

Evaluation of:

- **Stakeholder perceptions of the SCQF Partnership and progress of embedding the framework across sectors**
- **The impact that the SCQF has on learners**

Final report for

SCQF Partnership

Table of Contents	Page
1 Executive summary	3
2 Introduction	7
2.1 Background	8
2.2 Previous research	8
3 Approach.....	10
3.1 Stakeholder interviews	10
3.2 Learner consultation	11
3.3 Issues identified	11
4 Analysis of stakeholder interviews.....	12
4.1 Perceptions of the SCQF Partnership and the Executive Team	12
4.2 The Framework.....	16
4.3 Embedding the Framework.....	23
4.4 The future.....	29
4.5 Areas for celebration	30
4.6 Areas for consideration.....	31
5 Learner responses.....	34
5.1 School learners.....	34
5.2 College and university students.....	40
5.3 Work based learners.....	48
6 Conclusions.....	54
Appendix 1	56

1 Executive summary

This research was carried out over three months, March to May 2010, and has captured the views of both stakeholders and a cross section of Scotland's learners.

Stakeholder views were captured using semi structured face to face interviews. Stakeholder feedback has been very positive and exceptionally supportive of the work carried out by the SCQF Partnership and Executive Team to date.

Throughout the report, we differentiate between the SCQF Partnership Board (also referred to as 'the Partnership'), the SCQF Partner Organisations themselves; the SCQF (also referred to as 'the Framework') and the Executive Team (the 8 staff who are employed by the SCQF Partnership).

We would like to emphasise two extremely important issues up front.

1. The SCQF Executive Team is very small. They have achieved a huge amount with very limited resources. Cuts in funding would severely jeopardise the continued development of the Framework and the excellent progress made to date.
2. Without real commitment from Forum members, learners and organisations across Scotland (and beyond) will not have the support or adequate knowledge to benefit from the SCQF.

There are a number of other messages that have come from the evaluation and these are included below:

The Partnership / Executive Team

- The work of the SCQF Executive Team and the development of the Framework have progressed well within the constraints of their limited resources.
- Most of those consulted understand the general principles of what the SCQF Partnership is trying to achieve.
- The SCQF is considered a good fit with government and national objectives, in particular the lifelong learning and Curriculum for Excellence agendas.
- It was asked whether there was representation from the SCQF Executive Team on the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Management Board, as this was viewed as a good idea for the SCQF

Although there is validity in fostering closer practical links with Learning and Teaching Scotland to assist with embedding the Framework through the CfE, it is not considered practical for a member of the Executive Team to be represented on the CfE Board. Several members of the Partnership Board are already involved and can adequately represent SCQF where necessary.

A particularly emotive and recurring theme highlighted the amount of work that the Executive Team has managed to do with a very limited budget. It is recognised by all stakeholders that the scope of the Partnership's work could be much greater with more resources to hand.

'The SCQF Executive Team is a small tight group that function well together. They are efficient, helpful and have achieved a level of engagement that far exceeds what would be expected from an organisation of their size'

In a time of public sector cut backs and budgetary constraints, it is important that the Partnership continues to be supported to build on the very solid foundations that have been built around the SCQF to date.

The Framework

- It was suggested that the Framework would yield greater kudos if the government, and other relevant bodies, wrote the SCQF into their letters of guidance, as they do with SQA
- Most of those consulted view the enabling design of the Framework as inclusive and potentially all encompassing but there is a lack of consensus as to whether the Framework should be linked to funding.
- Publicity could be improved with more targeted promotion of the Framework focused on those who need to understand the detail. There is also recognition that marketing and promotion is expensive and that the SCQF team do not have the available resources to have a high impact in the short term.
- Stakeholders agree that the SCQF Framework is fit for purpose, however they highlight that there is still some work to be done, including the potential for investigating the scope for the recognition of sub 10 hour learning.
- There is a clear gap between Forum members' enthusiasm for the Framework and the support they actually provide outside of Forum meetings. There needs to be a more formal process for ensuring that Forum members are carrying out their responsibilities and demonstrating their commitment to the SCQF practically. The Executive Team at the SCQF Partnership is very small and there is a real need for Forum members to take on some responsibility for promoting the SCQF.

One of the important points raised about the Framework is the fact that it is an inclusive, open Framework. This has been contrasted with the Framework south of the border and the bureaucracy that is associated with that.

Following recommendations from earlier research, the Partnership has made great efforts in producing material to promote the Framework and this has been recognised by stakeholders. Getting messages across to all learners takes time, however, and can only be achieved with the continued support of stakeholders, particularly those involved in the delivery of education.

Embedding the Framework

- Success in embedding the Framework has been mixed. It has been reasonably well communicated in mainstream education, but less so across parents, individual learners and employers. SCQF Partner organisations and other stakeholders should be taking more of an active part in promoting the Framework and leading the way in terms of encouraging best practice.

- Clarifying the link between the Framework and Curriculum for Excellence may help to increase awareness among teachers and school aged learners.
- The effectiveness of articulation and progression is dependent on individual organisations and how well they understand it. Translating this knowledge into practice is very varied.
- The SCQF Partnership may have a role in simplifying, yet ensuring the robustness of the process in relation to the recognition of prior learning.
- Further engagement should be sought with high profile employers, as this will encourage more organisations to be brought on board.

There is still some work to do in embedding the Framework across lifelong learning in Scotland. Stakeholders do accept that this is a long process, however. Previous research has recommended targeting younger learners to ensure the Framework is understood by school aged learners in the hope that it will then move through the lifelong learning environment with them as they grow up and get involved in other types of learning. The launch of the Curriculum for Excellence in September 2010 may influence the perceived importance of the SCQF and encourage teachers and learners to become more aware of their learning options and how they fit with more traditional progression routes.

There are still issues over articulation and progression, particularly at FE/HE level. This was highlighted by stakeholders as well as college students. The SCQF Partner organisations may have a role to play in future in aiding FE and HE institutions to be more clear about the progression routes available to students.

SCQF in the future

- The future for the SCQF is seen as offering more opportunity for continued work and roll out of the Framework and continued improvements in awareness across learners and employers. In a climate of continued constrained resources, areas for improvement should be prioritised.

Stakeholders were very positive about the future of the SCQF and the work that is being done by the Partnership. Several stakeholders requested 'more of the same' for the future, emphasising their support for the work done to date.

The Credit Rating process

- Credit rating activity has been considerable but stakeholders recognise that in most cases this has been lower than they would have liked. The SCQF Partnership should continue to encourage and support Credit Rating Bodies to credit rate as much of their provision as possible
- Suggested improvements tend to be around how to deal with sub 10 hour learning.

Credit rating may have a big impact on populating the Framework in future. The more available credit rating services are and the more efficient processes become, the more likely it is that learning providers and employers will know where to go and will get

better value for money. Third party credit rating services are currently dominated by only a few active providers which means that there is little choice and restrictive pricing at the moment.

The impact that the SCQF has on learners

Learners have a mixed and somewhat confused understanding of the SCQF. What is consistent is their lack of awareness of what the Framework is for and how they might use it to aid their learning decisions. Recommendations have been made throughout the section around learner consultation. The main actions to take forward are:

- Awareness raising across all learner groups
- Working with learning providers to help get a consistent and targeted message out to learners
- Working with FE and HE stakeholders to highlight student concerns over progression routes, their lack of clarity and lack of consistency
- Working with FE and HE stakeholders to enhance promotion of the SCQF amongst current students and how this might best be achieved
- Working with FE, HE and awarding bodies to encourage SCQF recognition on college and university certificates

The general consensus is that the Executive Team is doing a very good job under severely restricted resources. Levels of awareness have dramatically improved since surveys were first carried out in 2005 and learners have a better idea of what the SCQF is. There is always room for improvement and embedding a qualifications Framework is neither an easy nor a quick process. The Partnership should celebrate achievements to date and continue to work very closely with stakeholders (probably tasking stakeholders with greater, more accountable responsibilities) and build on the excellent work already done.

2 Introduction

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is a means for understanding the qualifications that are delivered in Scotland. It is a mechanism that is designed to simplify understanding of qualifications that are offered in Scotland and to make them comparable with other qualifications delivered here, in the rest of the UK and across Europe. Development of the Framework began around 2001 and the SCQF Partnership was formally established in 2006.

Throughout the report, we differentiate between the SCQF Partnership Board (also referred to as 'the Partnership'), the SCQF Partner Organisations themselves; the SCQF (also referred to as 'the Framework') and the Executive Team (the 8 staff who are employed by the SCQF Partnership).

The SCQF Partnership Board is made up of representatives from:

- the Association of Scotland's Colleges
- the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
- Scottish Ministers
- the Scottish Qualifications Authority
- Universities Scotland

The SCQF Partnership is not run to make a profit and is a registered charity.

To help the Partnership support the Framework, the SCQF Forum was established. The Forum is made up of senior representatives from the fields of education, business and communities in Scotland. The Forum is designed to provide advice to make sure the Framework continues to meet the needs of all learners, employers and other users of Scottish qualifications, both within Scotland and in Europe and the rest of the world.

The Framework now continues to be embedded across the qualifications spectrum in Scotland.

The Framework aims to map qualifications and assessed learning in Scotland to give learners, employers, educational institutes and training providers a tool to understand where qualifications 'sit' in relation to 12 distinct levels. It is a tool for guiding training choices for learners and for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) that individuals may have gathered in the past. The SCQF supports the Scottish Government's Lifelong Learning agenda. It adds value to the Scottish qualifications arena by:

- improving the transparency, consistency and transferability of qualifications, in Scotland and beyond
- simplifying the articulation of qualifications by defining them as part of a 12 level progression
- enabling vocational and employer based learning to be assessed and allotted appropriate 'credit' to fit within the Framework at the appropriate level
- supporting a logical progression route for learners through the accumulation of credit
- maximising the opportunities for credit transfer and recognition of prior learning
- helping to articulate the value of Scotland's qualifications nationally and abroad

2.1 Background

Mapping qualifications is now something that is done across the UK with the emergence of the Qualification and Credit Framework in England and the Credit and Qualification Framework for Wales. The Framework of Qualifications for Ireland and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning have also been set up.

Scotland is world famous for its high quality of education, but we are unique in our education system – particularly at school level where qualifications here are not necessarily easily understood elsewhere in the UK. UCAS tariff has helped to alleviate this, to some extent, but previous to the emergence of qualification Frameworks, there was no formal mechanism for mapping lifelong learning effectively. The SCQF is ambitious and it is high profile. The SCQF Partnership highlights the commitment it receives from the Scottish Government and the education sector in Scotland.

The SCQF Partnership produced its first strategic plan for 2007-2011, articulating the ambition for the development of the Framework and the strategic objectives for the Partnership under three distinct headings:

- maintain the quality and integrity of the SCQF
- promote and develop the Framework as a tool to support lifelong learning
- develop and maintain relationships with other Frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally

It is timely to review how the Partnership has succeeded in meeting its initial objectives and how, operationally, these have been progressed. These three points were considered throughout the evaluation and are referenced in appropriate sections in the main body of the report. Most stakeholders knew little about relationships with other Frameworks. Where knowledge did exist – mainly in Partner organisations, rather than Forum members – work done to date has been well received. The EQF referencing work, for instance, was praised as being very well managed. Some of those in the education sector have suggested that links with the EQF and QCF have strengthened relationships in the sector.

2.2 Previous research

Previous research¹ into the progress made with the SCQF has monitored awareness and understanding of the Framework between 2005 and 2008. Earlier research is a useful benchmark and as the Partnership has evolved considerably since 2005, becoming a formal company with a broader membership with a formal board and management structure, the changes over the five year period have been quite remarkable.

Even looking at basic indicators, such as the percentage of surveyed individuals who have heard of the SCQF, shows that there has been an increase from 8% in 2005 to almost 35% in 2008. By 2010, 45% of school children, 70% of students and around 85% of work based learners surveyed have at least some awareness of the SCQF. This shows a dramatic improvement over the five year period where the filtration of marketing material and, importantly, word of mouth has affected the level of awareness across learners in Scotland.

The SCQF Partnership has taken forward recommendations from earlier research and

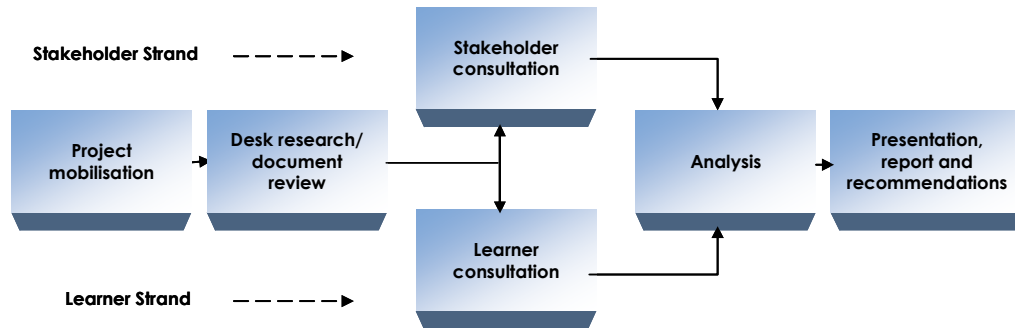
has benefited from doing so. Key groups of learners now appear to have a much greater understanding of the Framework and, although this is still quite weak amongst school aged learners, there has been a great improvement. The Partnership has also made great strides with the engagement of stakeholders, bringing a broader spectrum of stakeholders together to contribute to the work of the Executive Team and to represent a wider cross section of lifelong learners throughout Scotland.

The SCQF Partnership now has strategic and operational plans in place to take work forward to continue to embed the Framework in lifelong learning in Scotland, incorporating all from entry / access level through to post graduate and doctorate level.

This research examines the continued progress made by the SCQF Partnership, how they, and the Executive Team, are perceived by stakeholders and how successful they have been in embedding the SCQF. There is also a focus on the views of learners to gauge their levels of understanding of the SCQF today and what it is designed to do for them.

3 Approach

The approach was kept simple as this is a consultation to facilitate the collection of opinions from a broad group of stakeholders and learners. Our approach to this project is shown in our method diagram below.



3.1 Stakeholder interviews

Stakeholder interviews have provided an interesting and varied response which we believe will be very helpful in guiding the SCQF Partnership in future and also acting as a reassurance around the work and the quality of work carried out by them to date. The stakeholders we have consulted with are shown in table 1.

