



Audit Report

Scottish Qualifications Authority

25 March 2020

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1 Background

This was the fifteenth audit of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) since it was approved as an awarding body by SQA Accreditation in 1990.

SQA's functions are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996 as amended by the Scottish Qualifications Act 2002. This audit applied to the awarding function in relation to all elements of the SQA accredited provision.

SQA offers a range of accredited provision, most notably with respect to Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) but also offers regulatory and licensing qualifications. The Audit Team was provided with access to awarding body staff and documentation.

1.1 Scope

SQA Accreditation carries out quality assurance activity in line with its *Quality Assurance of Approved Awarding Bodies Policy*. This states the type and frequency of our quality assurance activities, describes our reporting procedures and indicates how the awarding body's Quality Enhancement Rating is calculated.

This was a limited scope audit of SQA, therefore, not all aspects of the awarding body's systems, procedures and performance have been considered in this report to the same depth as is the case with a full audit.

SQA Accreditation audit reports are written by exception focusing only on those areas where corrective action is required or recommended. Consequently, this approach to audit reporting does not detail areas where compliance or good practice was found.

The audit was designed to ensure SQA complies with SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements namely:

- ◆ *SQA Accreditation's Regulatory Principles (2014)*
- ◆ all *Regulatory Principles Directives*
- ◆ the awarding body's Accreditation Licence

Awarding body documentation considered for review by the Audit Team includes all documents banked on SQA's SharePoint site at the time of audit and information supplied to support audit activity. Restricted or commercially sensitive information gathered during SQA Accreditation's quality assurance activities is treated in the strictest confidence.

1.2 Audit Report and Action Plan Timescales

SQA audit date:	25 March 2020
Audit Report approved by Accreditation Co-ordination Group on:	22 April 2020
Audit Report to be signed by SQA:	4 June 2020
Action Plan to be emailed to regulation@sqa.org.uk by SQA:	4 June 2020

The process will apply in relation to the timescales specified above:

- ◆ The awarding body will be sent a signed copy of the Audit Report by email.
- ◆ The awarding body must sign the copy of the Audit Report and return by email to SQA Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified above.
- ◆ The awarding body will also be emailed a copy of the Action Plan.
- ◆ The awarding body must complete and return the Action Plan in accordance with the timescale specified above and email this in Microsoft Word format to regulation@sqa.org.uk.
- ◆ SQA Accreditation will confirm when the Action Plan is appropriate to address the Issues and present it to Accreditation Co-ordination Group (ACG) for approval.
- ◆ Following approval by ACG, the awarding body will be sent a signed copy of the approved Action Plan by email.
- ◆ The awarding body must sign the copy of the Action Plan and return by email to SQA Accreditation.

The findings of this Audit Report and the associated Action Plan will be published on SQA Accreditation's website following signed agreement.

SQA Accreditation will continually monitor progress towards completion of the proposed actions identified in the Action Plan and update the awarding body's Quality Enhancement Rating as appropriate.

1.3 Summary of Audit Issues and Recommendations

An Issue has been recorded where evidence shows that the awarding body is not compliant with SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements. The awarding body must address the Issues and specify corrective and preventative measures to address them through its Action Plan.

The Action Plan is emailed to SQA as a separate document to the Audit Report, and must be submitted to SQA Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified in 1.2.

As a result of the audit and post-audit activities, one Issue has been recorded and one Recommendation has been noted.

Issue	Detail of Issue recorded	Risk rating
1. Principles 6, 9 and 15	A review of the learner certificates supplied by SQA showed that the awarding body had coded the components of the endorsement separately and as a result this had led to credit being awarded multiple times.	Low

A Recommendation has been noted where SQA Accreditation considers there is potential for enhancement. The awarding body is advised to address any Recommendations in order to reinforce ongoing continuous improvement. However, measures to correct or prevent these are not mandatory and therefore do not form part of the Action Plan.

Recommendation	Detail of Recommendation noted
1. Principle 10	It was recommended that the awarding body should engage with the Scottish Joint Industry Board (SJIB) to influence and simplify the section on roles and responsibilities within the assessment strategy so that the roles of awarding bodies and the SJIB in relation to external verification activities are transparent and clearly defined.

