

SQA Accreditation Annual Review 2019–20

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SQA Accreditation

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Chief Executive's statement

SQA Accreditation has a statutory remit under the Education (Scotland) Act 1996 to accredit and quality assure qualifications and qualification products in Scotland. The work carried out by SQA Accreditation safeguards the interests of learners, apprentices, employers, funding bodies, providers, parents and the Scottish Government.



During 2019–20, just under 132,000 learners were registered for qualifications that are accredited by us, and just over 104,000 learners received a certificate for their accredited qualification.

COVID-19 has impacted greatly upon the vocational education landscape and, in just a few months, the environment has changed significantly. All SQA Accreditation staff are working remotely, and I want to thank them for their hard work and dedication in working with the approved awarding bodies to determine whether the accredited qualifications can continue to be delivered and assessed. Because of this work, the vast majority of accredited qualifications can continue to be delivered and assessed without requiring any form of modification. I also want to thank all the staff in awarding bodies, Scotland's colleges and private training providers for their help in completing this work.

Awarding body audits and provider monitoring activity continue to be an essential part of our quality assurance role. During 2019–20 SQA Accreditation audited 12 awarding bodies, and carried out two post-approval visits and 39 provider monitoring visits (PMVs), following our risk-based approach to regulation. In the year ahead we will be working with awarding bodies and their training providers to introduce more remote auditing activity wherever possible.

We approved one new awarding body in the course of the year, and we continue to seek opportunities to work with new organisations.

In 2019–20, the Accreditation section dealt with and processed 539 submissions. This includes the approval of qualification products, accreditations, re-accreditations, extensions, withdrawals and credit rating of qualifications.

As I look forward to 2020–2021, SQA Accreditation's role in the maintenance of qualification standards is perhaps more important than it has ever been. We will continue to work with and support our approved awarding bodies. Our role to retain public confidence in accredited qualifications remains at the heart of what we do.

Fiona Robertson
Chief Executive

1 Introduction

1.1 About SQA Accreditation

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has two distinct and autonomous parts:

- ◆ SQA the awarding body
- ◆ SQA Accreditation

SQA Accreditation has a statutory remit under the Education (Scotland) Act 1996 to accredit and quality assure qualifications in Scotland, thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers and the Scottish Government.

We do this by independently approving and regulating awarding bodies operating in Scotland, and accrediting their qualifications. We accredit any type of qualification, other than degrees, including:

- ◆ **Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)**
- ◆ **Regulatory and Licensing qualifications (R&L)** — qualifications that are required to perform regulated job roles, including security qualifications and personal licence certificates
- ◆ **‘Other’ qualifications** — including exam-based, and competence-based qualifications that are neither SVQs nor Regulatory, including diplomas, certificates and awards in subjects such as Accounting and Facilities Management

SQA Accreditation also plays a central role in advising and supporting standards setting organisations (SSOs) in the development and review of National Occupational Standards (NOS), and also with qualification development. We are responsible for approving and quality assuring NOS and qualification products including qualification structures, assessment strategies and Core Skills signposting.

In addition, SQA Accreditation is an approved Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) credit rating body, and is the only body with the authority to credit rate SVQs.

SQA Accreditation consistently aims to work efficiently and effectively to fulfil its responsibilities. Our work is underpinned by a set of regulatory principles, regulatory principles directives and the Accreditation Licence. Operational activities are driven by the responsive nature of our team and their aim to continually review and improve processes and systems for the benefit of all external and internal customers. Our three main areas of work are:

- ◆ accreditation of qualifications
- ◆ regulation
- ◆ research and statistics

This Annual Review provides a summary of the operational activities carried out by SQA Accreditation in 2019–20, as well as project group activity and other events. Key performance statistics relating to accredited qualifications and awarding body regulatory activity are also presented.

2 Operational activity 2019–20

In this review we summarise SQA Accreditation's annual operational activity from April 2019 to the end of March 2020. We provide an overview of significant developments in 2019–20 and details of how we met our operational objectives through project groups.