Stakeholders engaged

Table 1

Stakeholder Organisation	Stakeholder Organisation
SQA – Awarding Body & Accreditation	Scottish Social Services Council
Alliance of Sector Skills Councils	Scottish Trade Union Council
Association of Directors of Education in Scotland	Institute of Leadership & Management
Skills Development Scotland	Scotland's Colleges
CBI Scotland	Convention of Scottish Local Authorities
Federation of Small Businesses	Scottish Council for Development and Industry
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education	Scottish Funding Council
Learning and Teaching Scotland	Scotland's Colleges
Learning Connections	Scottish Training Federation
Learning Link Scotland	Universities Scotland
NHS Education Scotland	Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland
Scottish Enterprise	QAA Scotland
Scottish Police College	Scottish Government
City & Guilds	Scottish Qualifications Authority
West Lothian College (learner)	Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland

When consulting with stakeholders, we used a structured topic guide which focused on 20 main questions with five separate questions for stakeholders who also had credit rating status. The questions were designed to cover the following broad areas:

- Understanding of the aims and objectives of SCQF Partnership
- Benefits of the SCQF
- Effectiveness of Partnership / Executive Team

- Effectiveness of the Framework
- General views around acceptance / understanding of the Framework
- Publicity
- Comparisons with other Frameworks
- Tie in with national policy
- Embeddedness of SCQF
- Institutional and learner understanding
- Progression and articulation
- Recognition of prior learning
- The credit rating process

A copy of the full topic guide is included in appendix 1

3.2 Learner consultation

We identified and separated learners into specific categories in our project proposal. These were:

- School pupils
- FE / HE students
- Work based learners
- Community based learners

It is important to view learners this way so that responses are not too generic and so that, in line with the lifelong learning agenda, no learners are excluded from the consultation. We carried out the learner consultation via e-Survey so that they could be consulted unobtrusively. This also gave greater scope for reaching a wider learner population, giving a broader geographical representation across the country.

3.3 Issues identified

Issues identified early into the project included:

- Difficulties in getting feedback from S4, S5 and S6 pupils, due to the timing of the project and the clash with exam leave for SQA examinations.
- Accessing parents
- Schools and their preference for paper based surveys
- Accessing work based learners
- Accessing community learners

In some circumstances, the barrier to reaching these learners was technological and so we set up a freepost address and ensured that all e-Surveys were also made available in paper format for those who either had little access to IT or for whom the e-Survey was too much of an administrative issue to circulate effectively.

Community learners have been particularly difficult to reach. We have used a contact list provided by the Community Learning and Development team at the Scottish Government to try to access these important learners, but this has yielded a very poor response rate. Throughout the consultation, we have relied on intermediaries to distribute e-Surveys on our behalf. Colleges and universities have been very good at making surveys accessible to students and we have had a good response rate from school aged learners. Due to the very low response rate from community learners, this group has been excluded from our analysis.

4 Analysis of stakeholder interviews

4.1 Perceptions of the SCQF Partnership and the Executive Team

Effectiveness of the Partnership and the Executive Team

Stakeholders were asked about their perceptions of the Partnership and the Executive Team. All stakeholders were positive about the Executive Team and frequently referred to them as helpful and approachable. Some of the anecdotal evidence collected included the following comments:

'The SCQF Partnership is effective largely due to the goodwill of the Partner organisations working with them and the effective engagement and personality of SCQF staff'

'The SCQF [Executive] team is great. They work well together and in a way that the hierarchy is not apparent'

'The Partnership is improving. There is now greater dialogue with Partners and the key people in SCQF and with Partner organisations...It is a better arrangement now – it is an operating business with a strategic plan and a CEO, so it can drive its own objectives more effectively than it did previously'

'They have come a long way in a short period of time – in terms of developing and embedding the Framework'

'[The] SCQF [Executive] team is helpful to all members so we're happy to accommodate them. They are a unique organisation in Scotland'

Certainly, the SCQF team are well liked and perceived positively among stakeholders. The evolution of the SCQF team into a more formal entity with a strong chief executive has really helped to boost the profile of SCQF and this has been well received by stakeholders.

Stakeholders who are also members of the Partnership Board were very positive about the Executive Team's transparency, honesty and the support that they have provided. The Executive Team are seen as an effective voice for the SCQF Partnership.

'They have done a great job in development considering that they are working with limited resources'

Limited resources are frequently referred to by stakeholders who are acutely aware that the Executive Team is working with a very small human resource and very limited financial resource. Progress made with such limitations has been broadly applauded by stakeholders.

It was highlighted by one of the Partnership members that there may be too many people involved in the SCQF Forum

'The Forum has too many people involved and if they are not careful it may appear leaderless, despite the Chair being so far very effective.'

It is recognised that the Executive Team works very well with all of the various stakeholders, but that trying to satisfy representatives from such a broad field must be both stressful and time consuming. It is also seen as being potentially limiting in terms of getting agreement amongst a diverse group. With such a large number of stakeholders, the Forum is seen as a place where members can sustain contact with other members. However, there has been some criticism of the Forum meetings:

'The Forum meetings sometimes lack focus... a series of seminars rather than the current set up may be a better use of time'

There were no negative comments, specifically directed at the Executive Team, recorded throughout the stakeholder interviews to the point where some stakeholders suggested that the Partnership should, perhaps, have more confidence in what it is doing and be less introspective. This is a great compliment and highlights the value of what has been achieved to date. The Executive Team are recognised as being a small resource and stakeholders do realise that they cannot do everything. Most stakeholders recognised the importance of their role in ensuring the success of the Framework and that Partnership working is the only way to move forward at speed.

'Overall, the view is that the Executive Team has made a very effective and efficient use of resources'.

Getting more than anecdotal responses here was not easy. This is likely because many of the stakeholders, although aware of the main aims of the Executive Team, do not understand their specific objectives and so although they recognise that the team has performed well, they struggled to put this into context.

One point raised by a number of stakeholders (across all groups) is that there is a need to simplify the explanation of what it is the SCQF Partnership does and what the Framework is for. The perception of stakeholders is that too many learners and those working in education do not understand this sufficiently. In a similar vein, one stakeholder (one of the key Partner organisations) highlighted that the roles of the Partner organisations / Forum members also need to be better understood – in terms of both their role within the Partnership and their role outside the Partnership.

The point of this exercise was to gauge perceptions of the SCQF Partnership and the Executive Team and stakeholders demonstrate, albeit anecdotally, that they have positive perceptions of both.

Aims and objectives of the Partnership

Stakeholders were asked how well they understood the aims and objectives of the Partnership. Responses to this question were mixed. Some stakeholders have a very firm grasp on what the Partnership does and wishes to achieve, others understand the 'flavour' of the aims and objectives and most could list at least a few pertinent points. One stakeholder questioned the membership of the Partnership Board and suggested that this should be revisited to ensure that other stakeholders – for instance further education (specifically individual colleges) and those with Curriculum for Excellence responsibilities – have the opportunity to be better represented and involved in strategic direction and decision making. This point was reiterated by employers who feel that most of the decision making power rests with educationalists. Stakeholders were asked further questions to determine their views around progress against

objectives. Responses are included within sections 4.2 to 4.5.

Tie in with Scottish Government / national objectives

Stakeholders were asked how well they thought that the aims of the SCQF Partnership fit with current government direction and focus. Most stakeholders saw a clear link between the work of the Partnership and the Scottish Government's lifelong learning agenda. With the emphasis around the portability of qualifications and the mobility of learners, there is also a fit with UK and EU government policy. There are some concerns that the prominence of the SCQF in 'Skills for Scotland' may be lost in the refreshed publication as the recession has led to a shift in focus from skills acquisition to skills utilisation and SCQF is understood to link more directly to skills acquisition, rather than utilisation. However, there is scope for the SCQF Partnership to play a role in the utilisation drive and this may need emphasising to ensure they are not excluded from this work. There are indirect links to Scottish Government policy through stakeholders with policy remits and SCQF is seen as a vehicle for sustainable economic growth by some stakeholders – representing education.

As the SCQF Forum brings together a wide span of stakeholders from public and private sectors, there is a belief that it can be used to consider 'issues of the day' relatively effectively. One stakeholder referred to topical agenda items and the role that the SCQF Partnership may have in addressing issues.

Specific comments included:

'Yes, [it does tie in with national policy] but the difficulty lies with policy makers not being involved enough or, perhaps, committed enough yet'

'It is better to look at this the other way round. The government should write SCQF into letters of guidance, as they do with SQA'

'An enabling Framework such as the SCQF is supportive of the lifelong learning and skills agenda, creating more choices and more chances that aren't necessarily formal education routes'

Stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, also referred to the SCQF's alignment with the Curriculum for Excellence agenda and the work that has been undertaken around migrant workers and their qualifications. One of the public sector stakeholders suggested that there is scope for the SCQF to be better aligned with some of the policy issues, making it more proactive rather than reactive. The Executive Team could, perhaps, consider a thematic approach to delivering against specific areas including:

- vocational education
- MCMC
- Skills for Scotland
- those dropping out of university

It was also asked whether there was representation from the SCQF team on the Curriculum for Excellence Management Board, as this was viewed as a good idea for SCQF.

Development of the Framework

We asked stakeholders how effective they thought the Partnership had been in developing the Framework. Again, responses were very positive, highlighting the amount of progress made in a relatively short period of time with a small resource. Comments included:

'There has been great progress in the last two years, in particular with networks being used and created, to support the development of the Framework'

'The Partnership has worked very hard to develop the Framework, bringing providers and key players from education and training together'

'The Partnership has been remarkable in the fact that five organisations have worked so well – and tirelessly to get to this situation'

The situation referred to is the current status of the Framework and the progress that has been made in raising awareness and getting qualifications other than national qualifications linked to the Framework through the expansion of credit rating activities. This emphasises the commitment of the Partnership and the recognition they have earned through consistent hard work. The continued growth of the Framework is viewed positively.

'[The Partnership, Executive Team, Quality Committee, RPL and the Forum] have been pretty effective. There are consistently a number of key providers of qualifications involved in the work of the SCQF to ensure that the Framework is promoted and understanding continues to grow'

'The Framework is organic and will progress over time – the Partnership is like a stimulant to keep it going'

One stakeholder was more critical of the approach taken by the Partnership in developing the Framework. However, this stakeholder is also an employer and naturally views that demand should lead the development.

'[It is] too focused on the supply side with a 'touchy feely' air about the whole thing'

Another more critical stakeholder suggested that:

'They have been slow to extend the Framework. It is lengthy in nature and complex. They have been slow to include other organisations' provision and recognise what other organisations (other than universities, colleges and SQA) can add'

In contrast, a representative of many employers was more positive:

'Strides of progress have been very impressive. The Scottish Framework is viewed as a leading one and the SCQF team now have more manpower to focus on other areas, including mapping employer training'

One of the Credit Rating Bodies highlighted the potential to explore whether there

might be any qualifications that sit beyond level 12 and beyond post doctorate levels of study. This may be a development too far but is possibly worth considering.

The general feeling from stakeholders was very positive and the development of the Framework has been accepted as a very difficult and time consuming job – particularly when resources are tight. Sceptics are few and tend to be employers rather than educationalists, who have demonstrated lower levels of understanding of the SCQF and the role of the Executive Team.

Key messages

The SCQF is considered a good fit with government and national objectives, in particular the lifelong learning and Curriculum for Excellence agendas.

Most of those consulted understand the broad, general principles of what the SCQF Partnership is trying to achieve, even if they are not entirely clear about the specific objectives of the organisation

Of all stakeholder groups consulted, employers are the least positive about the development of the SCQF and the composition of the Partnership. They tend to believe it is composed of 'educationalists' and has too little focus on the employer side.

The work of the SCQF Executive Team, with the Partnership, Forum and the development of the Framework, has progressed well within the constraints of their limited resources.

4.2 The Framework

Fitness for purpose

This section fits with the first strategic objective of the Partnership around the quality and integrity of the SCQF

Stakeholders have been very positive about the Framework's fitness for purpose. It is seen to be particularly relevant for secondary school and college level qualifications.

'The Framework should be considered a Godsend by schools as the Curriculum for Excellence is encouraging them to look beyond the more traditional qualifications offered by SQA out to other alternatives'

It is recognised that there is still a lot of work to do before the full potential is realised. The fact that the Framework covers all levels of learning is seen as a great plus point, as other Frameworks do not deal with levels 1 and 2 which, arguably, excludes those learners most at risk of becoming disengaged.

Some comments made by stakeholders around fitness for purpose included:

'The SCQF is fit for purpose. It is considerably better than the QCF and CQFW'

'There is much more willingness with SCQF Partners to engage and embed the Framework and a level of goodwill that might not have been so high if the Framework was regulatory. HE would exist outside the SCQF if it was a regulatory Framework'

'EQF raises questions about whether it encourages lifelong learning in the wider sense as it doesn't include the lower levels of the SCQF. There should be a discussion about where the lower levels of the SCQF fit with the EQF to encourage pan European recognition that some levels fall below'

'The SCQF is more than fit for purpose. Other countries look to the SCQF as it is leading the way...it should continue to push barriers, though, and [continue to] address RPL'

'Having the Framework is a considerable achievement and, yes, the technical elements of the Framework are fit for purpose. More could be done around awareness raising, though, as there is insufficient understanding amongst key audiences'

Although fitness for purpose is recognised, there is still a constraint around realising the full potential of the Framework. A number of stakeholders highlighted the fact that very few colleges have actively taken up credit rating which may be hindering full use of the Framework.

'The full benefits of the Framework [from an employer perspective] do not come through strongly enough to encourage people to buy into it'

There is a concern that the SCQF is being undersold, or perhaps sold in the wrong way. The perception is that there is a drive to make the Framework 'all things to all people' whereas it could potentially be 'quite a lot of things to most people' within and outside Scotland. Employers are particularly unmotivated by their understanding of the benefits of the SCQF and more work is perhaps required to let employers know 'what's in it for them'. Stakeholders who are very close to the educational system agreed that the Framework is fit for purpose. They also highlighted potential future issues around bite sized chunks of learning and how the Framework might support that.

'The interrelationship between SCQF, QCF and EQF can be a challenge. The mapping is helpful but there are differences where qualifications at QCF level 4 and SCQF levels 7/8 overlap and differences are difficult to match up. There are also practical differences – there is potential to use the SCQF to credit rate a qualification differently than it might be done through the QCF'

The Framework is seen to be very coherent and transparent. For qualifications developers and providers, it provides consistency, quality benchmarking and reference points. There is a concern that those not entirely 'in the know' will use inaccurate equivalences. There is still a need to make sure that people know what the Framework is there for – qualifications may be at the same level, but that does not make them equivalent. Several stakeholders highlighted the need for level descriptors to incorporate more work based learning as there is a feeling that they are currently focused on qualifications gained in more of an academic setting. However, there is

also recognition that:

'The Framework helps to recognise the value of learning. It helps to translate work into the academic sphere and vice versa'

Design of the Framework

This section, along with section 4.3, fits with the second strategic objective of the Partnership around the promotion and development of the Framework

Stakeholders were asked whether they valued the SCQF as an enabling, rather than a regulatory Framework. This also prompted comparisons with the QCF in England, where stakeholders had a reasonable understanding of the differences. Most stakeholders are positive about the design of the Framework; they view the enabling aspect of it to be inclusive and potentially all encompassing. There were a few questions over whether the current set-up gives organisations incentive enough to engage with the Framework and whether the voluntary nature of it had pushed it back in terms of people's priorities. However, in general, the enabling Framework is seen to be less bureaucratic and more flexible – both positive attributes.