1.4 Risk Rating of Issues

SQA Accreditation assigns a rating to each Issue recorded, depending on the impact on or risk to the awarding body's operations, its SQA accredited qualifications and/or the learner. Issues recorded during the audit will count towards SQA's Quality Enhancement Rating which will, in turn, contribute towards future quality assurance activity. Further detail on how the Quality Enhancement Rating is calculated can be found on the [SQA Accreditation website](#).

2 Detail of Audit Issues and Recommendations

The following sections detail Issues recorded and Recommendations noted against SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements.

2.1 Issues

Regulatory Principle 6. The awarding body and its providers shall maintain accurate documents, records and data.

and

Regulatory Principle 9. The awarding body shall ensure that it has robust systems and processes for the identification, design, development, implementation and review of qualifications, which meet the needs of users.

and

Regulatory Principle 15. The awarding body and its providers shall have effective, reliable and secure systems for the registration and certification of learners.

Following a re-accreditation submission for the SVQ in Winter Services (Construction) at SCQF Level 5, the Audit Team were alerted to a potential Issue regarding the allocation and certification of unit credit in construction qualifications which contained endorsements.

In March 2020, Accreditation Co-ordination Group agreed that the SVQ in Winter Services (Construction) at SCQF Level 5 should be extended until the issue was resolved. In addition, the SVQ in Associated Industrial Services Occupations (Construction) Passive Fire Protection at SCQF Level 5 and SVQ in Plant Operations (Construction) at SCQF Level 5 needed to be reviewed as part of the upcoming awarding body audit.

Prior to the audit, the Lead Auditor requested learner certificates for the pathways that had been identified as potentially problematic. The awarding body was extremely quick in providing these. The certificates requested were for two pathways from the SVQ in Plant Operations, namely Loader Securer pathway and In-shore Marine Plant Pathway.

The Lead Auditor also spoke with the Qualifications and Standards Policy Manager for Scotland at the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) to ascertain how endorsements should be certificated and how much credit should be assigned. The CITB stated that endorsements must only be certificated at unit level and not by component. The CITB had ensured through its credit and levelling processes that the final credit and level for each unit endorsement reflected the credit of all components.

A review of the learner certificates supplied by SQA showed that the awarding body had coded the components of the endorsement separately, and as a result this had led to credit being awarded multiple times. This has been recorded as **Issue 1**.

In the case of the In-shore Marine Plant pathway unit VR403, which is worth 36 credit points at SCQF Level 5, this had been awarded 6 times — a total of 216 credits where only 36 should have been certificated.

In the case of the Loader Securer pathway unit VR397, which is worth 16 credit points at SCQF Level 5, this had been awarded 4 times — a total of 64 credit points where only 16 should have been certificated.

Through discussion with SQA staff, it was acknowledged that this was attributed to the limitations of their systems being able to recognise individual endorsements without certificating them multiple times. It was extremely encouraging to note that SQA recognises this situation and will be working with the CITB and certification scheme bodies to find acceptable solutions to this in the very near future.

SQA has also provided SQA Accreditation with uptake figures and only one pathway showing a low number of entries, however, the matter needs to be addressed so that the awarding body is correctly certificating the approved qualification structures of existing and future accreditation submissions.

2.2 Recommendations

Regulatory Principle 10. The awarding body shall ensure that it has the necessary arrangements and resources for the effective delivery, assessment and quality assurance of SQA accredited qualifications.

The Audit Team and SQA staff had a discussion around the external verification and assessment arrangements outlined in the SummitSkills Consolidated Assessment Strategy, approved June 2015, in particular around the relationship between Scottish Electrical Contractors Training Trust (SECTT) and the Scottish Joint Industry Board (SJIB).

The Qualifications Manager (QM) explained that, in addition to the external verification activities that SQA carries out, SJIB also carry out their own verification activity contracting SQA external verifiers to visit centres to verify the training and materials as well as the training environment.

It was agreed that the arrangements in place met the requirements of the assessment strategy, however, the arrangements within the strategy itself are complex and open to interpretation. The QM stated that the assessment strategy was currently under review and it was recommended that the awarding body should engage with the SJIB to influence and simplify the section on roles and responsibilities within the assessment strategy so that the roles of awarding bodies and the SJIB in relation to external verification activities are transparent and clearly defined. This has been noted as **Recommendation 1**.

3 Acceptance of Audit Findings

For and on behalf of SQA:

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