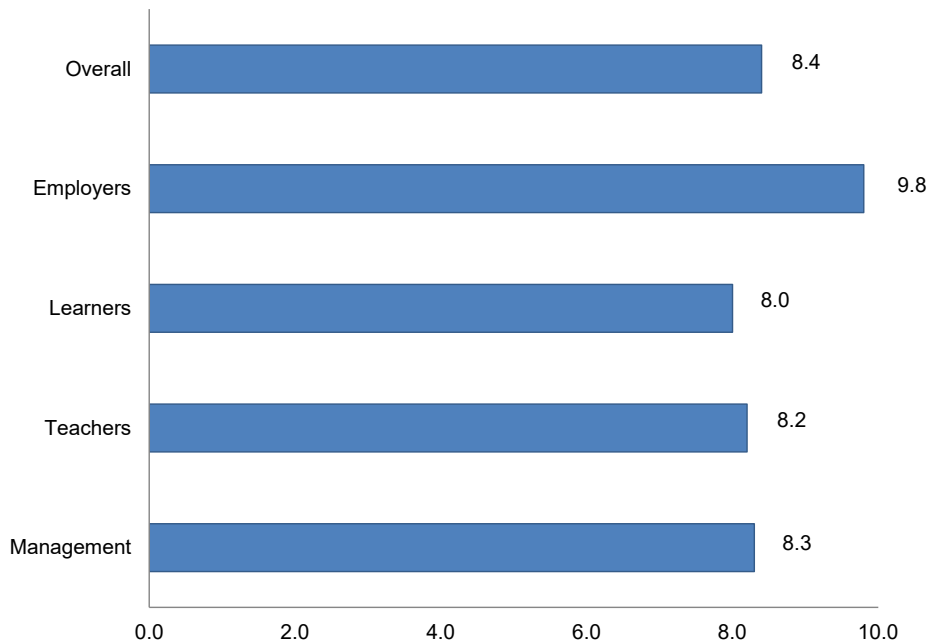

Base: All respondents

Half of respondents (50%) stated that they had had contact from SQA (in the case of employers, ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers) or had contacted SQA (in the case of ETP learners).

Figure 10 also indicates that SQA contacts were far greater amongst ETP managers and ETP teaching professionals:

- ETP managers (98%)
- ETP teaching professionals (83%)
- ETP learners (31%)
- Employers (30%)

'How would you rate your contact from SQA or contact with SQA, on a scale from 1 to 10, where '1' is 'very poor' and '10' is 'very good'?'

**Figure 11: Rating of contacts from SQA - average scores**

Base: Have had contact from SQA or have contacted SQA

When respondents were asked how they rated their contact from SQA (in the case of employers, ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers) and contact with SQA (in the case the ETP learners), an average score of 8.4 out of a possible 10 was noted, with this outcome being notably higher amongst employers (9.8 compared to between 8.0 and 8.3 amongst the three remaining respondent types).

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'Why did you choose a positive rating for SQA contacts?'

**Figure 12: Reasons for choosing positive rating of SQA contacts
(unprompted)**
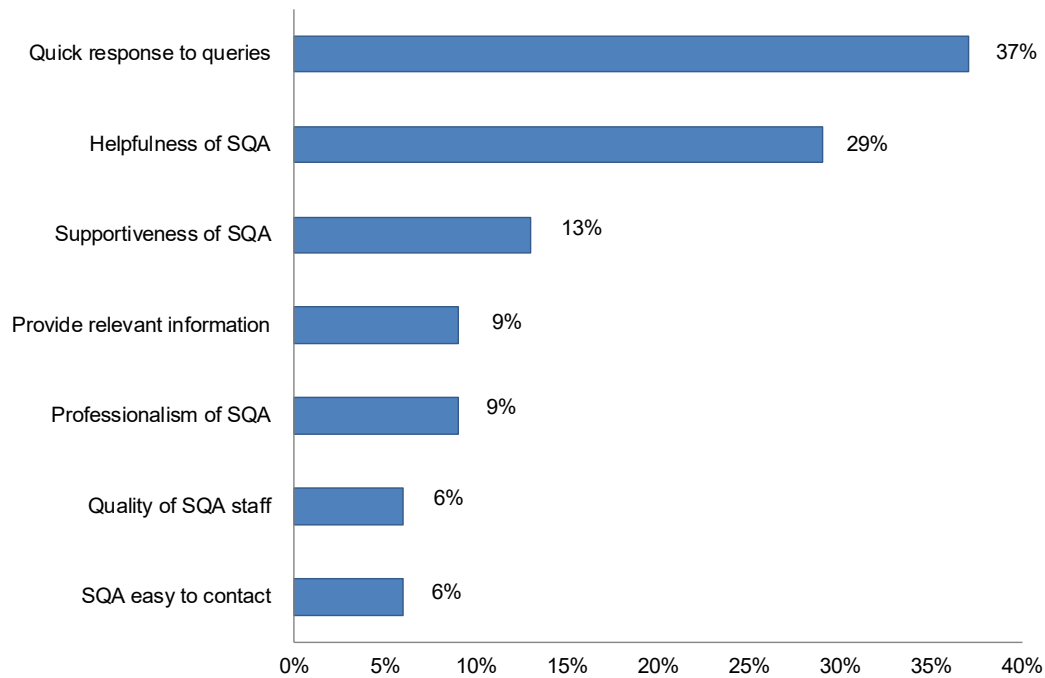
Base: Provided rating of 6 to 10