'The Framework has enabled us to link in with several universities and colleges and work collaboratively with SQA'

'English Frameworks are regulatory whereas the SCQF is not. It is an overarching Framework which is broad in scope and doesn't get bogged down in the detail of all that is involved in the HE sector'

'A forced implementation might work in the short term but there would not be the long term commitment that is being aimed for. This allows SCQF room to bring this all together with a focus on quality'

One of the issues that raised a consensus of opinion was the issue of quality assurance and the Framework. Some see it as naturally integral to the Framework, others, due to the rigour of the process behind becoming a Credit Rating Body; also feel there is rigour across the Framework.

'Quality assurance is a built in feature and there is a process to follow when updating qualifications and design specifications'

One stakeholder emphasised the importance of differentiating between the quality of the design, content and delivery of qualifications and the quality issues incorporated in the process of attributing credit and level to a qualification.

'The SCQF is not set up to look at the quality of qualifications – if it did, there would be big issues in terms of the role of HMIE, QAA and the Funding Council...'

It is long recognised that maintaining the quality and integrity of the Framework is vital for it to be successful. The SCQF Board established the SCQF Quality Committee to support the quality of the Framework and to provide clear, accurate technical information to learners, the public and others with an interest in learning, including learning providers and employers.

SQA considered scenarios around how the Partnership would deal with challenges to the level attached to a qualification. There is currently no audit process in place to randomly 'test' the levels attributed to qualifications within the Framework. With new Credit Rating Bodies on board, there is increasing scope for inconsistency. Having processes in place to provide some comfort over the validity of levels applied to qualifications was viewed as necessary. This was suggested as a supportive mechanism rather than a threat or 'big brothing' of the Credit Rating Bodies.

They also highlighted the need for some guidance to ensure that the naming of qualifications does not confuse learners – for instance 'post graduate certificates' and 'diplomas' are currently being used in England to describe some qualifications at lower levels. As these names are not protected, they could theoretically be applied to qualifications offered in Scotland which could be misleading for learners. With the SCQF Partnership not having any regulatory power, it is difficult to know how this might be enforced, but there is definitely need to put something in place.

There was a mixed response when stakeholders were asked about the value of more closely linking funding with the SCQF. Some stakeholders outright said no to this, but a few stakeholders – including those directly engaged in mainstream education – were more open to this. A couple of important points were raised, however:

- Linking funding to credit should not happen – this has been fairly disastrous south of the border
- If funding is linked to SCQF, there is a risk that certain types of community provision (for instance) will be missed, so a % would need to be ring fenced for those courses

In terms of encouraging organisations to 'sign up' to the SCQF, several stakeholders suggested that the link to funding would give them the impetus to get their qualifications levelled through the Framework.

Interestingly, when speaking with an awarding body that is represented on both the QCF and the SCQF, the simplicity and usability of the SCQF becomes apparent:

'We use the SCQF to credit rate for the QCF... credit given to our qualifications is the same across the UK. If anomalies occur, units are revised'.

This gives an example of the ease of use of the SCQF processes, as well as giving some comfort that qualifications delivered in Scotland and elsewhere in the UK are assigned equivalent levels.

Benefits of the Framework

All stakeholders were able to identify benefits that they associated with the SCQF. There are many of them, so we highlight the most common ones below:

- recognition of private sector training
- employees – articulating the 'worth' of training
- emphasises UK providers' commitment to Scotland
- navigation – understanding the qualifications environment
- mobility – routes / progression
- employers – understanding / navigating / planning for CPD
- common language across all deliverers
- qualifications in perspective
- putting qualifications in context simply
- provides some parity of esteem for less mainstream qualifications
- coherent and transparent
- supports lifelong learning
- supports credit building
- eradicates dead end learning
- flexibility
- enables recognition of prior learning (RPL)

As discussed in section 4.1, employers are least aware of the benefits of the SCQF. Speaking with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, for instance, raised the issue that the SCQF may need to be tied to funding or some other bottom line benefit to grab the attention of employers. It might also be a beneficial appraisal tool for employers if it also considered how work experience / competence might be incorporated into level descriptors.

Publicity

Stakeholders were asked to consider whether the SCQF had been adequately publicised. Raising awareness of the Framework is integral to its success and so publications and communications are regarded as critical to supporting this. Stakeholders, on the whole, do not think that the Framework has been adequately publicised, although not because the SCQF team have done too little:

'Not only is it not well enough publicised, but the message is not aimed at employers and why it is in their interest to adopt it and promote it internally themselves'

'On going communications are required by all parties. It is consistently publicised by those steeped in the SCQF but some don't publicise as well, such as the older colleges and universities. Some employers publicise and others do not. Messages should be focused and not just a one size fits all. Careers guidance teachers at schools and colleges should be targeted as well as SDS'

Several public sector organisations also suggested using a wider variety of promotional material to target different groups. They stated that more memorable material, particularly for children is required. Other stakeholders were more up beat about the progress made here:

'...extremely well with a tight budget and other limiting parameters. If there was more funding available the priority should be the workplace'

'Yes, within the education community it is common to hear the Framework feature in discussions. There has been great progress made in eight years and in the last two to three years, there has been much more talk about levels and credit points'

'It has been more about getting organisational buy-in rather than publicity'

There is an acceptance that Partner organisations and Forum members have a big role to play in assisting with getting the message out to relevant people. It is also accepted that this is a slow (and expensive) filtering process and that to get a consistent message out to everyone takes time. The Scottish Government expressed that they have had a few internal barriers to raising awareness since the last review. However, they also concede that there is much more that they could be doing to communicate the message. The Executive Team has work to do to ensure that Forum members and Partners are being proactive in promoting the Framework.

In terms of existing marketing material, the postcards were cited as being particularly helpful and the Crystal Mark publications have also been well received. Stakeholders also highlighted the quality of:

- Revised handbook – much more user friendly
- Employer guide
- SCQF updates
- 'Degree or Equivalent'
- 'Qualifications Cross Boundaries'

There is seen to be a gap in guidance around 'how to work with level descriptors' which needs to include easy, accessible worked up examples.

Publicising the SCQF is a long game; it is conceptual and is not easy to sell. One of the frequently raised questions was 'who needs to know?' This is important to keep in mind as getting messages and understanding out to everybody is going to take a long time. The work done to date is very well recognised:

'The SCQF team host events that draw a range of people from across the spectrum of employment and education, nationally and internationally'

A number of stakeholders suggested that the detail need only be understood by educationalists, with only broad understanding of the concept understood by everyone else.

Key messages

Stakeholders agree that the Framework is fit for purpose; however they highlight that there is still some work to be done around the recognition of sub 10 hour / bite sized chunks of learning.

Most of those consulted view the enabling design of the Framework as inclusive and potentially all encompassing but there is a lack of consensus as to whether the

Framework should be linked to funding.

With new Credit Rating Bodies on board, there is increasing scope for inconsistency. Having processes in place to provide some comfort over the validity of levels applied to qualifications was viewed as necessary. This was suggested as a supportive mechanism rather than a threat or 'big brothing' of the Credit Rating Bodies.

Publicity could be improved with more targeted promotion of the Framework focused on those who need to understand the detail. There is also recognition that marketing and promotion is expensive and that the SCQF team do not have the available resources to have a high impact in the short term.

There is a gap in publications around level descriptors. Level descriptors are viewed as complicated and simple guidance with worked examples would be welcomed.

4.3 Embedding the Framework

Success in embedding the Framework to date

Stakeholders were asked to consider how well they thought that the SCQF has been embedded in mainstream education, training and learning activities in Scotland. The general feeling is that the Framework has been reasonably well communicated in mainstream education, but less so across parents, individual learners and employers.

'If private training providers are under a public sector contract, they tend to use and refer to the Framework. Beyond this, there is uncertainty. There is scope for Skills Development Scotland and Partner organisations to push this by including SCQF references in contracts, for instance'

'The educational side is well covered but this may be at the expense of involving employers. The whole process seems to be driven by academics, for academics, which creates problems for employers in adopting'

'The SCQF team has been particularly good at engaging with different stakeholders and it has been a difficult task getting HE and industry on board, particularly the professional bodies with their own regulatory provision'

'Teachers are not as aware as we would expect them to be – yet it is crucial that they lead the way for parents, employers and learners. Teachers should be a priority area'

So far, very few local authorities in Scotland have adopted the SCQF and they collectively employ 270,000 people. This point was raised by a public sector representative and links back to the points made about communicating and emphasising real or bottom line benefits to employers.

The overarching message from stakeholders is that the success in embedding the Framework has been mixed. In schools, although Head Teachers are likely to understand the SCQF, there is a lack of understanding at class teacher level. This means that school aged learners will have a limited and at best mixed understanding of the Framework and probably very limited understanding of what it actually signifies. Evidence from school aged learners is examined in section 5.

Embedding and understanding of the Framework is seen, to a degree, as being a generational issue. If school aged learners have a good grasp of the SCQF then it will slowly filter through 'the system' into further and higher education, employers and beyond. Clarifying the link between the Framework and Curriculum for Excellence may help to raise more awareness among teachers and school aged learners.

As school learners are given more options in terms of the type of qualifications on offer to them, the SCQF should become more of a 'tool' for understanding the map of school qualifications.

The Scottish Funding Council has been working with colleges and universities to develop articulation hubs which are helping to smooth transition between FE and HE to give students credit for work done under the FE umbrella.

Universities, particularly the older ones, are not seen as being especially open to the SCQF. There are some areas of good practice, however, with the University of the

West of Scotland cited as being proactive in examining how SVQs can contribute to some of their degree programmes. They are also looking at developing work-based degree programmes.

It was also reasonably clear that stakeholders accept that this is a long process and that SCQF terminology is slowly becoming incorporated in learning in Scotland.

Acceptance and comprehension of the Framework

Stakeholders were asked whether they thought the Framework was well understood and accepted across Scotland. Tying in with the previous section, answers to this were mixed. The perception is that the Framework is not as well understood as it should be or as well as educationalists would like it to be. As discussed in an earlier section, this may be because the Framework is not mandatory and so is given limited priority by those with the real power to promote it. Like many things, there is an opinion that the promotion of the SCQF is very much dependent on individuals in organisations with the kudos to act as a catalyst in enthusing staff and learners to take on the SCQF. Comments from stakeholders included:

'SDS has a pivotal role to play in helping learners to understand and to raise awareness of the SCQF'

'The biggest change that is required now is to gain more support from employers and get them to accept it, embrace it and most importantly use it'

'It is well understood in HEIs. Do candidates need to know the level of their qualification? Surely, it is enough for them to know that they are Highers or degrees and to know that the SCQF exists and is accessible should they need it'

'More accepted and understood but still have a long way to go. As time goes on it will get better and this may take a while, regardless of the level of communications and publicity'

'There is a lack of understanding. SQA has done a lot to promote the Framework, especially at certification time. Suspect that the Framework itself leaves a lot of school children cold'

'Employers tend to be behind the times, with many still looking for comparisons between the current qualifications and the O Grades that they would have been awarded themselves'

These comments bring back the question over how much people actually need to know about the SCQF. Giving everyone a very broad understanding and raising awareness in general will help.

'Employers should be advertising jobs in SCQF terms. This is happening with organisations close to the SCQF but others probably don't know much about it. Partnership [and Forum] members should be taking the lead and pushing this practice forward'

'Profiling the level is important but the Framework has to have currency and we shouldn't bombard learners with meaningless jargon. The public sector would be a good place to start, perhaps by incorporating SCQF levels in qualification titles'

These comments reflect a number of issues coming through, but the most important one is that those in education accept and understand the Framework – whilst those it is aimed at supporting, do not. This is a classic case of supply led rather than demand driven, but this seems unlikely to change soon as until attitudes and perceptions can be changed, it will only be 'those on the education side' that will stimulate demand

There are some ideas coming through that SCQF Partnership can consider but, generally speaking, most of these are already being pursued. The comments do, however, bring back the question over how much people actually need to know about the SCQF. Understanding the benefits that it can bring to learners and employers is a significantly more important message than trying to explain what the Framework is to a large and currently unsympathetic general public. As highlighted in an earlier section, this is a long game and will take time to get the SCQF into the mindset of the general public.

Efforts to gain acceptance and comprehension of the SCQF should therefore be targeted more heavily on learners and employers. The sting in the tail is that there is also a view that not all on the education side are as 'up to speed' on the SCQF as they might be and are therefore not lending enough support to promoting to the demand side.

Articulation and progression

Articulation and progression are two key themes for the SCQF Partnership. Stakeholders were asked how well the SCQF has assisted educational institutes with routes through learning and how well they perceive that learners understand articulation and progression and the links to SCQF.

'The universities tend to be elitist and masters of their own domain – especially the pre '92 institutes. Newer universities tend to have better articulation arrangements'

'Learners understand the qualification route rather than the SCQF level. If they need the knowledge to achieve what they want then they will get it e.g. to jump into 2nd year at university they may then need to understand the articulation issues'

'Qualifications are the articulation route to FE and HE – SCQF alone is not enough. Partnerships with institutions need to be forged first. [The] SCQF [team] should do more work with [awarding bodies] and FE colleges to break down some of the barriers that exist'

'It has been a definite benefit. The articulation pathway has enabled credit for Detectives to do forensic science. Police learners have a good understanding of articulation and progression'

There is a concern that although articulation and progression are likely to be understood in theory, whether or not this is translated into practice is still very varied. The SCQF is seen to 'incentivise' learners and there is a feeling that more should be done to promote this. There is also scope for the SCQF team to work with the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to try to deal with implications that the funding of tuition fees (or lack of funding) has on articulation and progression.

Articulation agreements and articulation hubs are in place and it seems that the Framework is viewed as a supportive tool rather than the solution to articulation and progression working more effectively in Scotland.

The effectiveness of articulation and progression is very dependent on individual organisations and how well they understand it. If organisations have clearly defined pathways for learning then employees are more likely to understand their options better. There are still issues around transfer between the different types of learning – vocational, professional and academic. Funding is a factor here too. Some institutions will only get funding for delivering whole courses and so if students are given exemptions through credit transfer, which organisation gets the funding? ILM, for example have had greater success at transferring value for their qualifications at SCQF level 11 which may be because post graduate students are not publicly funded.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

Recognition of prior learning fits in with the last point around articulation, although there is far less understanding of RPL, what it means and how it is or should be dealt with. RPL is a massive driver for the SCQF and fits in very well with the ethos of lifelong learning. Stakeholders are at different stages in understanding exactly what RPL means for them. Most understand that there is work going on around RPL, but few have a real understanding of RPL in practice. Awarding bodies tend to have a much better practical experience of RPL. ILM qualifications, for instance, are based on assessment and so if a learner claims to have prior informal learning, they can miss the teaching and go straight to assessment. If they can prove they have prior learning through certification then they are automatically exempt. ILM may be a good benchmark as they have redefined how they deal with RPL, amending their previously complex policy into very simple guidance. The difficulty comes when trying to take account of prior learning that is not directly related to what an individual is moving into.