2.1 Standards and Frameworks commissioning

This was another challenging year for our team of Accreditation Managers in the quality assurance and approval of the products reviewed and developed through the Standards and Frameworks commissioning programme. Contracts to standards setting organisations (SSOs) and delivery partners were not issued until August 2019, so the operational period for work to be completed was reduced to only seven months.

Close working relationships with SSOs and delivery partners maximised results for the outputs of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks for Scotland. Our quality assurance colleagues in Northern Ireland and Wales similarly supported the review, revision and production of National Occupational Standards (NOS).

We continue to work closely with all of the aforementioned stakeholders, and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), which is responsible for managing the commissioning and funding of the programme on behalf of the three devolved administrations, to ensure the best possible products are approved and made available for all who use them.

3 Events

Representatives from SQA Accreditation again attended the annual conference of the Federation for Awarding Bodies (FAB) on 10–11 October 2019. This is an important opportunity to engage with the wider awarding body network and to learn about the developments, opportunities and challenges they currently face. This year SQA Accreditation gave a seminar on the functions of the team, explaining regulation and accreditation, while also highlighting the benefits of becoming an approved awarding body.

SQA Accreditation's Regulation section staff also attended the Regulators, Scrutiny and Accountability in Scotland conference on 12 September 2019. This was valuable, as it brought multiple Scottish regulators into one forum and allowed open dialogue around Scotland's regulatory environment, including current and future approaches to the regulation of Scottish public services.

4 Project groups

To ensure that the objectives identified in SQA Accreditation's *Operational Plan 2019–20* could be realised, a series of internal project groups were established. These project groups included representatives from each of the SQA Accreditation sections:

- ◆ Accreditation
- ◆ Regulation
- ◆ Information and Research
- ◆ Administration

The operational activities carried out by project groups are summarised here.

4.1 SVQ research project

The Information and Research section designed a research project to evaluate whether SVQs were meeting the needs and experiences of stakeholders and learners. A project group consisting of members from all sections within SQA Accreditation was formed to undertake activities such as:

- ◆ identifying appropriate questions to ask learners and stakeholders
- ◆ providing opportunities to engage with awarding bodies and other appropriate stakeholders
- ◆ assisting with the research process

This project and therefore the project group will continue into 2020–21 and is part of the operational plan for the coming financial year.

4.2 Regulatory Principle Review project

Our Regulatory Principles (RPs) were last reviewed and published in 2014. SQA Accreditation objectives for the year 2019–20 included a project designed to review the current RPs in their entirety to ensure they remain fit for purpose. A project group was formed consisting of members from the Accreditation section and the whole of the Regulation section team. The review intended to achieve the following objectives:

- review RP 1–15 and amend if required
- review RP 1–15 and split out further if felt necessary
- review RP 1–15 and check overlap with ISO 9001:2015
- review RP 1–15 and ensure guidance aligns with any changes

To start with we asked our approved awarding bodies for their views on the current RPs. We gathered their feedback and fed this into regular project review meetings throughout 2019–20. The result was a revised Regulatory Principles document with 19 principles. The increase came from the introduction of one new RP and the splitting of some of the larger RPs into smaller ones. The RPs were also split into those related to business activities and those related to awarding body activities, with links between RPs identified for ease of use and reference.

The revised first draft Regulatory Principles document was presented to the Accreditation Committee in January 2020, and approved. The next phase was to move to consultation, which has been delayed due to COVID-19.