When those noting a positive rating in terms of SQA contacts (providing a rating of between 6 and 10) were asked (on an unprompted basis) why this was the case, their **primary responses** were those of:

- SQA's quick response to queries (37%)
- The helpfulness of SQA during their contacts (29%)

Thereafter, **more limited unprompted mention** was made here of:

- The supportiveness of SQA in their contacts (13%)
- SQA providing relevant information during contacts (9%)
- The professionalism of SQA during contacts (9%)

Further examination of the data indicated that the following respondent types were most likely to make unprompted reference to the factors noted below, namely:

- **SQA's quick response to queries**: employers (53%)
- **SQA being helpful during contacts**: ETP learners and ETP managers (46% and 38% respectively)
- **The supportiveness of SQA during contacts**: ETP learners (23%)
- **SQA providing relevant information during contacts**: employers and ETP teaching professionals (16% and 11% respectively)
- **The professionalism of SQA during contacts**: employers and ETP learners (16% and 15% respectively)
- **SQA being easy to contact**: exclusively employers (24%)
- **Quality of SQA staff during contacts**: ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers (10% and 9% respectively)

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents providing a low rating of their SQA contacts is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown on the basis of respondent type. On an indicative basis, however, the most prominent reason cited related to 'communications with external verifiers' and 'SQA not being interested in smaller centres' (both of which were most prominently noted by those in ETP teaching and management roles).

5.2 Communications Profile

'How would you rate the following aspects of communications from SQA, on a scale from 1 to 10, where '1' is 'very poor' and '10' is 'very good'?'