'Some sectors are good at linking RPL to SCQF. SSSC have developed a toolkit for care staff, for instance. Getting bespoke toolkits in place for each sector will be very helpful'

'The RPL network is evolving and there is a lot of goodwill in the group. There is a need to develop a raison d'etre for using RPL and for linking it to the SCQF'

RPL was described by one stakeholder as 'a bit of a black hole', although it was recognised that progress is being made, there is a good amount of uncertainty around what this actually means.

'There is more depth than there used to be. SCQF is helping to create routes into chartered banking from other professions'

'There is recognition of mainstream qualifications but not work-based learning'

'[We] don't do anything around RPL. It seems like a lot of work in terms of time and effort to provide evidence for RPL – well in excess of value gained'

The most detailed response was:

'There is guidance and a toolkit for RPL available from the SCQF [Partnership] – but there is still some difficulty with dealing with and understanding of RPL and smoother progression pathways and how non accredited learning is recognised. This is also a messy issue internationally.

Lifelong learning principles should override systems. There is an impenetrability of language when what is needed are mechanisms to deal with RPL in a smooth, efficient fashion. Often by the time you look at the evidence it is easier just to take the unit and do the assessment.

Something needs to change and perhaps there is a role for the SCQF [Partnership] to facilitate this process, ensure validity by providing a QA process without it being painstaking so that the potential for a candidate to have their prior learning recognised is fully realised'

The role of the SCQF seemed to be well understood by stakeholders who had a firm grasp of RPL. However, the area of RPL was probably the one that most stakeholders were least informed about. As with articulation and progression, this is probably as much of an issue about wider understanding and recognition of the benefits of RPL as about understanding the relationship of RPL to the Framework.

Engaging high profile employers

Most stakeholders consider that there are not enough employers actively engaged with the SCQF. There is a perception that if anything, it is only public sector educationalists and the NHS that are involved. Again, stakeholders accept that engaging employers is difficult and that with limited resource, this is made more difficult. Some questioned the drivers for getting involved in the SCQF – it doesn't save them money, so incentives and benefits are perhaps not obvious enough for private sector employers.

'The NHS (with their Agenda for Change) and the banking sector are well engaged. A high percentage of employers in Scotland are SMEs so surely it is just as important that small businesses are on board. Representatives from small business networks could cascade to smaller employers'

'[The] SCQF [Partnership] could try and engage more with public sector organisations as NDPBs are funded by Government and so will find it difficult not to support the SCQF'

'The number of employers will grow as the Framework increases in transparency – it only takes a few high profile employers to be involved and more employers will lock onto it'

'There are not enough high profile employers engaged in the SCQF...more needs to be done to win hearts and minds. What we need now are good news stories in the shape of high profile testimonials and good case studies'

Some of the issues with getting high profile employers on board may be due to the fact that most of the Sector Skills Councils are based in England. It was recognised that more employers are likely to get involved with time. One of the employer representatives recommended further distribution of the postcard, even as an aid to raise awareness.

Key messages

Success in embedding the Framework has been mixed. It has been reasonably well communicated in mainstream education, but less so across parents, individual learners and employers. Partner organisations should be taking more of an active part in promoting the Framework and leading the way in terms of encouraging best practice.

Clarifying the link between the Framework and Curriculum for Excellence may help to increase awareness among teachers and school aged learners.

The majority involved in education accept and understand the Framework – whilst those it is aimed at supporting, do not. This is a classic case of supply led rather than demand driven, but until attitudes and perceptions can be changed, it will only be 'those on the education side' that will stimulate demand. However, the majority is not enough, and not all on the education side are as 'up to speed' on the SCQF as they might be and are therefore not lending enough support to promoting to the demand side.

Understanding the benefits that the Framework can bring to learners and employers is a significantly more important message than trying to explain what the Framework is to a large and currently unsympathetic general public. Efforts to gain acceptance and comprehension of the SCQF should therefore be targeted more heavily on learners and employers.

The SCQF is seen to 'incentivise' learners and there is a feeling that more should be done to promote this. There is also scope for the SCQF team to work with the Student Awards Agency for Scotland to try to deal with implications that the funding of tuition fees (or lack of funding) has on articulation and progression.

The effectiveness of articulation and progression is dependent on individual organisations and how well they understand it. Translating this knowledge into practice is very varied. A wider issue is that articulation is also 'geographic area dependant' as there is a perceived inconsistency surrounding articulation that is beyond the scope of the SCQF Partnership.

The SCQF Partnership may have a role in simplifying, yet ensuring the robustness of the process in relation to the recognition of prior learning. The difficulty is that despite pockets of progress, RPL in its own right is not yet fully understood and therefore accepted.

Further engagement should be sought with high profile employers, as this will encourage more organisations to be brought on board. Promoting the success stories and benefits is one way of doing this, but the current recession (and its impacts) may slow down progress.

4.4 The future

The SCQF is developing at a time when changes across mainstream education will be facilitated by a structured qualifications Framework. It has the potential to offer structured support for Curriculum for Excellence and for the lifelong learning agenda.

Stakeholders have been very positive about the work of the SCQF team to date and see the future as offering more opportunity for continued work and roll out of the Framework and continued improvements in awareness across learners and employers.

'Greater understanding will creep in - how the Framework works and what sits within it that is important rather than the entity itself'

'The limitations are around the terminology. If it becomes too prescriptive it will become less enabling'

Keeping this simple for the general public will be critical in raising learner / parental awareness and broad understanding of the Framework. Work to date is viewed positively and is seen to set the SCQF in good stead for the future.

'The future for SCQF should be bigger and brighter and more of the same – they shouldn't try and stray into other areas that they don't have expertise in [around quality assurance]'

'What SCQF does adds real value: it helps individuals and employers, gives kudos to companies and has made the learning hierarchy much better defined'

'[The] SCQF has established a sound footing...the main issue is now getting it out there'

'The more work done by the Partnership, the less critical they will become in the process, the future aim should be that the Framework is in the hands of the users so that the Partnership's role becomes more light touch. There is a long way to go before this is achieved, however'

It was suggested that if the SCQF team simplified the explanation of what the Framework is set up to do and convinced employers and learners that the currency of qualifications is rigorously quality assured then they can begin to change the landscape of Scottish achievement.

Other suggestions for what the future may hold for the SCQF included closer links with the EQF and greater focus on the Global opportunities that may arise.

As stakeholders were very positive about the future for the SCQF, many suggestions were made; some of these are included below:

- Using levels to describe jobs / skills – link with National Occupational Standards

- RPL pushed forward
- Opportunities to link bite sized learning to the SCQF
- Looking for opportunity beyond level 12
- Could experience / time served be measured through SCQF?
- More support from the Scottish Government to communicate the value of SCQF
- Limit the number of Credit Rating Bodies created

Lastly, although the SCQF is seen as very important for the future of education in Scotland, we were reminded that there are things we cannot lose:

'Skipping forward a generation when the language of the SCQF is likely to be second nature, it is important that the other language is not lost. Merely describing a qualification as SCQF level X does not mean anything alone. Different qualifications have different purposes'.

Key messages

The SCQF Framework is an asset that those in education or closely linked with education recognise. However, if it is going to add value this message needs to be understood by those on the demand side - the learners and employers that can benefit from using the Framework. Taking this on board it may mean using directed messages such as:

- For those under threat of redundancy, RPL against the Framework can support you in promoting yourself into new employment
- Better recruitment is supported by using SCQF in adverts, saving time and money for employers
- When you leave school, college or university, using the SCQF helps you to communicate your qualifications and understand where they fit in relation to others

Stakeholder ideas for the future represented a broad cross section of opinion on the areas requiring greater focus. However, there was no one area that emerged over others nor was there any area that the Partnership was not putting effort against already.

Although the message is already a fairly straightforward one, this message should continue to be short and simple to ensure that no layers of complexity are added.

The work of the Partnership - and the complexity of the task of changing mind sets and opinions - is recognised and respected by stakeholders. The message is to keep doing more of the same as this is a long haul approach.

4.5 Areas for celebration

Things that work particularly well – Partnership & Framework

The Framework itself is evolving and stakeholders highlighted the impact that the SCQF has had on Framework development elsewhere. The fact that the SCQF is not a regulatory Framework that is concerned only with national curriculum outcomes is also seen to make it very valuable.

Framework

With the general popularity of the Framework, it was perhaps surprising that only a few comments came through about the successes of the Framework. The reason for this would appear to be that it is the whole Framework package that is respected as opposed to specific items.

- Engaging different types of learner
- Encompasses a broad range of learning
- Quality assurance
- SCQF covers many agendas and can have real impact
- Framework offers rigour with flexibility

Partnership, Executive Team & Forum

The strong points of the Partnership and Executive Team that were fed back shows a wide variety of plus points and includes a strong message of support for the way that the SCQFP team is communicating. Good communication is not something that is often fed back and this should give great confidence to the team. One specific comment that reflected a number of views was:

'The SCQF Executive Team is a small tight group that function well together. They are efficient, helpful and have achieved a level of engagement that far exceeds what would be expected from an organisation of their size'

Some of the other points raised about the Partnership, Executive Team and Forum are summarised below. What also came through was the strength of the Partnership and the Forum in supporting networking which gives a wider advantage that previously may not have been captured.

- Neutrality of the Partnership – no hidden agenda
- Power of Partnership to act as broker
- Transparency
- New marketing and updates have been a real boost
- Branding of the SCQF is much improved
- Thorough consultation with Forum members before action taken
- Excellent communication from Executive Team
- Lots of good ideas
- Forum offers opportunity to share understanding of each other's learners
- The Forum is an excellent mechanism for making connections

4.6 Areas for consideration

Things that may require improvement - Partnership & Framework

Stakeholders were more than happy to extend an opinion on the types of thing that the Partnership should consider and on ways that the Framework might be developed or improved. A selection of comments below reflects the breadth of opinion on:

- funding and resources

- the role and make-up of the Partnership
- the remit of the Forum
- the Framework itself
- promoting the Framework

Funding and resources

The comments generally reflect the widely held fact that funding will be scarce for some time, and the SCQF Partnership should look at other ways of maximising their capacity for delivery. One way of doing this might be to try and drive up the number of secondments into the Executive Team, but this may prove difficult because of the staffing implications for any seconding body in these difficult economic times.

- Danger that the SCQF Partnership is vulnerable in funding rounds
- Funding should be more readily available now that the Framework is in place to help populate it so that it represents the fuller picture of learning across Scotland
- Greater promotion of secondment opportunities within the Executive Team to boost resource
- Link funding with SCQF – money is the key driver for employers
- The financial implications of getting provision credit rated

The role and make-up of the Partnership

The breadth of opinion gives no clear steer as to which direction the Partnership might take. What did emerge was a feeling that some Forum members might be tasked with having a more focussed contribution to make. There is a stark difference of opinion over the size of the Forum with some saying it is too large and others feeling more organisations could still add value through their representation. On balance, the make-up of the Partnership Board is probably about right at present, but a move to greater employer representation in the future might support a move to the Framework becoming more demand driven.

- Forum should also include less mainstream representatives
- Are too many people involved in the Forum?
- There is no need to be wholly inclusive – Forum meetings could be massive, but to what end?
- Profile of SCQF may be strengthened if there was employer representation on the Board
- No central QA body in Scotland so there is more trust involved with gauging appropriateness of qualification levelling etc – the SCQF Partnership needs to ensure that the 'trusting' nature of the Framework is not abused
- Better focus for Forum meetings – series of seminars rather than Forum?
- Some responsibilities are a bit blurred – need more definition around Partner organisation and Forum member roles and responsibilities
- Clear task setting so Forum members deliver – and understand their roles

The Framework

In relative terms there were few comments made about the Framework. This is probably because the Framework has built up a strong reputation in academia, and the main focus is now on implementing it rather than continuing to 'engineer' it.

- Too much focus on the academic bit of learning
- Units with less than 10 hours and how to recognise them on the Framework
- Too much introspection – keep moving forward
- Revise level descriptors so that they take account of workplace learning

Promoting the Framework

In other areas of this consultation the promotion of the Framework comes through as the most important thing to be done. The fact that the main headings were mentioned but no solutions given, reflects that it is recognised a lot of work has been undertaken by the Partnership in this area, but the desired results have not yet come through.

- SCQF not yet well enough understood by industry
- Need to shout about the good work being done
- Key influencers need to be encouraged to influence
- Not enough engagement with learners about what the SCQF values mean and what the Framework can help them do

5 Learner responses

We collected responses from learners using e-Surveys designed for each learner group. This section will be split into parts to recognise each group and detailed commentary will be provided on survey responses.

5.1 School learners

Secondary schools were clustered by geography and then randomly selected for targeting. Head Teachers were contacted directly and were encouraged to pass the survey on to a selection of their pupils. It became apparent quite early on that schools had a preference for paper based surveys, so these were provided, along with a FREEPOST address for returns. This approach yielded 334 paper survey returns and 39 online returns. We also received 41 supplementary responses, to a less detailed questionnaire, from school pupils who attended the annual Careers Fair at the SECC in March this year.