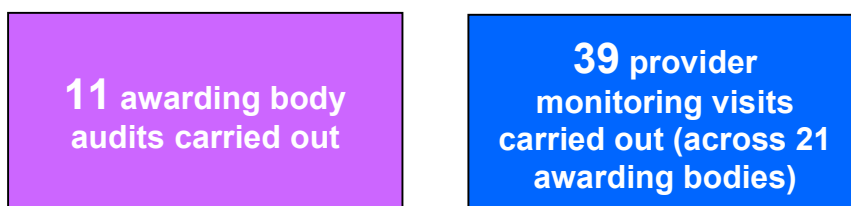
5 Audit activity 2019–20

SQA Accreditation’s regulatory function includes the approval of awarding bodies, audits of awarding bodies, and provider monitoring visits (PMVs). This section gives an overview of regulatory activity for the period 2019–20. (Data has only been included in the following analyses where reports had been agreed by both regulator and awarding body by the end of 2019–20.)

SQA Accreditation carries out monitoring of all SQA-approved awarding bodies. In 2019–20, SQA Accreditation’s quality assurance processes were based on a range of measures, and compliance was assessed against the [Regulatory Principles \(2014\)](#) and the associated [Regulatory Principles Directives](#). All analysis in this section is based on the audit and provider monitoring activity during this period.

Awarding body audits are based on a three-year cycle, depending on their level of risk. PMVs aim to check the effectiveness of the awarding body’s systems and enable SQA Accreditation to identify any areas of concern that may help to inform our regulatory activities and safeguard the learner experience.

SQA Accreditation conducted the following number of audits and PMV’s in 2019–20:



5.1 Awarding bodies

SQA Accreditation is responsible for approving awarding bodies to deliver qualifications of social, economic, environmental or cultural benefit to Scotland.

To achieve approval, organisations must demonstrate that they can meet SQA Accreditation’s Regulatory Requirements. In 2019–20 one organisation gained SQA Accreditation approved awarding body status: SFJ Awards.

SFJ Awards is a national awarding body that develops and offers qualifications that help people working in justice and community safety, the armed forces, local government and healthcare to develop their skills and operate more effectively. SFJ Awards are part of the Workforce Development Trust, which is an organisation that includes Skills for Health, Skills for Justice and People 1st International. This awarding body currently has one accredited qualification:

- ◆ SVQ in Regulatory Services at SCQF level 7

At the end of the operational year 2019–20, there were 38 awarding bodies approved by SQA Accreditation. The [full list of approved awarding bodies](#) can be found on our website and in Appendix 1 to this document.

5.2 Analysis of Issues and Recommendations

Issues are recorded by the audit team where evidence shows that the awarding body is not compliant with SQA Accreditation’s Regulatory Principles, posing a potential risk to learners and/or to the integrity of the qualification. Awarding bodies must address the Issues via an action plan. During an audit or PMV, an Issue may be raised against multiple Regulatory Principles and/or Regulatory Directives.

A Recommendation can be noted if the audit team considers that an awarding body’s systems and processes meet the Regulatory Principles but it has been identified that there is potential for improvement. There is no requirement for the awarding body to take action in response to this, but it would be seen as good practice and a demonstration of continuous improvement. During an audit or PMV, one Recommendation may be raised against multiple Regulatory Principles and/or Regulatory Directives. Our regulatory requirements can be viewed in the [Regulation section](#) of our SQA Accreditation website.

The total number of audit Issues raised in 2019–20 was 19.

The total number of PMV Issues raised in 2019–20 was 39.

The total number of recommendations raised in 2019–20 was 38.

The following table shows the total number of Issues and Recommendations recorded against each principle during audit and PMV activity for 2019–20 (this will not match with total Issues above as one Issue can be assigned to more than one principle):

Regulatory Principle	Issues raised at audit	Issues raised at PMV	Recommendations
Principle 1	1	0	1
Principle 2	1	0	0
Principle 3	2	0	1
Principle 4	3	1	3
Principle 5	1	0	2
Principle 6	5	22	9
Principle 7	3	2	3
Principle 8	0	1	0
Principle 9	2	0	2
Principle 10	4	8	15
Principle 11	1	1	1
Principle 12	0	2	1

Principle 13	2	1	1
Principle 14	4	3	1
Principle 15	2	1	1
Total	31	42	41

Table 1: Number of Issues and Recommendations by Regulatory Principle

The higher number of Issues identified under Principles 6 and 10 at provider level highlights the strength of the PMV process in identifying areas for improvement for awarding bodies at an operational level.