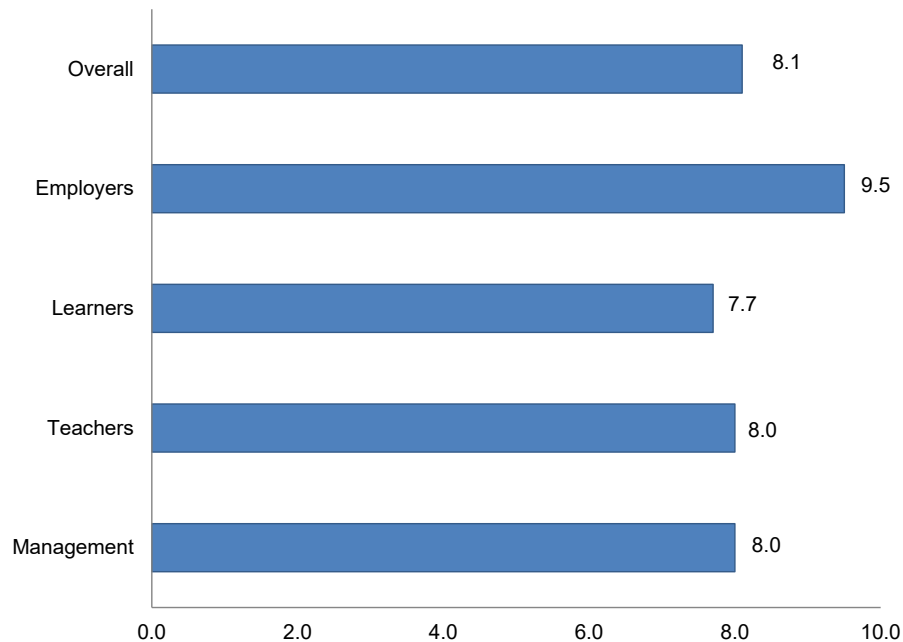**Figure 13: Rating of communications from SQA - average scores**
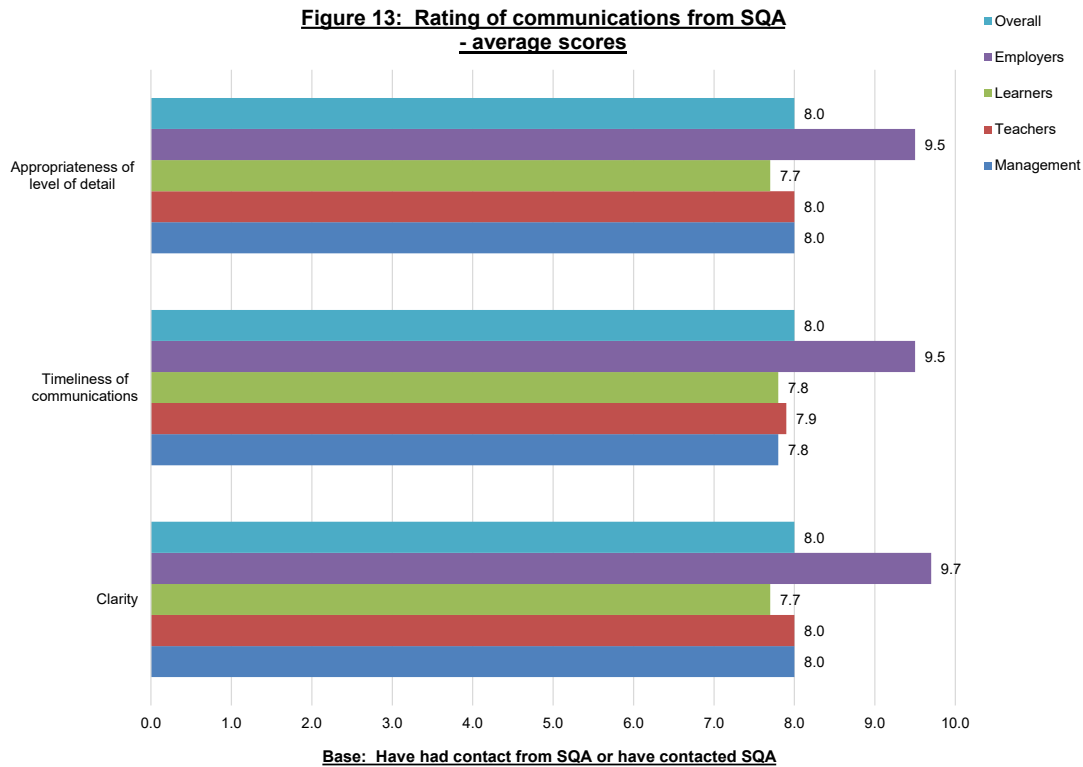
Respondents provided the following average scores (out of a possible 10) for three aspects of their communications from SQA:

- How appropriate the level of detail was (8.0)
- The timeliness of communications (8.0)
- The clarity of communications (8.0)

Figure 13 also indicates that, in all three cases, highest ratings were provided by employers, with ratings amongst the three remaining respondent types being relatively similar.

'Overall, how would you rate communications from SQA, on a scale from 1 to 10, where '1' is 'very poor' and '10' is 'very good'?'

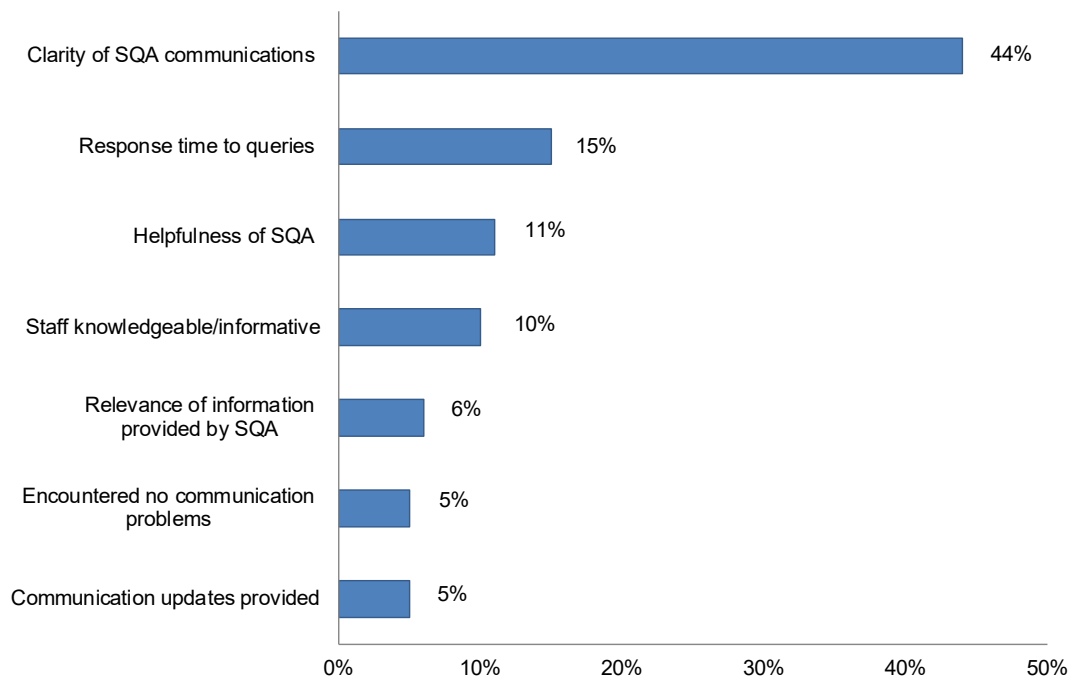**Figure 14: Overall rating of communications from SQA - average scores**

Base: All respondents excluding those unable to provide an answer

An average score of 8.1 out of a possible 10 was provided by respondents in terms of their overall rating of their communications from SQA, with this outcome being highest amongst employers (9.5) and being similar across the three remaining respondent types (ranging from 7.7 for ETP learners to 8.0 for both ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers).

'Why did you choose a high rating number here?'

Figure 15: Reasons for choosing good rating of SQA communications

Base: Provided rating of 6 to 10

When those providing a high rating number for SQA in terms of their overall rating of its communications (provided a rating of 6 to 10) were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, their **primary response** related to 'the clarity of SQA communications' (44%).

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

- Response time to queries (15%)
- The helpfulness of SQA in their communications (11%)
- SQA staff being knowledgeable and informative in their communications (10%)

Further examination of the data indicated the following differences on the basis of the respondent types being most likely to provide the responses cited above:

- **Clarity of SQA communications**: employers (56% compared to, for example, 34% for ETP managers)
- **Response time to queries**: ETP managers (29%)
- **The helpfulness of SQA communications**: ETP learners (21%)
- **SQA being knowledgeable and informative in their communications**: ETP managers and ETP teaching professionals (21% and 15% respectively)
- **Relevance of communications**: employers and ETP learners (15% and 12% respectively)
- **Respondents not encountering any problems in relation to SQA communications**: ETP teaching professionals (15%)
- **Communication updates provided**: employers (17%)

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown on the basis of respondent type for those providing a poor rating (of between 1 and 5) of SQA's communications, although, indicatively, it would appear that this was primarily due to 'SQA providing unclear answers' and 'SQA being slow to respond in their communications'.

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6.0   SQA CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROFILE

'How would you rate how well SQA consults or engages with you or you and your peers, on a scale from 1 to 10, where '1' is 'very poor' and '10' is 'very good'?'