Survey responses were received from pupils at:

- Dornoch Academy (Highland)
- Stonelaw High School (S. Lanarkshire)
- Hutchesons' Grammar School (Glasgow)
- Notre Dame High School (Inverclyde)
- Tain Royal Academy (Highland)
- Kilmarnock Academy (E. Ayrshire)
- Park Mains High School (Renfrewshire)
- The High School of Glasgow (Glasgow)

Chart 1

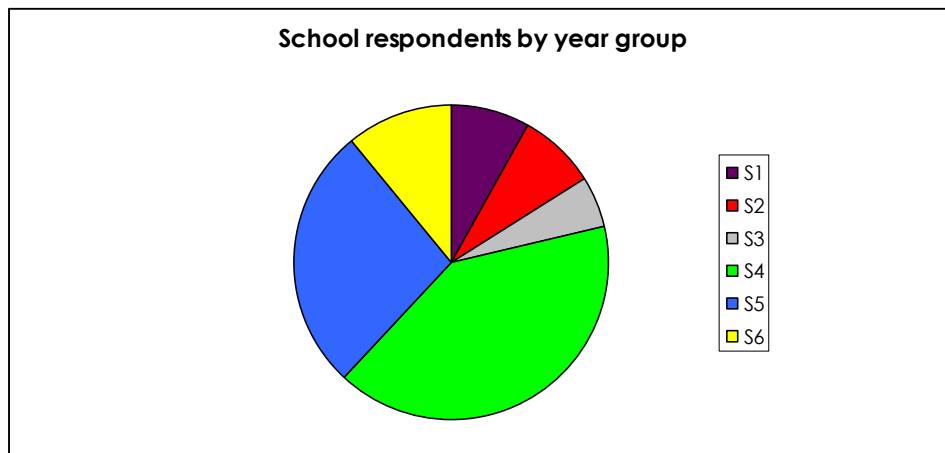
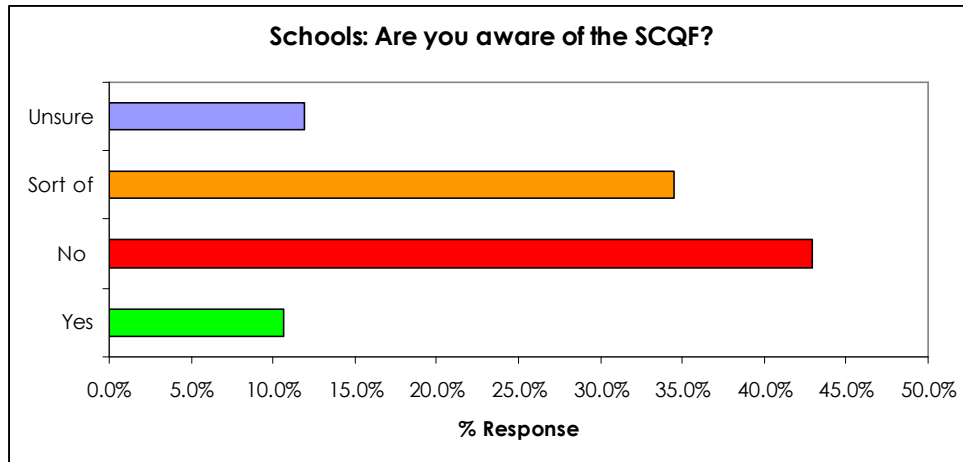


Chart 1 shows the breakdown of responses by year group. As shown, responses were received from each secondary year group, including those with SQA exam commitments, largely due to the commitment from a few proactive Head Teachers. It is important to gauge understanding of the SCQF across all age groups as, particularly with the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence next session, the SCQF becomes more prominent in the schools sector.

Chart 2

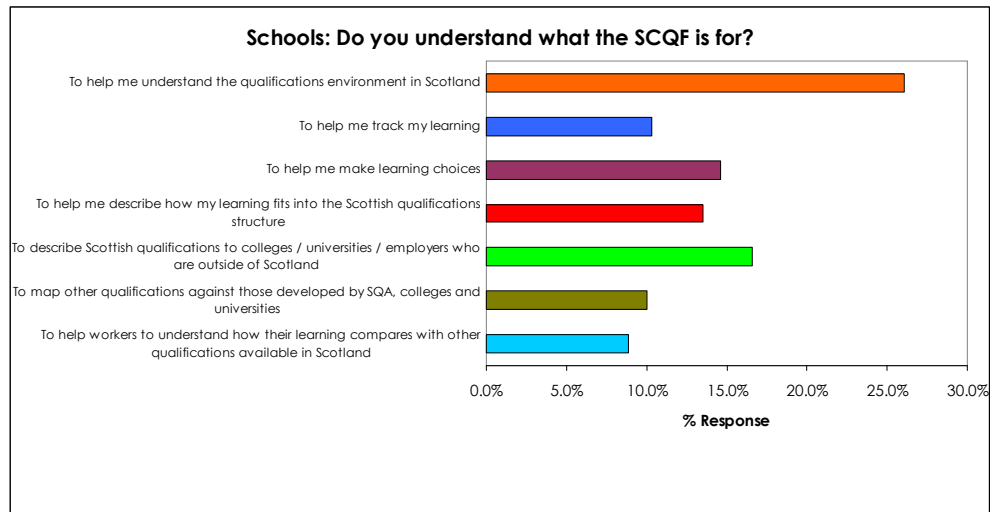


School pupil awareness of the SCQF is not great. The results shown in chart 2 are representative of all age groups, with no one particular class straying too much from the overall average response. This indicates that there is still plenty of scope for raising awareness of the SCQF with school pupils, and although many of them have heard of it, they struggled to describe it in a sentence. Typical responses, when asked to describe the SCQF included the comments below. The year group of the respondent is indicated in brackets:

- 'I don't know what it is' (S6)
- 'I'm not sure what the SCQF is all about' (S4)
- 'Something to do with exams' (S3)
- 'Unsure of what it is but it seems a useful idea' (S2)
- 'I don't know how to explain it' (S4)
- 'Never heard of it' (S5)
- 'Confusing, but probably helpful, if you understand it' (S4)

Very few school pupils managed, or even attempted, to actually describe the SCQF which probably indicates that it is in their vocabulary somewhere, but has either been very briefly mentioned, or they've seen it on an exam certificate. There is work to be done to raise awareness which may be something that can be done in tandem with SQA to produce information in a format that captures the attention of school aged learners.

Chart 3



When prompted, most respondents ticked at least one option in this part of the survey – notably option one 'to help me understand the qualifications environment in Scotland'. Although all of the statements are true, very few pupils selected all of them, with most selecting around four from the seven options.

Chart 4

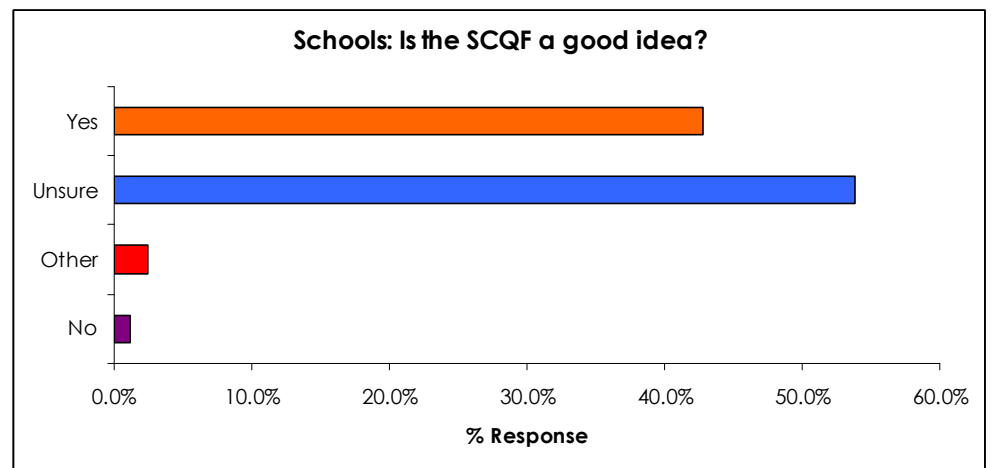


Chart 4 shows that the majority of respondents are unsure whether the SCQF is a good idea. This ties in with Chart 2 which showed that most pupils are not entirely aware of the SCQF. With a definition of what the SCQF is set up to do included in the survey, pupils are at least considering the worth of the Framework in context with their own learning. Only two pupils said that they thought that the SCQF was not a good idea – one because they had never heard of it and the other response came from an S1 pupil who, due to the language used and the total clash with views of her peers, is likely to have had some parental 'help' in completing the survey. Her comment was:

'It is a waste of money. We need UK wide qualifications in this country.'

Other more typical comments included:

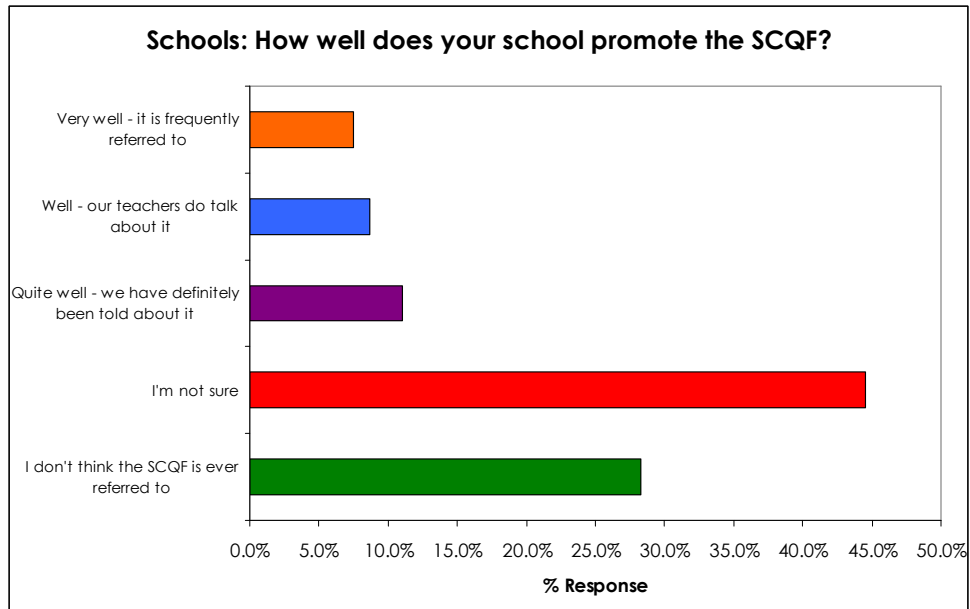
'I don't know what it does' (S5)

'Never heard of it' (S5)

'Don't have a clue' (S1)

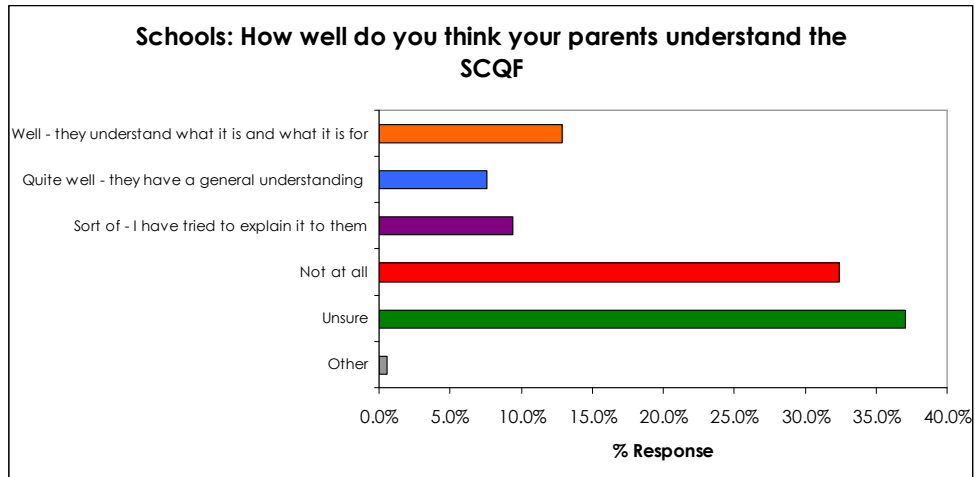
Most schools at least seem open to persuasion and on the face of it do not appear opposed to the SCQF, even though most lack the knowledge to make a more decisive response.

Chart 5



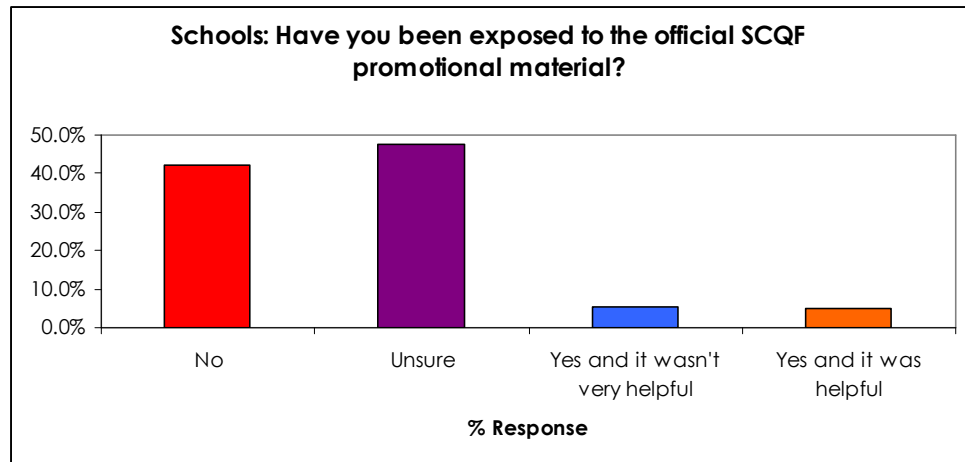
The key method of communicating the SCQF is through the school. Pupils were asked how well their school promoted the SCQF, with the overwhelming majority stating that they were unsure. Chart 5 shows that around 28% of pupils thought that SCQF had never been referred to and around 45% were not sure. This means that less than 30% of school respondents had some recollection of teachers talking about the SCQF. Interestingly, responses varied within schools and so this may come down to a combination of pupils not understanding the potential importance of the SCQF, or it may be that some pupils have had exposure to particular teachers who are very good at talking about it. There appears to be no obvious pattern, and so it is likely that this a combination of teacher enthusiasm and understanding and individual pupil interest in the SCQF. Again, more captivating marketing that is actually aimed at pupils, rather than parents, may help to reverse this.

Chart 6



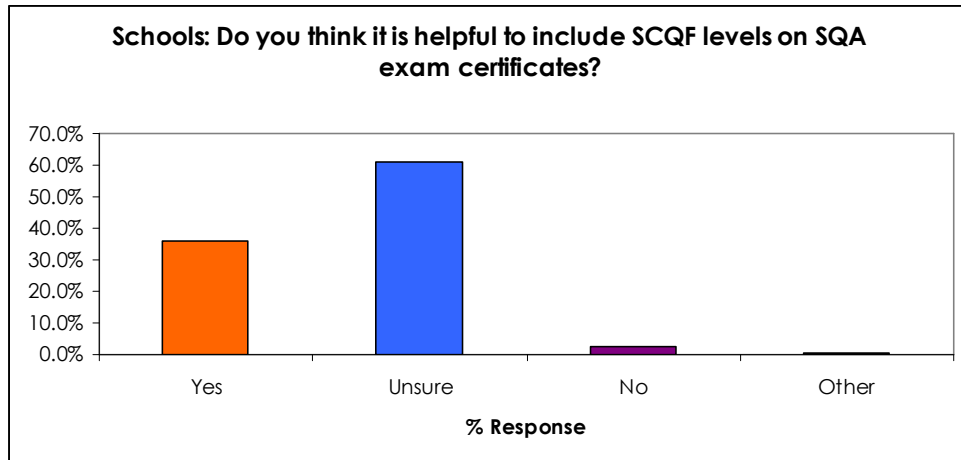
As shown by Chart 6, most school pupils are either unaware of how much their parents know about the SCQF or assume that they know nothing at all. Supplementary data collected at the Careers Fair show that only around 30% of parents (albeit from a very small sample) are aware of the SCQF. This is not surprising, given the level of awareness of the pupils themselves.

Chart 7



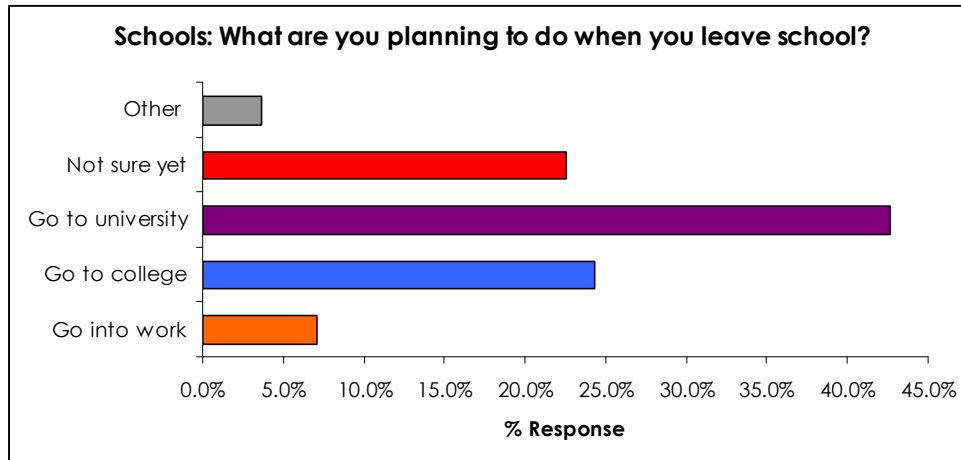
The official SCQF promotional material is specifically aimed at learners and has been distributed with SQA exam information and at Standard Grade 'choices' time for S2 pupils. The results shown in chart 7 suggest that promotional material has had a limited impact on learners, in so much as most of them do not remember whether they have or have not been exposed to it. Of those who say they have definitely seen the promotional material, there is a mixed response around its perceived helpfulness. Again, this highlights an opportunity to develop 'young person friendly' marketing materials. However, it is possible that, due to the nature of the SCQF, it is going to be difficult to raise enough enthusiasm in school pupils, regardless of the marketing approach. This is worth some consideration.

Chart 8



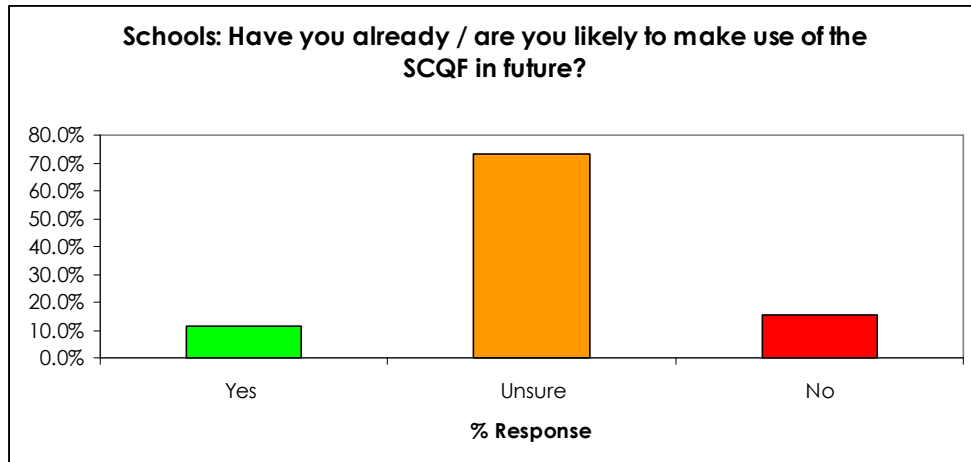
It should be borne in mind that the majority of respondents are made up of those in S1 to S4 – very few of whom will have received an SQA exam certificate at the point they completed the survey. This will account, to some degree, for the large proportion of respondents who are unsure whether SCQF levels should be included on SQA certificates. Some work with SQA is probably required to ensure that SCQF levels are clear on certificates and are not confused with Standard Grade results, for instance. As Standard Grades are phased out, SCQF levels will be more distinctive as they will be the only numbers, as opposed to 'A, B, C, pass / fail' and so on.

Chart 9



Most pupils plan to move onto university on completion of their school education. Chart 9 shows a mixture of responses to this question, with most of the 'not sure yet' responses coming from younger pupils. Over 30% stated that they planned to go into work or go to college, with a few citing Modern Apprenticeships as their desired outcome. It is particularly important that these respondents have a firm grasp of the SCQF or, at least, how their learning journey sits within it.

Chart 10



We finished the survey by asking pupils whether they had already used the SCQF or though it likely that they would use it in future. Chart 10 shows the responses to this. Most respondents were unsure – mainly because they were also unsure what the SCQF actually is and what they might be able to use it for. It is difficult, at this stage of learning, to really acknowledge the value of the Framework as learning is so well defined and learning choices are few. Again, the introduction of the Curriculum for Excellence, depending on how it is implemented, may influence this and enhance the relevance of the SCQF for school learners.

Therefore, amongst this group, the main priorities stem around:

- Raising awareness of the SCQF, in general
- Raising awareness of what the SCQF is for and how pupils might use it
- Improving promotional material to make it more appealing and memorable for school aged learners
- Working with schools to raise awareness of the SCQF amongst teaching staff
- Working with schools to raise awareness of the SCQF amongst parents

5.2 College and university students

Using the same approach to contacting schools, we took a random sample of colleges and universities to target with an e-Survey. Responses were received from students at:

- University of Stirling
- University of Abertay
- Jewel & Esk College
- Kilmarnock College
- Aberdeen College
- John Wheatley College
- Scottish Agricultural College
- Moray College
- James Watt College
- Inverness College
- Glasgow Metropolitan College
- Glasgow Caledonian University

- Edinburgh's Telford College
- Forth Valley College

Although we achieved a decent coverage of institutions, only 40 individuals responded in total. The results of the survey are detailed below.

Chart 11

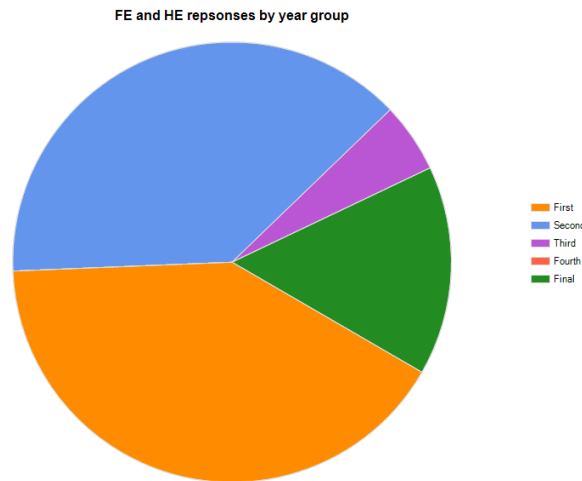
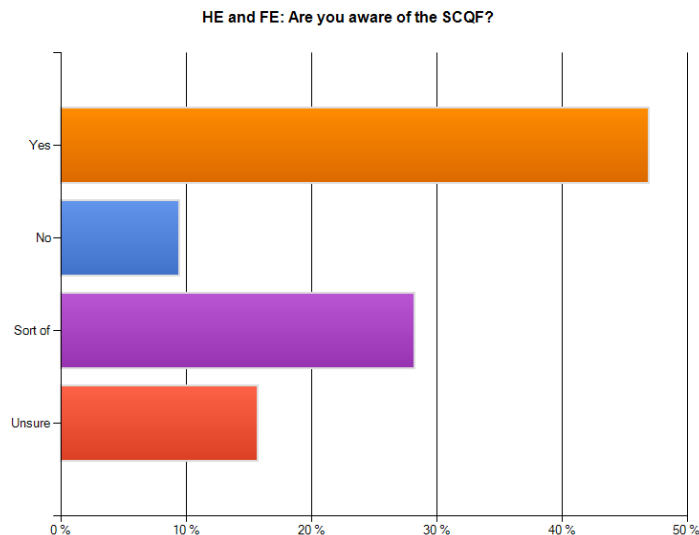


Chart 11 shows responses broken down by respondent year group. The vast majority of responses came from first and second year students. This cohort is likely to have been exposed to SCQF levels on their school certificates which may explain why they have been quicker to respond. Due to the time of year, many honours year students will be preoccupied with exams.

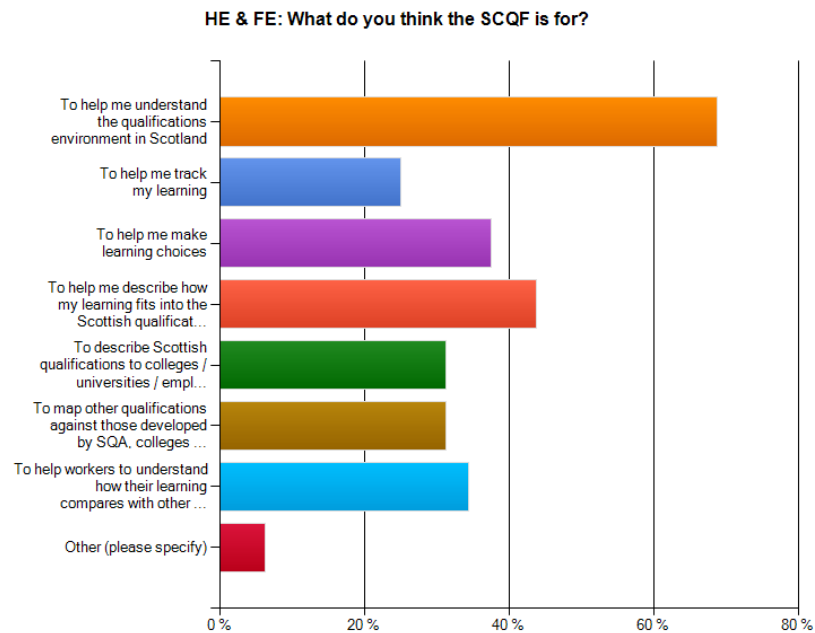
Chart 12



The majority of respondents are aware of the SCQF. There is no particular pattern to suggest that FE students are more aware than HE students as there is a consistent response across both groups. Of those who said no, all were college students. Although the sample size for HE/FE is considerably smaller than the schools sample,

students on average appear to be more aware of the SCQF than those still at school are.

Chart 13



Again, like school aged learners, the students have most commonly chosen the first option as their preferred answer. Chart 13 illustrates a decent spread across all options, but option one outweighs other options considerably. Of those respondents that chose 'other', one of the comments referred to the articulation of qualifications between colleges and universities:

'Ensuring that an HNC/D at a College is at the same standard as University level for first/second years. Therefore, when a student graduates from a College if they had an HNC they would be able to enter second year at a University, or an HND graduate would be able to enter third year at a University. Thus, the SCQF would be ensuring that available qualifications fit into the 'bigger picture' in Scotland. In addition, ensure that HNC/Ds are not devalued by employers and universities'.

This is obviously particularly important for college graduates who wish to progress to university and get credit for their learning undertaken at college.

Chart 14

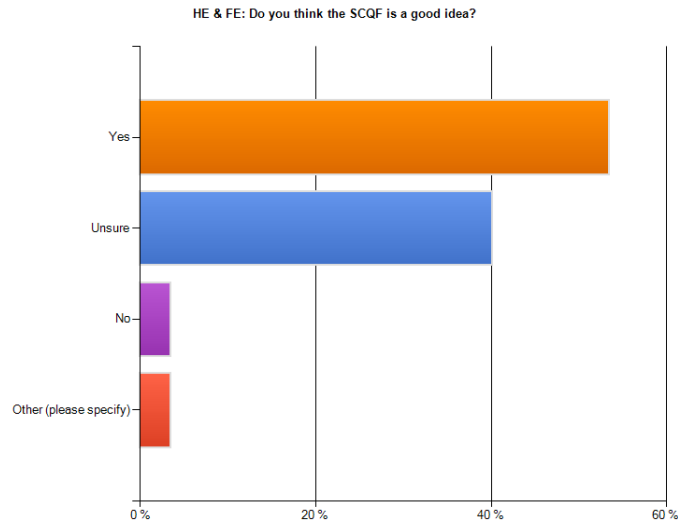


Chart 14 shows that more than half of FE/HE respondents think that the SCQF is a good idea. The proportion of those who are unsure is also quite high at 40% and may be, like school learners, due to an incomplete understanding of the SCQF and its scope.

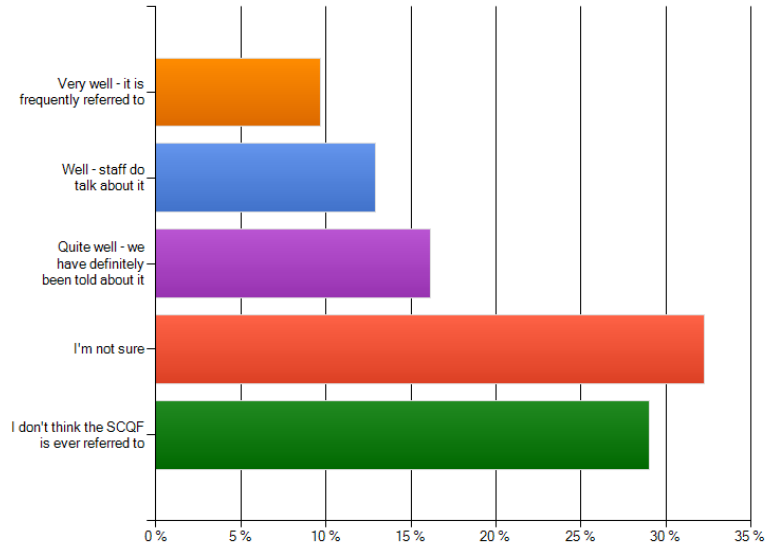
Comments left included this one which perhaps highlights two points – that, yes, the SCQF is underutilised but also that it is somewhat misunderstood.

'I think the SCQF is valuable, however, it is not utilised to its full potential, particularly with regard to graduate unemployment'.

It is not clear how the Framework can solve graduate unemployment, unless this respondent is alluding to the possibility that the SCQF could help employers to understand the value of qualifications or could encourage them to give credit for other types of learning.

Chart 15

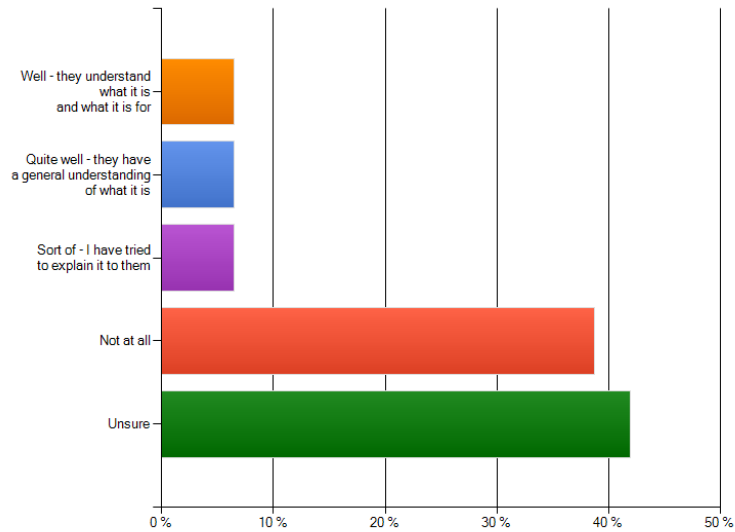
HE & FE: How well does your college / university promote the SCQF?



The pattern of responses here is similar to that from school learners. Around 60% of respondents are either unsure how well the SCQF is promoted by their college or university, or they believe that it is never referred to. Although most colleges and universities make reference to the SCQF in their prospectuses, these are obviously not read by their current students. There is potential scope to work with FE and HE institutions to make promotion of the SCQF more widespread among current as well as future students.

Chart 16

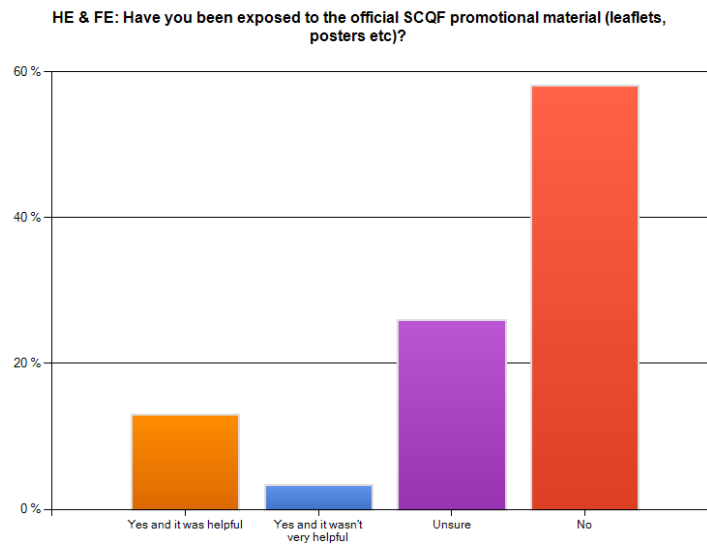
HE & FE: How well do you think that your parents / guardians understand the SCQF?



Again, this is similar to the response from school pupils. Chart 16 shows that the majority

of students believe that their parents will either be unsure of what the SCQF is or will know absolutely nothing about it. Keeping in mind that parents are also workers and potentially learners themselves, this group should not be seen as unreachable. Some parents will have exposure to the SCQF under different circumstances, but there is scope to encourage schools and FE/HE institutions to communicate more information about the SCQF with parents. Again, this may be given more attention once the Curriculum for Excellence is embedded in schools next session.

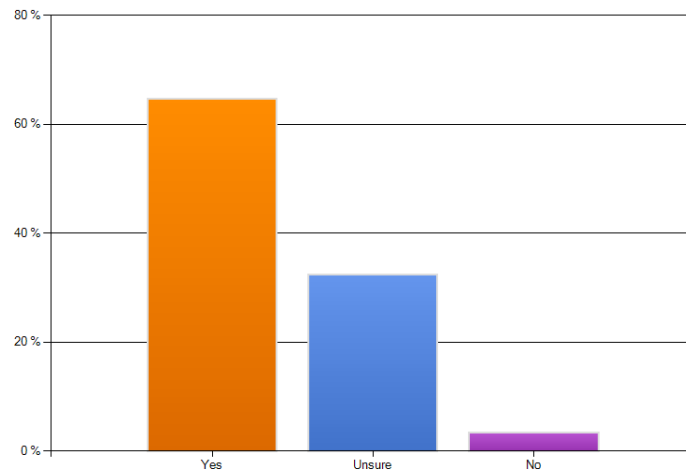
Chart 17



The vast majority of students suggest that they have not been exposed to any SCQF promotional material. However, as around 20% state that they have, there may be confusion over what is SCQF material and what is college / university material. Again, there is no distinct pattern in responses to this question. University students all responded 'no' to this question and college students gave a variety of responses. This would suggest that it is down to the individual institution in terms of how well they display SCQF promotional materials, or how well it is integrated within their online services and so on. Scotland's Colleges and Universities Scotland may have a Partnership role to play here to encourage some consistency across Higher and Further Education institutions.

Chart 18

HE & FE: Do you think it is helpful to include SCQF levels on college / degree certificates?



Over 60% of FE/HE students said that they thought that including SCQF levels on certificates was a good idea. This is very positive. Levels are currently not included on college and university certificates, even though the qualifications are included as part of the Framework. Some students remain uncertain with around 30% stating that they are unsure about this. Very few said no. This gives the Executive Team an opportunity to explore this further with FE and HE institutions which, again, will help to raise awareness of the SCQF amongst current and graduating students.

Chart 19

HE & FE: What are you planning to do when you leave college / university?

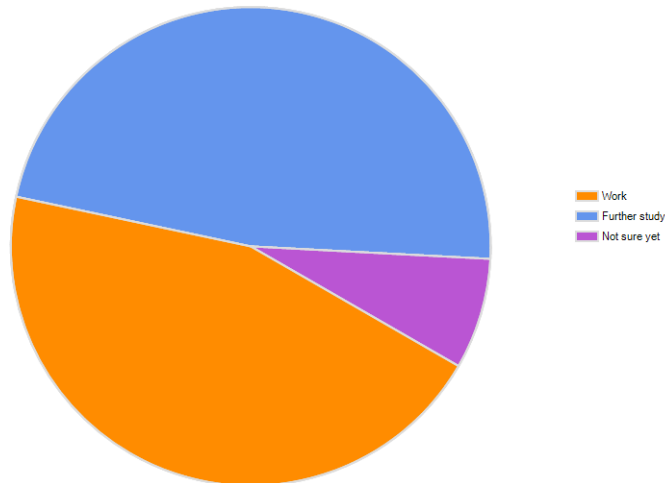
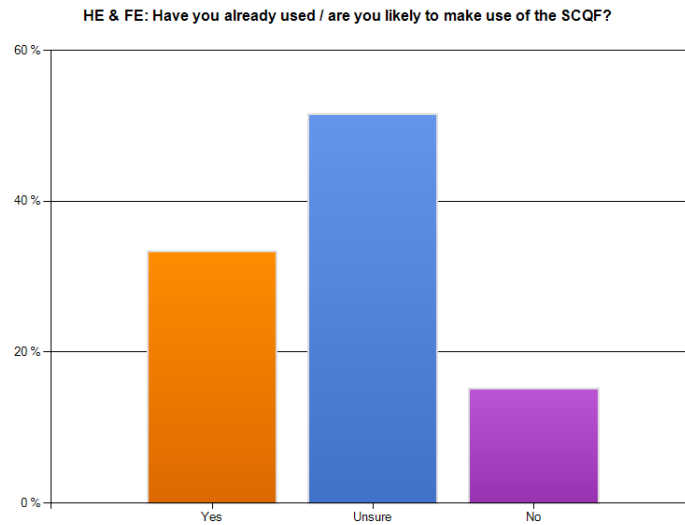


Chart 19 illustrates what students plan to do on graduation. Many of the college students are hoping to progress to university and have questions over the value of their college learning, which is highlighted after Chart 20, where student responses to how the SCQF might be improved are provided. College students who plan to continue their studies are particularly important as the SCQF should provide them with a tool for demonstrating the credit they have achieved through studies already undertaken.

Chart 20



Again, when students were asked if they had made use of the SCQF or are likely to in future the responses are very similar to those given by school pupils. Chart 20 shows that over half of respondents are unsure about this – largely because they are unsure what the SCQF offers them.

We also asked students what might be done to improve the SCQF. Although most of their suggestions do not relate to the SCQF directly, they do highlight the importance of articulation and progression and a need for a vehicle (the SCQF) to make the approach to this more consistent and fair.

'Different colleges and universities seem to rate the same qualifications in different ways. Some universities will let me into third year with my HND whereas some will only let me into first year - if there was some way to make my qualification consistently recognised everywhere that would be good'.

'I'm a direct entry student from college to University and depending on where I went dictated whether I got 3rd year entry or 2nd year entry - for very similar courses. I feel an HND should get you into the same level entry in HE no matter which institution it is'.

'I don't understand how some courses at college allow access to 3rd year at Robert Gordon University (RGU) when similar courses at other universities will only accept at 1st year level. Also, how students in 3rd year at RGU can transfer to an alternative university, but if you have transferred from college to RGU this option is not available. This has caused a lot of confusion for many students'.

'Make articulation consistent! At Aberdeen College an HND can get you into 3rd year at RGU but anywhere else and the students could be forced back to first year'.

'Taking a greater role in trying to promote the value of qualifications, to try and reduce graduate unemployment. In addition, making sure that College qualification to University study - articulation - is a priority'.

'Better promotion to raise awareness'.

'The ideas behind the SCQF are good but not understood well to the general student. I am hard pressed to find a student who understands what this is and how this can be used to their advantage over the coming years'. (NUS representative and final year university student)

Therefore, amongst this group, the main priorities stem around:

- Raising awareness of the SCQF in general and more specifically how students can make use of it
- Working with FE and HE stakeholders to highlight student concerns over progression routes, their lack of clarity and lack of consistency
- Working with FE and HE stakeholders to enhance promotion of the SCQF amongst current students and how this might best be achieved
- Working with FE and HE stakeholders to encourage SCQF recognition on college and university certificates

Most students surveyed seemed to think that the SCQF is a good idea, they just really need greater exposure to the detail of the SCQF and how it can assist them, particularly in terms of articulation and progression. It is somewhat beyond the remit of the SCQF Partnership to influence the way in which universities in Scotland articulate college qualifications but there is scope to raise this as an issue that is potentially hindering the perceived effectiveness of the SCQF and student faith in the real value of their college qualifications.

5.3 Work based learners

Work based learners have been targeted through private training providers and the Scottish Training Federation.

We have received 70 responses from work based learners and responses are detailed below. Chart 21 shows the age group of respondents. Most are aged between 16 and 21, although responses do cover the entire spectrum of age group options offered.

Chart 21

Work based learners: Age group of respondents

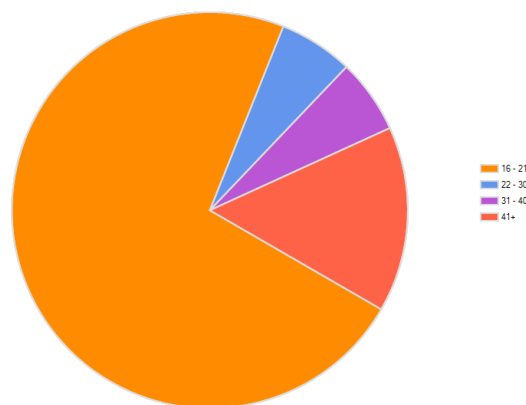
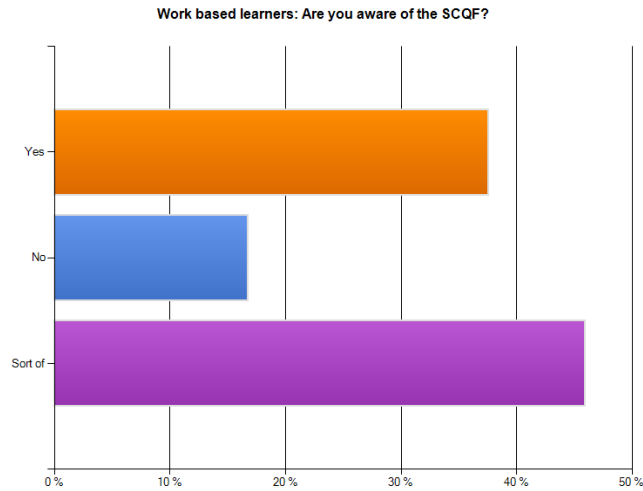
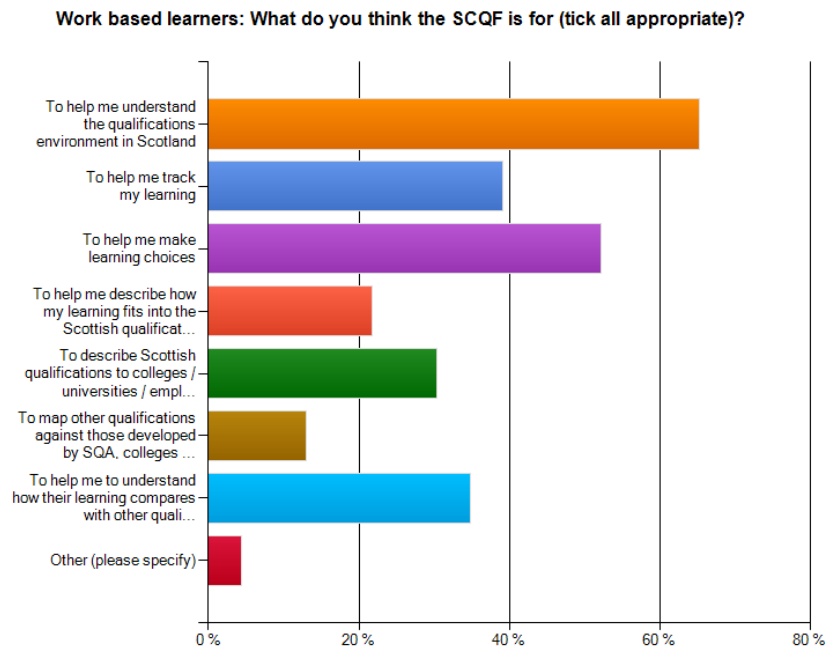


Chart 22



A higher proportion of work based learners are aware, or least 'sort of' aware of the SCQF than the school pupils and students, with only 15% of learners in this group claiming to be unaware of the SCQF.

Chart 23



Work based learners have a similar understanding of the SCQF as other learners. Chart 23 shows that, again, the most popular answer is option one. Work based learners have a different response to option four, however, where less respondents opted for 'To help me describe how my learning fits into the Scottish qualifications structure'. Otherwise, the spread of answers is similar to responses given by school pupils and students. Like all respondents, though, work based learners would be unlikely to make a coherent statement about the SCQF without these prompts, although one

respondent stated:

'[The SCQF is designed] to recognise my learning and place it alongside other qualifications creating a cluster of qualifications often set at different levels'.

This perhaps demonstrates that there is more confidence among work based learners in their understanding of what the SCQF is for.

Chart 24

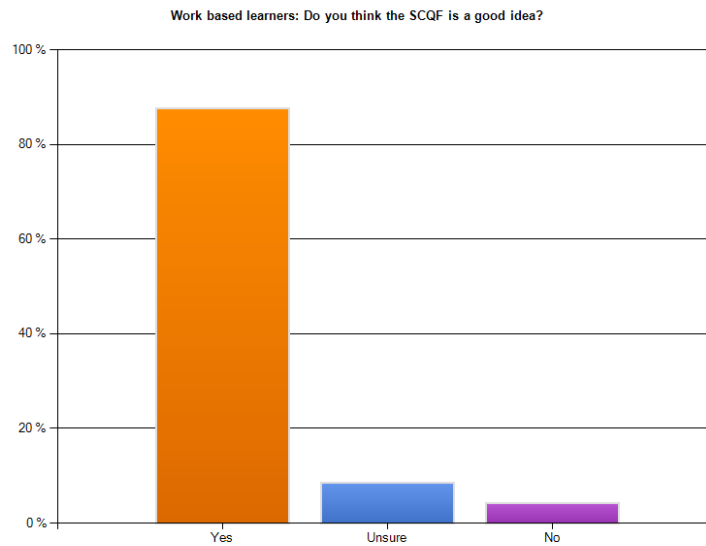
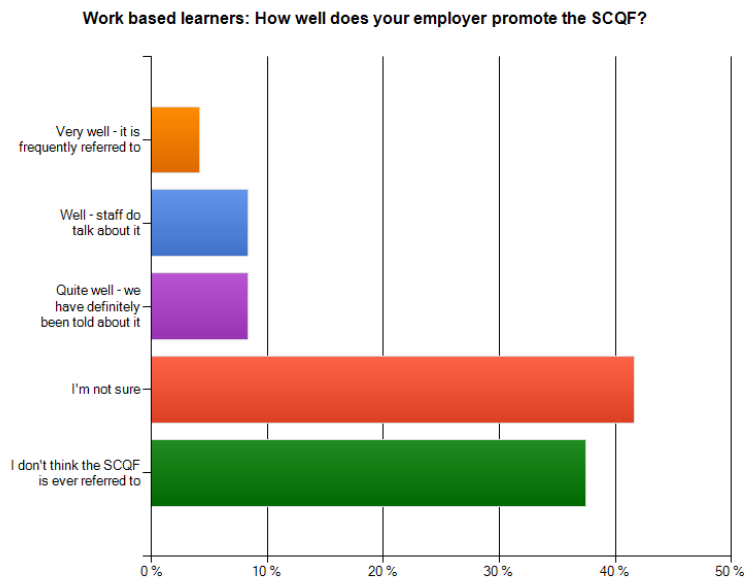


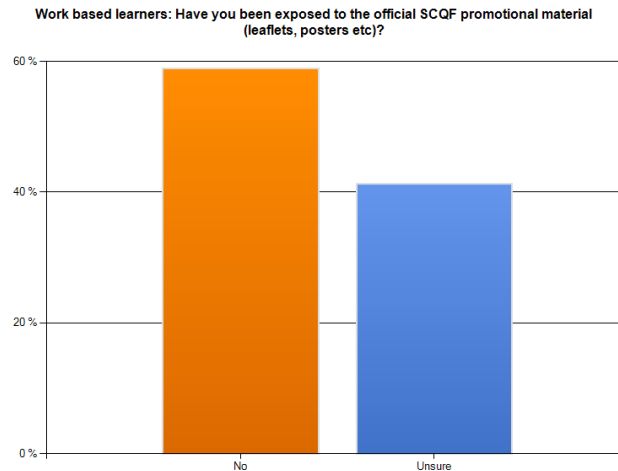
Chart 24 shows that work based learners are significantly more positive about the SCQF as over 80% of them think it is a good idea. Far fewer work based learners are unsure about this than other groups of learners have been.

Chart 25



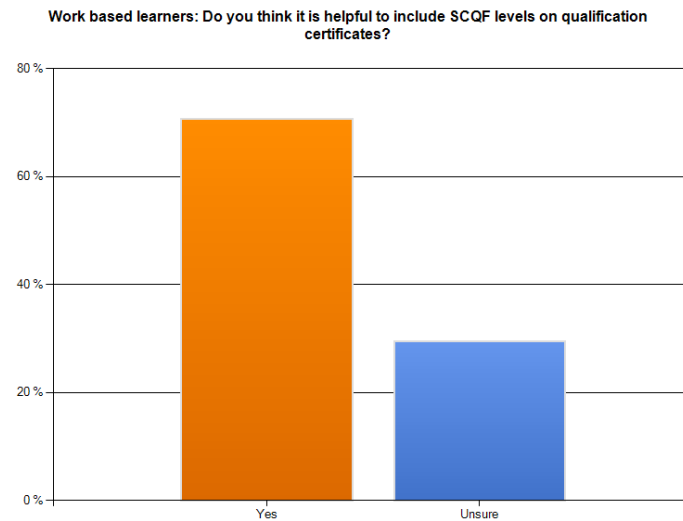
Interestingly, work based learners do not hold great belief that their employers actively promote the SCQF. However, as all respondents are at least sort of aware of the Framework, we can probably assume that training providers are communicating something that at least highlights the existence of the SCQF.

Chart 26



Exposure to official SCQF promotional material is missing amongst this group of learners. However, this may be because SCQF information is provided within employer or training provider materials. NHS Education for Scotland, for instance, certainly makes open reference to the SCQF in their in-house training publications.

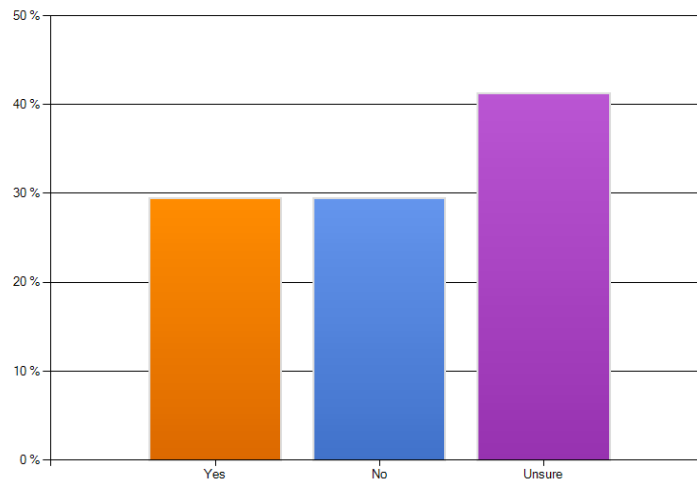
Chart 27



Work based learners, as shown in chart 27, are enthusiastic that SCQF levels be included on their qualifications certificates. Close work with Sector Skills Councils and the Scottish Training Federation may help to ensure this is put in place consistently across each sector.

Chart 28

Work based learners: Has the SCQF helped you to better understand the options available to you in terms of your future learning?

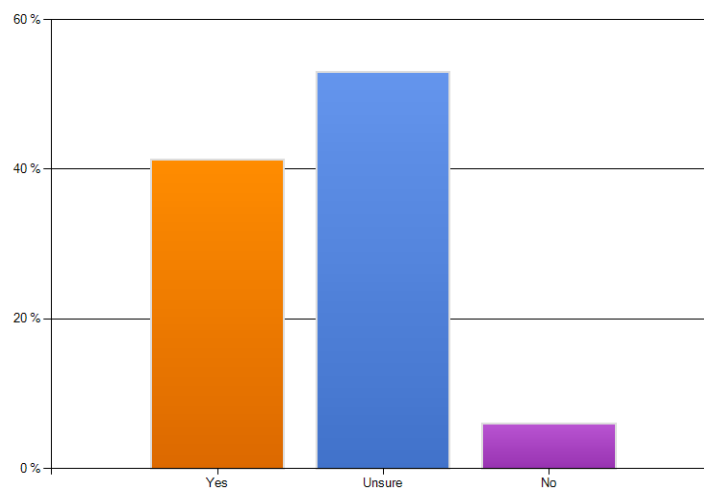


Work based learners are a very important group as many of them have not gone through the more traditional learning routes. The largest proportion of respondents here are under 21 years old and many are completing apprenticeships. We asked if the SCQF has helped them to understand their future learning options. Chart 28 shows a mixed response to this – possibly because many of the respondents may not have considered life after their current learning.

This is part of the SCQF that may need to be made more obvious to work based learners to encourage them to consider their future options and where their current training may lead, particularly under the less traditional routes to attainment and progression.

Chart 29

Work based learners: Have you already used / are you likely to make use of the SCQF, do you think?



Again, like all learner groups surveyed, chart 29 gives a fairly positive indication that there is an appetite for using the SCQF in future. Those unsure tend to be those who

are unsure how the SCQF might help them in future. Very few respondents in this group said no.

When asked to describe the SCQF in one sentence, responses included:

'[The SCQF] really helped me when I was at school in deciding my future'

'I know about it but don't know a lot'

'[I have] heard of it but really don't know a lot about it'

'The SCQF provides info on qualifications in Scotland'

'[The SCQF is] helpful for my future'

'SCQF allows you to get access to appropriate training so you can meet your full potential'.

All of these respondents are under 21 years of age. One response that demonstrates a more comprehensive understanding of the SCQF came from a work based learner in the over 41 age bracket:

'[The SCQF is a] benchmarking process which brings recognition for qualifications of all levels allowing them to form a flexible Framework of competence which reflects an individual's skills and academic achievement'

This may just illustrate that older learners are better prepared to carry out more research into their continuing learning. It does demonstrate that the information is available to learners, but maybe also implies that this is only the case if learners are willing to be proactive in finding it.

Therefore, amongst this group, the main priorities stem around:

- Further awareness raising with work based learners, particularly around progression routes and future learning
- Working with SSCs and the Scottish Training Federation to consider getting SCQF levels onto all qualifications certificates

6 Conclusions

Stakeholder feedback has been extremely positive. The SCQF team are seen to be effective, supportive and approachable. All stakeholders have praised their commitment to getting the Framework formalised and integrated into the Scottish education environment.

Responses have not really produced any great surprises. Where there are still issues to be resolved, stakeholders appreciate the limited resource available to the SCQF team to respond quickly and attack issues on a big scale. Early analysis indicated that the following issues came out as the most important for stakeholders:

- RPL & credit transfer
- Making better use of Partner organisations
- Communicating successes
- Quality assurance
- Targeting school teachers as advocates of SCQF
- Level descriptors – linking to skills / National Occupational Standards

There are also areas for consideration, grouped under three main headings below. More detail is provided in section 4, specifically at 4.5 and 4.6

Promoting the Framework

- SCQF not yet well enough understood by industry
- Need to shout about the good work being done
- Key influencers need to be encouraged to influence
- Not enough engagement with learners about what the SCQF values mean and what the Framework can help them do

Funding

- Danger that SCQF Partnership is vulnerable in funding rounds
- Funding should be more readily available now that the Framework is in place to help populate it so that it represents the fuller picture of learning across Scotland
- Greater promotion of secondment opportunities within the Executive Team to boost resource
- Link funding with SCQF – money is the key driver for employers
- The financial implications of getting provision credit rated

The Partnership, Executive Team and the Forum

- Profile of SCQF may be strengthened if there was employer representation on the Board
- No central QA body in Scotland so there is more trust involved with gauging appropriateness of qualification levelling etc – the SCQF Partnership needs to ensure that the 'trusting' nature of the Framework is not abused
- Some Forum member responsibilities are a bit blurred
- Clear task setting so Partner organisations and stakeholders deliver – and understand their roles
- Forum should also include less mainstream representatives
- Are too many people involved in the Forum?
- There is no need to be wholly inclusive – Forum meetings could be massive,

but to what end?

- Better focus for Forum meetings – series of seminars rather than Forum?

The learner consultation has also not really raised many surprises. Learners have a mixed and somewhat confused understanding of the SCQF. What is consistent is their lack of awareness of what the framework is for and how they might use it to aid their learning decisions. Recommendations have been made throughout the section around learner consultation. The main actions to take forward are:

- Awareness raising across all learner groups
- Working with learning providers to help get a consistent and targeted message out to learners
- Working with FE and HE stakeholders to highlight student concerns over progression routes, their lack of clarity and lack of consistency
- Working with FE and HE stakeholders to enhance promotion of the SCQF amongst current students and how this might best be achieved
- Working with FE, HE and awarding body stakeholders to encourage SCQF recognition on college and university certificates

The general consensus is that the Executive Team is doing a very good job under severely restricted resources. The progress they have made is viewed positively and in a climate of increasingly tightened public sector budgets, it is felt that the SCQF Partnership should not be sidelined as there is progress to be made on the very firm foundations that have been developed over the past few years.

Frontline Consultants

July 2010

Appendix 1

Stakeholder interviews

We are doing some work to understand stakeholder perceptions of the SCQF, how well the Framework has been embedded across sectors and the effect on learners. We have devised a set of structured questions to gauge your perception of the Framework, how well you feel it works and what still needs to be achieved. We would like to understand what you think has gone well and where you feel there needs to be change.

Length of time with SCQF Partnership Forum (if applicable):

1. How well do you understand the aims and objectives of the SCQF Partnership?
2. Do these aims and objectives complement those of your own organisation?
3. What do you understand the benefits of the SCQF to be?
4. How effective has the SCQF Partnership been in developing the Framework?
5. Do you think that the Framework is fit for purpose?
6. Is the Framework widely accepted and understood (across Scotland – learners/employers/parents/everyone)?
7. Has the SCQF been adequately publicised?
8. How do you think the SCQF compares with the qualifications Framework in England?
9. The SCQF is an enabling, rather than a regulatory Framework, do you think this works?
10. Do you think that the Framework is robust in terms of linking education, funding and quality assurance?
11. Do the SCQF Partnership's activities sufficiently tie in with government / national policy?
12. How well do you think the SCQF has been embedded in mainstream education, training and learning activities in Scotland (particularly if speaking to educational institute representatives, ask how well they do it)?
13. Have enough high profile employers been engaged with the SCQF?
14. How well has the SCQF assisted educational institutes with articulation and progression routes through education?
15. Do you think that learners understand the SCQF in terms of articulation and progression?
16. How effective do you think the mechanisms for the recognition of prior learning are?
17. Do you think there are any weaknesses in the current set up with either the Partnership or the Framework itself?
18. What do you think works particularly well?
19. Is there anything to be learned from Frameworks elsewhere, do you think?
20. How do you envisage the future for the SCQF?

Extra questions for Credit Rating Bodies

1. How has the process of being granted credit rating status worked? Is it straightforward?
2. What could be improved in this process?
3. How active have you been in terms of credit rating?
4. Is the support you receive from the SCQF Partnership adequate?
5. What needs to be improved / changed? (barriers to qualifications getting credit & levelled etc)