The number of Issues identified is reviewed by the Regulation section in order to identify trends and to ensure fitness for purpose of the Regulatory Requirements.

During 2019–20, audit and PMVs found the greatest number of Issues recorded against Regulatory Principles 6 and 10:

- ◆ Principle 6: The awarding body and its providers shall maintain accurate documents, records and data
- ◆ 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

Some examples of the PMV Issues raised were:

- ◆ For two of the Workplace Core Skills being assessed at a provider, the assessment packs used did not involve tasks or skills suited to the requirements of the candidate’s working environment.
- ◆ The provider-devised Equal Opportunities Policy for a provider does not make reference to both the Equality Act (2010) and the nine protected characteristics.
- ◆ At an examination venue, the examination papers had been stored in an unlocked cupboard within an open-plan area before the examinations for five days and after the examination for several hours.
- ◆ The accommodation for both e-examinations held at the venue meant that candidates were not without disruption and the invigilator did not remain present in the room, as required.

Various Recommendations were identified during audit and PMVs. The greatest number of recommendations were recorded against Regulatory Principle 10:

6 Accreditation activity 2019–20

SQA Accreditation’s core functions include the approval of awarding bodies, approval of qualification products, accreditation of qualifications, and credit rating approval. This section gives an overview of accreditation activity for the period 2019–20.

6.1 Accredited qualifications

At the end of 2019–20, SQA Accreditation had a total of **790 accredited qualifications**¹. This is made up of the following qualification types:

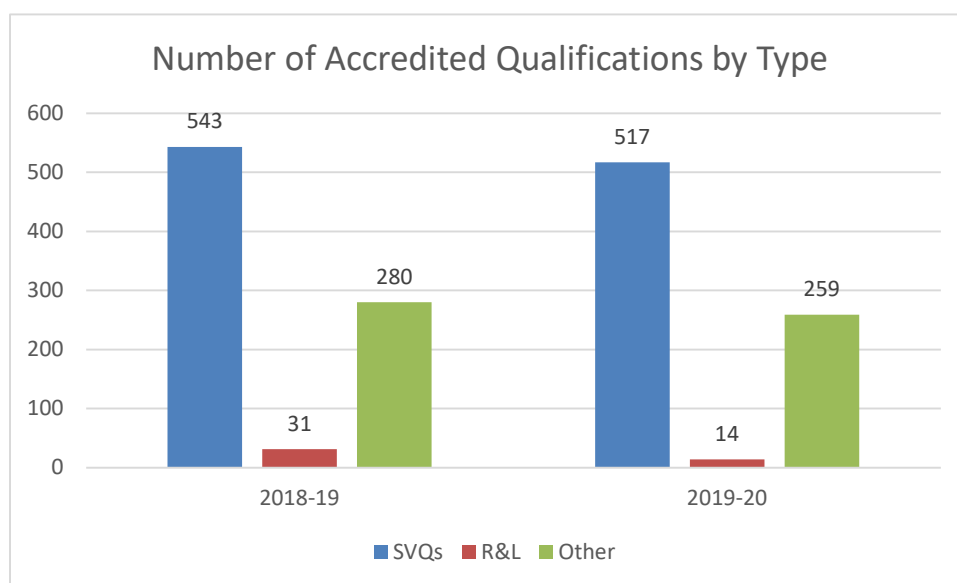


Figure 1: Number of accredited qualifications by type and year

6.1.1 Accredited Scottish Vocational Qualifications

At the end of 2019–20 there were **517 accredited SVQs**, which is a decrease of 26 qualifications compared to the previous financial year’s total of 543.

SVQs are offered by 17 approved awarding bodies, and account for 65.4% of all accredited qualifications.

6.1.2 Accredited Regulatory and Licensing qualifications

At the end of 2019–20 there were **14 accredited Regulatory and Licensing qualifications**, which is a decrease of 17 qualifications compared to 31 in 2018–19.