Figure 16: Rating of how well SQA consults or engages - average scores
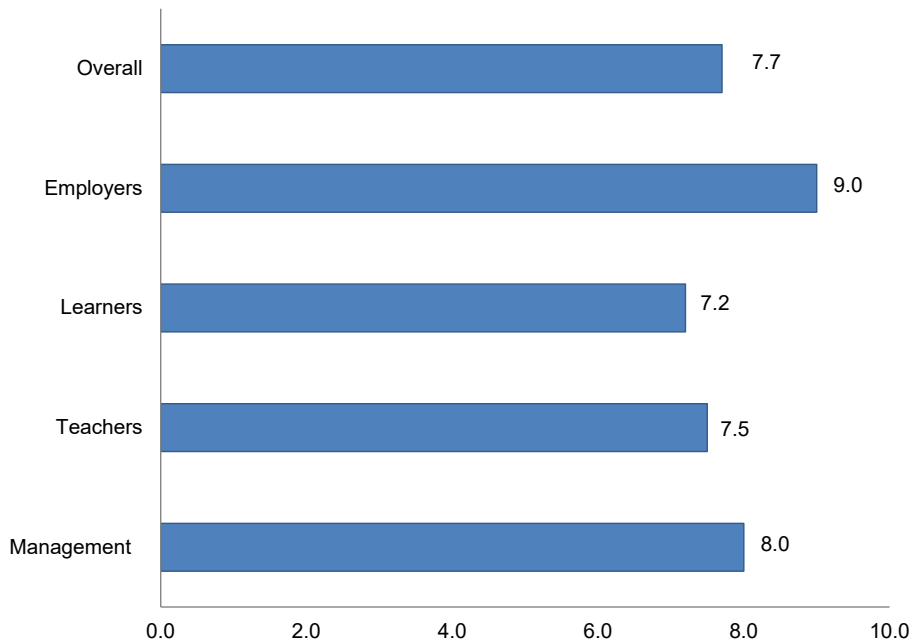

Base: All respondents

When respondents were asked to rate how well SQA consults or engages with them (in the case of employers, ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers) and consults with themselves or their peers (in the case of ETP learners), an average score of 7.7 out of a possible 10 was noted, with this average score being highest amongst employers and lowest amongst ETP learners:

- Employers (9.0)
- ETP managers (8.0)
- ETP teaching professionals (7.5)
- ETP learners (7.2)

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'Why did you choose this good rating number?'

Figure 17: Reasons for providing good rating re consultation and engagement (Unprompted)
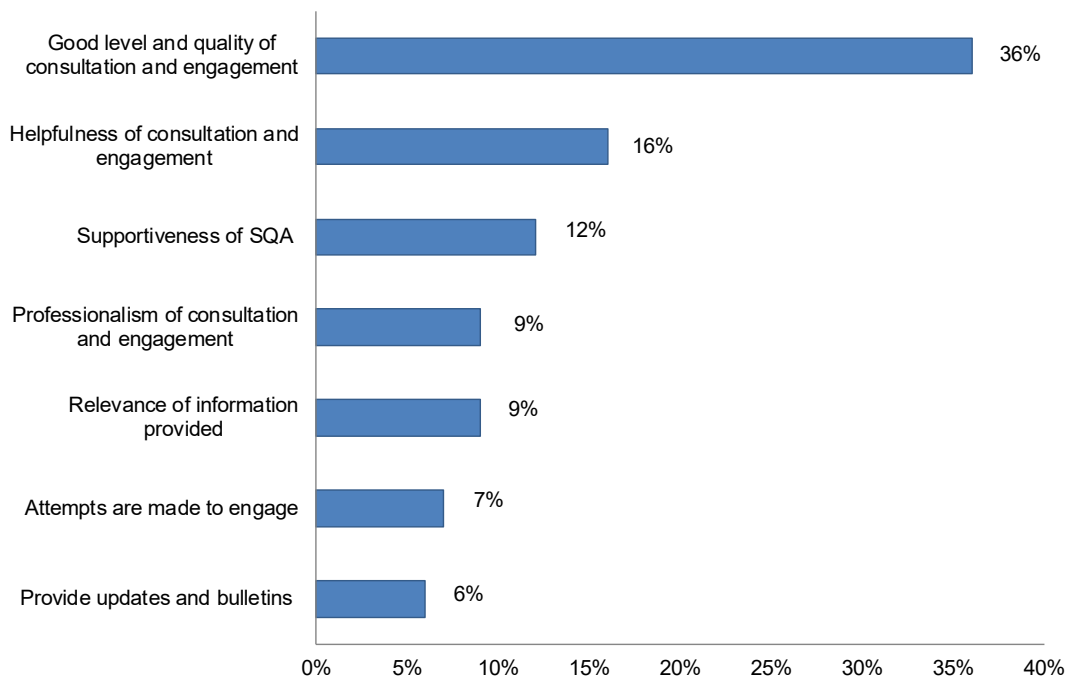
Base: Provided rating of 6 to 10

When those providing a good rating number for SQA in terms of its consultation and engagement (providing a score of between 6 and 10) were asked – on an unprompted basis – why this was the case, their **primary response** was that of SQA demonstrating 'a good level and quality of consultation and engagement' (36%).

Thereafter, the **most prominent unprompted mention** was made here of:

- The helpfulness of SQA's consultation and engagement (16%)
- The supportiveness of SQA in its engagement and consultation (12%)
- The professionalism of SQA's consultation and engagement (9%)
- The relevance of information provided during consultation and engagement (9%)

It should be noted that the subsample of respondents here who provided a poor rating for SQA's consultation and engagement (of between 1 and 5) is insufficient to allow a meaningful breakdown on the basis of respondent type, although, indicatively, this would appear to be primarily due to 'lack of consultation and engagement' (exclusively noted by ETP learners).

7.0   SQA'S VALUES PROFILE

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

Figure 18: SQA profile - agreement

Base: All respondents
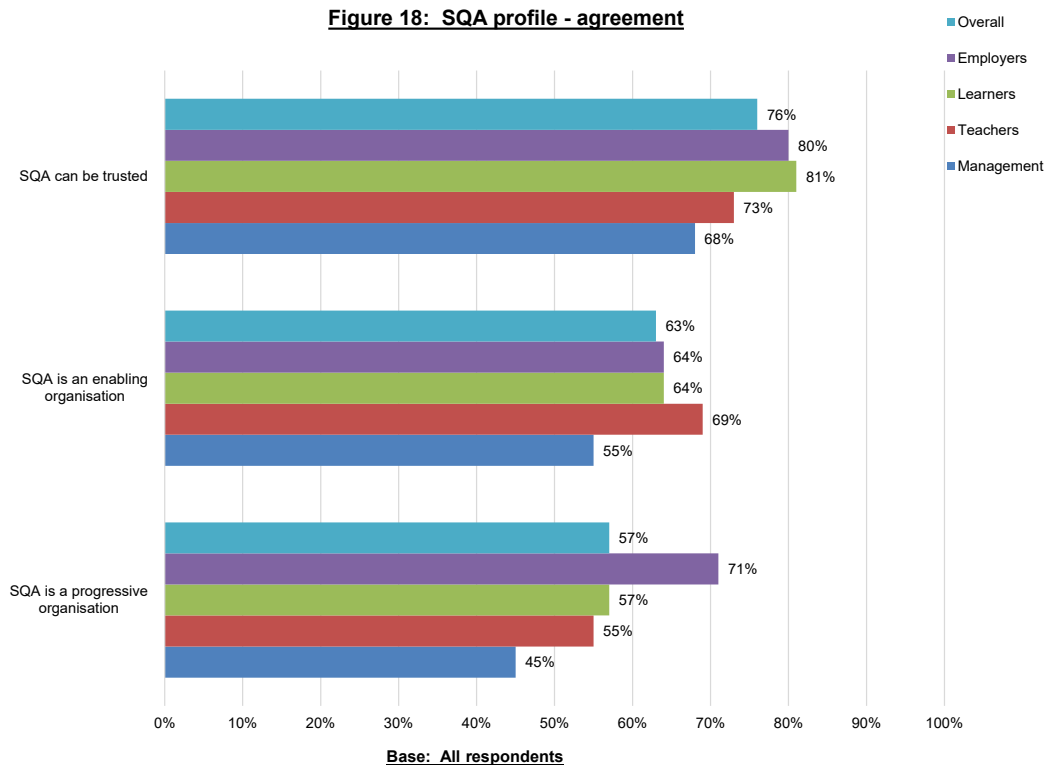
From the above graphic, it can be seen that:

- Three quarters of respondents (76%) **agreed** with the statement that 'SQA can be trusted' (with this ranging from 68% for ETP managers to 81% and 80% respectively for ETP learners and employers)

- Approaching two thirds of respondents (63%) **agreed** with the statement that 'SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles effectively' (with this ranging from 55% for ETP managers to 69%, 64% and 64% respectively for ETP teaching professionals, ETP learners and employers)

- Approaching three out of five respondents (57%) **agreed** with the statement that 'SQA is a progressive organisation' (with this ranging from 45% for ETP managers to 71% for employers)
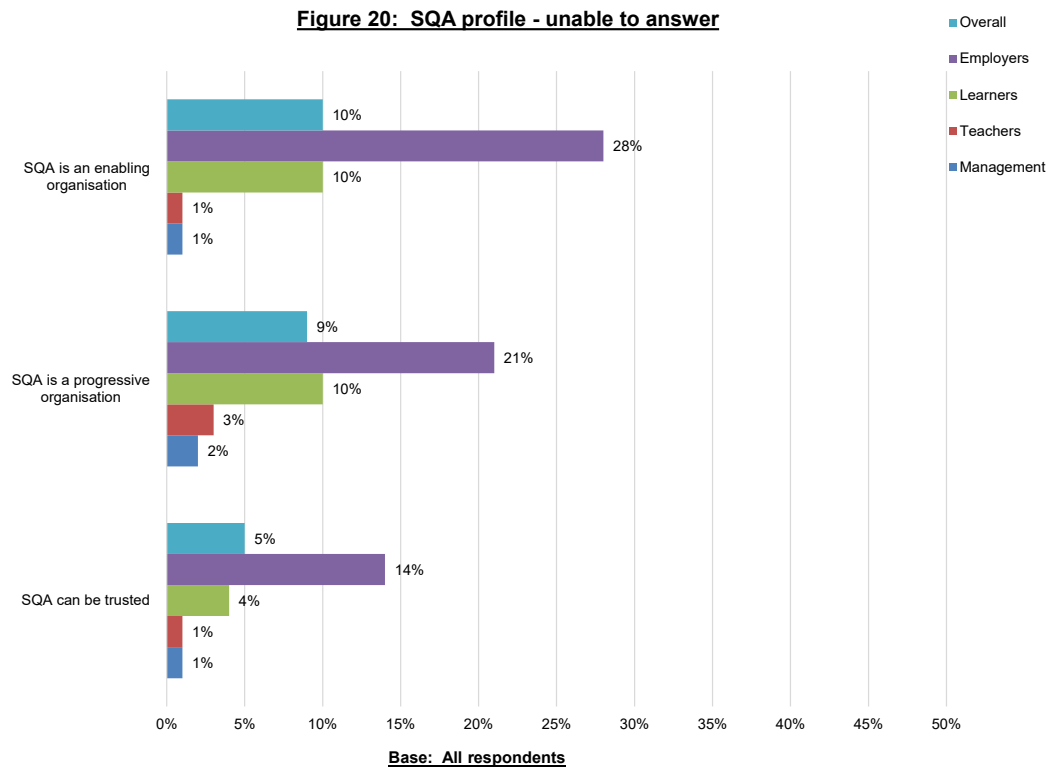
'How strongly would you agree or disagree with each of the following statements about SQA?'

Figure 19: SQA profile - disagreement

Base: All respondents
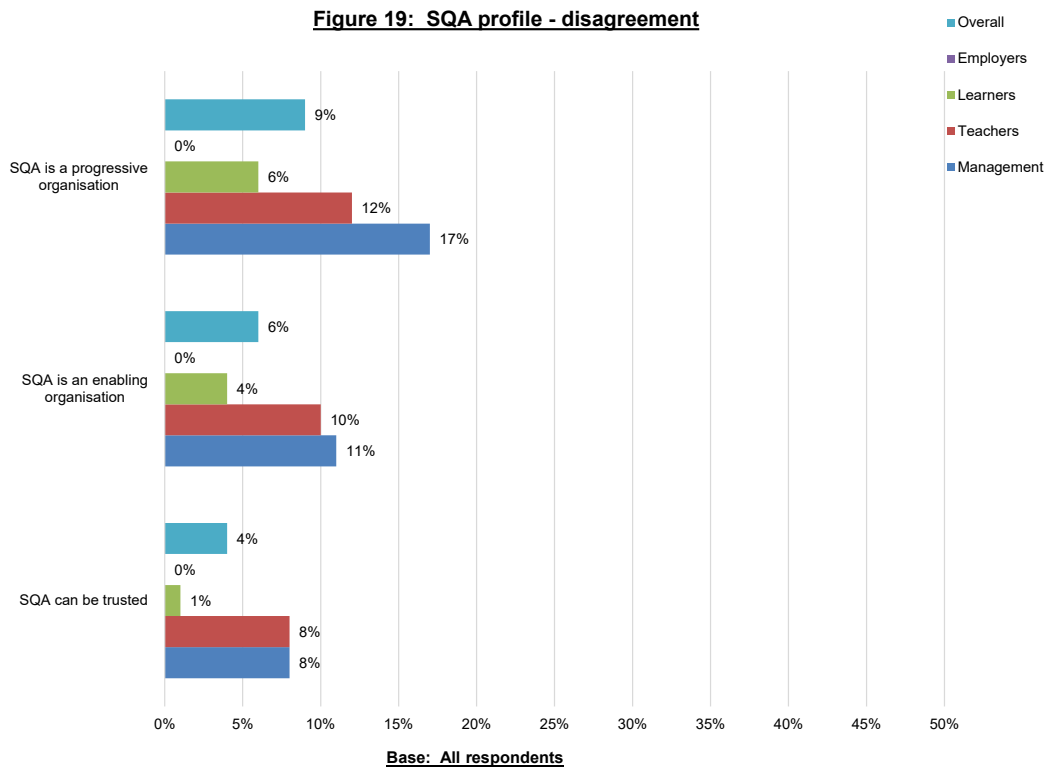
Levels of **disagreement** were far more limited and were as follows:

- 'SQA is a progressive organisation' disagreed with by one in ten respondents (9%) (ranging from 0% for employers to 17% for ETP managers)

- 'SQA enables organisation to carry out their roles effectively' disagreed with by one in twenty respondents (6%) (ranging from 0% for employers to 11% and 10% respectively for ETP managers and ETP teaching professionals)

- 'SQA can be trusted' disagreed with by very few – only 4% of respondents – (ranging from 0% for employers to 8% for both ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers)

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

Figure 20: SQA profile - unable to answer

Base: All respondents

Finally, the extent to which respondents felt unable to provide an answer in relation to each of the three statements under consideration tended to be minimal, although notable amongst employers:

- SQA being an enabling organisation (28%)
- SQA being a progressive organisation (21%)
- SQA can be trusted (14%)

Thereafter, in terms of the first two of these statements, it is of interest to note that one in ten ETP learners felt unable to express an opinion (both 10%).

8.0   KEY MESSAGES

8.1   SQA Profile

SQA is perceived as having high credibility across all four respondent types, with levels of perceived low credibility being far less evident.

SQA's perceived high credibility across all four respondent types is primarily driven by the fact that it is a well-known or well-established organisation and that it has good and well recognised qualifications.

There are high levels of satisfaction with SQA's overall performance across all four respondent types.

Although most respondents across all four respondent types – with the exception of employers – believe they know enough about SQA, there is scope for improvement in this regard for the three remaining respondent types.

There are limited desires amongst those who don't believe that they know enough about SQA to know more about SQA

8.2   SQA Qualifications Profile

Respondents believed that they know enough about a wide range of SQA qualifications of which they were aware, particularly SVQs, HNCs and HNDs, Highers, Advanced Highers and National 5s, with this least likely to be the case in respect of National 1s to National 3s.

Respondents also believed that a wide range of SQA qualifications of which they were aware had high credibility. However, this was least likely to be the case in National 1s to National 4s.

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Overall views on the credibility of qualifications that respondents had heard of changed for a core of respondents over the previous year and, for those for whom this was the case, it was far more likely that their views had become 'more positive' rather than 'less positive'.

8.3   SQA Contact and Communication Profiles

Contacts from or with SQA were noted by half of respondents and, amongst those for whom there was contact, there were high levels of satisfaction with these contacts, primarily because SQA is quick to respond to queries and is helpful during contacts.

There are high levels of satisfaction with communications from SQA both overall and in terms of appropriateness of detail in communications and how timely and clear they are.

High levels of satisfaction with communications from SQA are primarily driven by clarity but also by SQA's response to queries, the helpfulness of SQA communications and SQA staff demonstrating knowledge and being informative in their communications.

8.4   SQA Consultation and Engagement Profile

There were high ratings of SQA in terms of how well it consults or engages with the respondent types participating in the research, with this being primarily driven by the fact that there is a belief that consultation and engagement activities are at a good level and of quality.

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8.5   SQA Values Profile

> Most respondents view SQA as an organisation that can be trusted, is an enabling organisation and is a progressive organisation. In all regards, however, there is potential for improvement, particularly in terms of the last two indicators.
>
> Relatively few respondents disagreed with each of the statements under consideration and employers were least able to express an opinion in respect of these statements.

8.5   SQA Values Profile