Regulatory and Licensing qualifications are offered by eight approved awarding bodies, and account for 1.8% of all currently accredited qualifications.

6.1.3 Accredited ‘Other’ qualifications

At the end of 2019–20 there were **259 accredited ‘Other’ qualifications**, which is a decrease of 21 qualifications on the previous year.

¹ Qualifications that have lapsed are not included.

'Other' accredited qualifications are currently offered by 29 approved awarding bodies and account for 32.8% of all accredited qualifications.

6.2 Withdrawn qualifications

A total of 53 qualifications were withdrawn during 2019–20. This total comprised:

- ◆ 35 SVQs
- ◆ Regulatory and Licensing qualifications
- ◆ 11 'Other' qualifications

The most common reasons for withdrawal included:

- ◆ low or zero uptake, as a result of SQA Accreditation invoking the [Zero Uptake Policy](#)
- ◆ no future demand

For further detailed information on the performance of our accredited qualifications on a quarterly basis, please see our [Quarterly Statistics Reports](#).

6.3 Market performance

Data on the performance of SQA accredited qualifications is collected from approved awarding bodies on a quarterly basis. Quarterly data is compiled to produce financial year totals for candidate registrations and certifications. Tables 3–6 below present annual totals for SVQs, Regulatory and Licensing, and 'Other' qualifications, as well as Workplace Core Skills, and compare the data to previous years' totals.

6.3.1 SVQ market performance

The total number of registrations and certifications is tracked and compared to previous financial years.

In 2019–20 the number of registrations and certifications showed a minor increase compared to 2018–19:

- ◆ registrations increased by 3% (1,462 registrations)
- ◆ certifications increased by 3% (935 certifications)

Year	Registrations	± (%)	Certifications	± (%)
2014–15	45,920	-5	35,358	+3
2015–16	46,620	+2	33,856	-4
2016–17	44,538	-4	35,220	+4
2017–18	43,838	-2	33,414	-5
2018–19	44,811	+2	33,763	+1
2019–20	46,273	+3	34,698	+3

Table 2: SVQ registrations and certifications by financial year

6.3.2 Regulatory and Licensing qualifications market performance

Regulatory and Licensing registrations and certifications showed relatively minor changes in comparison to 2018–19:

- ◆ registrations decreased by 8% (1,870 registrations)
- ◆ certifications increased by 9% (1,995 certifications)

Year	Registrations	± (%)	Certifications	± (%)
2014–15	49,737	+67	48,161	+71
2015–16	30,792	-38	29,211	-39
2016–17	30,462	-1	29,199	0
2017–18	22,687	-26	20,408	-30
2018–19	21,488	-5	21,542	+6
2019–20	19,618	-8	19,547	-9

Table 3: Regulatory and Licensing qualifications registrations and certifications by financial year

6.3.3 ‘Other’ qualifications market performance

There were comparatively minor changes in ‘Other’ qualification registrations and certifications in 2019–20, compared to 2018–19:

- ◆ registrations increased by 7% (4,320 registrations)
- ◆ certifications increased by 2% (1,135 certifications)

Year	Registrations	± (%)	Certifications	± (%)
2014–15	39,766	+10	24,293	+1
2015–16	39,260	-1	23,492	-3
2016–17	37,975	-3	24,534	+4
2017–18	50,313	+32	33,874	+38
2018–19	61,361	+22	48,845	+44
2019–20	65,681	+7	49,980	+2

Table 4: ‘Other’ qualifications registrations and certifications by financial year

The performance of ‘Other’ competence-based accredited qualifications will continue to be monitored on a quarterly and annual basis.

While SVQs remain the Scottish Government’s qualification of choice for inclusion in Modern Apprenticeship frameworks, ‘Other’ accredited qualifications may be approved for inclusion where there is no appropriate SVQ. As a result, an increasing number of ‘Other’ qualifications are now included in Modern Apprenticeship frameworks, which could go some way to explaining the growing annual uptake of these qualifications.

6.3.4 Workplace Core Skills market performance

Workplace Core Skills were specifically developed to assess core skills in a work environment. They contribute to employability and are a component of Modern Apprenticeships in Scotland.

At the end of 2019–20 there were 145 accredited Workplace Core Skills.

Registrations for Workplace Core Skills have decreased by 1% (404 registrations) compared to 2019–20, and certifications have increased by 8% (2,420 certifications).

Year	Registrations	± (%)	Certifications	± (%)
2014–15	40,689	-11	33,967	-16
2015–16	38,600	-5	30,998	-9
2016–17	37,295	-3	32,545	+5
2017–18	38,654	+4	30,636	-6
2018–19	38,093	-1	30,536	-0.3
2019–20	37,689	-1	32,956	+8

Table 5: Workplace Core Skills registrations and certifications by financial year

The number of registrations and certifications of qualifications and Workplace Core Skills is continually monitored, and the information is published in SQA Accreditation’s Quarterly Statistics Reports, which can be found in the [Research and Statistics](#) section of our dedicated SQA Accreditation website.

6.4 SQA Accreditation — key figures summary

19 Provider Monitoring Visits reported to the Accreditation Co-ordination Group	11 Awarding body audits carried out
131,572 Candidate registrations across all accredited qualifications	104,219 Candidate certifications across all accredited qualifications
1 New awarding body received approval by SQA Accreditation	38 Awarding bodies in total approved by SQA Accreditation

7 Our plan for 2020–21

We will continue to support the Scottish Government with the Modern Apprenticeship programme, and the Standards and Frameworks programme, by offering advice and guidance on continuous improvement, with particular focus on commissioning and quality assurance systems and processes.

We will carry out research into the SVQ brand to investigate whether it continues to meet the needs and expectations of learners, employers and other stakeholders. We will seek the views of as wide a range of stakeholders as possible, including learners, colleges, private training providers and employers. This research will allow us to determine what changes, if any, need to be made to the SVQ model to ensure that it is fit for purpose.

Having reviewed our Regulatory Principles in 2019–20, we will consult on these principles, seeking views primarily from our approved awarding bodies, although the consultation will welcome comments from other stakeholders.

Appendix 1: Approved awarding bodies

Awarding bodies approved by SQA Accreditation as of 31 March 2020.

Abbreviation	Awarding body
AFS	Alcohol Focus Scotland
ASQ	Associated Sports Qualifications
AAT	Association of Accounting Technicians
ACCA	Association of Chartered Certified Accountants
BIIAB	British Institute of Innkeepers Awarding Body
CIH	Chartered Institute of Housing
CMI	Chartered Management Institute
Not Applicable	City & Guilds of London Institute
Not Applicable	EduQual
ECITB	Engineering Construction Industry Training Board
ESB	English Speaking Board
EAL	Excellence, Achievement and Learning Limited
FAA	First Aid Awards Limited
FAQ	Future (Awards & Qualifications) Limited
GQA	GQA Qualifications Limited
Not applicable	Highfield Qualifications
IMI	IMI Awards Limited
IQ	Industry Qualifications
ITC	ITC First
Not applicable	Lantra Awards Limited
MPQC	Mineral Products Qualifications Council
NEBOSH	National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health
Not applicable	PAA/VQ-SET
Not applicable	Pearson Education Limited
Not applicable	PIABC Limited
QFI	Qualifications for Industry
RAD	Royal Academy of Dance
Not applicable	RSL
Not applicable	SafeCert Awards Limited

STA	Safety Training Awards Limited
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
Not applicable	SFEDI Awards
Not applicable	SFJ Awards
Not applicable	Smart Awards Ltd.
BHSQL	The British Horse Society Qualifications Limited
Not applicable	The Prince's Trust
VTCT	Vocational Training Charitable Trust
WCSM	Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers