



## **Employer Engagement Provider Study**

### **Report for the SCQF Partnership**

**April 2014**

**Kerson Associates Ltd**



Supporting  
Skills Development

## Contents

<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>2. Report Presentation .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3. Context .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. Awareness of the SQCF by Employers.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Uses of the SCQF by Employers .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>6. Actions for SCQF Partnership to engage Employers .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>7. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>8. Recommendations.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Annex 1 - Terms of Reference from the SCQF Partnership.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Annex 2 - Consultant Team - Kerson Associates Ltd .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Annex 3 – Data Gathering Methodology .....</b>	<b>39</b>

# Executive Summary

## Overview

The study has considered:

- Employer perceptions, awareness and understanding of the SCQF across the public, private and voluntary sectors and the barriers which may prevent engagement with the SCQF.
- The use, impact and benefits of SCQF among employers across the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- Actions that could be taken to improve awareness and engagement with the SCQF.

## Conclusions

The study has concluded that:

The Scottish Government through its 'Economic Strategy' (2011)<sup>1</sup> and refreshed 'Skills for Scotland Strategy' (2010)<sup>2</sup> continues to highlight the importance of the SCQF in supporting employers and their workforce, in a lifelong learning context, to continue to develop and use the skills needed to support economic recovery and success. Despite this, there are still large numbers of employers who remain unaware of the SCQF and, if aware, don't see the SCQF as a business priority and don't appreciate its potential benefits to their organisation. As a result, it continues to be extremely challenging to actively engage employers across the public, private and voluntary sectors to purposefully use the SCQF in workforce recruitment and in planning and executing workforce development. This challenge remains particularly high with small businesses.

A significant number of employers struggle to understand the range of qualifications they may come across when employing staff, in particular those offered in schools in Scotland, vocational qualifications (VQs) and from other parts of the UK/EU. With new qualifications now added to the SCQF following the rollout of Curriculum for Excellence, this problem is

---

<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2011), Economic Strategy. Found online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/13091128/0>

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2010), Skills for Scotland Strategy. Found online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/10/04125111/0>

compounded. Importantly, a significant number of employers don't appreciate that they could be using the SCQF as a tool to help them better understand the qualifications offered in Scotland and understand levels of qualifications when selecting candidates for job interview.

In general, the resources provided by the SCQF Partnership are not well utilised by employers. A range of recently developed resources aimed at employers have been well received but have not yet had time to make a significant impact. Feedback has confirmed that the SCQF Partnership and Partnership Forum should continue to pursue its employer engagement strategy and use it to continue to develop simple, targeted and contextualised material for employers that continues to:

- Raise awareness of the SCQF and promotes the business benefits to employers.
- Illustrate to employers how others are using and benefitting from using the SCQF in their organisations.
- Provide tools and training to support the use of the SCQF by employers.
- Illustrate how the SCQF can specifically support small businesses.

As well as providing these resources, there is a need to have mechanisms that will allow the SCQF Partnership to assess the value and impact of the resources they provide to employers.

The approach taken by the SCQF Partnership to widen employer engagement through a collaborative approach with the SCQF Partnership Forum has had a degree of success, but is still not getting sufficient numbers of employers and/or intermediaries engaged with and using the SCQF in their workforce recruitment and development strategies and approaches. Feedback suggests that collaborative working continues to be the preferred model, and highlights the benefits of the SCQF Partnership continuing to expand the number of intermediary organisations<sup>3</sup> it works with in the implementation of future employer engagement strategies. It is difficult to see how the expansion of collaborative networks could be achieved, however, without increasing the staffing resource available within the **SCQFP Executive Team** to lead and co-ordinate this work. Further discussion with relevant funding bodies (e.g. SFC) could prove beneficial in enabling the SCQFP Executive team more flexibility to use available funding to progress this work.

---

<sup>3</sup> Intermediaries could include public sectors bodies such as Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, Chambers of Commerce, Councils, Business Gateways; employer networks, member organisations; trade associations; sector skills councils; professional bodies; trade unions.

## Recommendations

The recommendations aim to:

- Continue to raise the level of employer awareness and engagement with the SCQF in each of the three sectors.
- Encourage more employers to see its relevance to their business activity needs and actively embed the use of the SCQF into their workforce recruitment and development strategies.

The study recommends that:

### Recommendation 1

**The SCQF Board** should revisit the **SCQF Employer Engagement Strategy** in consultation with the **SCQF Partnership Forum**, ensuring that it builds on previous work and is designed to continue to support the Scottish Government's objectives relating to skills and economic development. In preparing the Strategy it is proposed that:

- **All partners in the SCQF Partnership** actively contribute to the objectives and actions set out in the SCQF Employer Engagement Strategy.
- Objectives are set which relate to the four levels of engagement.
- Mechanisms are specified in the Strategy that would allow the SCQFP Executive Team and SCQF Board assess the extent to which the Strategy is impacting on employer use of the SCQF over the three year period and to inform future action needed.

### Recommendation 2

**The SCQFP Executive Team** should review the resourcing and effectiveness, composition and working arrangements of the SCQF Partnership Forum with a view to continuing to find effective ways of working in collaboration with other 'intermediaries' representing different employer groups to promote and encourage the use of the SCQF in a targeted way. In reviewing the Forum, the SCQFP Executive Team should make further use of intermediary groups, such as Federation of Small Businesses, Chambers of Commerce, targeted trade associations and sector skills councils that would reflect the diverse nature of the employer sector and in particular, assist them to promote the use of the SCQF to small businesses.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The SCQF Partnership** should work with the **Partnership Forum** to review how best to target existing resources and communication methods to promote the SCQF to employers. In conducting the review consideration should be given to feedback from employers consulted during this study specifically:

- Identify employers for whom SCQF employer guides can be matched to their current business needs i.e. providing 'just in time' solutions for employers.
- Evaluate the most effective communication approaches for promotional messages to reach employers, including exploration of social media solutions.
- Explore solutions that provide targeted promotional messages which are linked to specific business needs and act as 'hooks' to get the attention of employers, for example, recruitment challenges such as employing school leavers, asylum seekers, Eastern European staff.
- Continue to ensure that there is clear signposting to the employer section of the SCQF website from other Partnership Forum member websites.
- Continue to build a bank of case studies and success stories which demonstrate how the SCQF can impact on real business issues, for example, high turnover, skills shortages. Wherever possible, these should be matched to different employers segments i.e. big vs small employers; private vs voluntary sectors.
- Evaluate the impact of existing work with sectors and identifying opportunities to work with priority sectors to develop contextualised approaches, for example, contextualised frameworks with sectoral qualifications and/or training/CPD pathways (for example, those with regulatory requirements); promotional material targeted specifically at micro/small business.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The SCQF Board** should consider the need to enhance the staffing resource within the **SCQF Executive Team** to undertake the co-ordination of the implementation of the employer engagement strategy with partners and a potentially augmented partnership Forum.

It is envisaged that additional staffing resource is needed to for example:

- Review and expand the SCQF Partnership Forum.
- Use the Partnership Forum to gather intelligence about the needs of different groups of employers and to provide feedback on promotional material/initiatives aimed at employers.
- Run further workshop based sessions in Forum meetings to specifically discuss business issues facing employer and develop cross organisational strategies.
- Work with public agencies such as Business Gateway, Chambers of Commerce, Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland to build the SCQF into the toolkits and resources provided for employers.
- Work with partners such as Federation of Small Businesses to evaluate the needs of, and potential of the SCQF to support, micro/small business where there is no dedicated HR function and a history of little investments in workforce development.
- Work with relevant professional bodies such as CIPD to increase the knowledge of the SCQF amongst HR and learning and development professionals.
- Investigate the scope for embedding awareness of the SCQF into professional/CPD provision.
- Investigate the scope for working with recruitment specialists/organisations to increase their understanding and use of the SCQF.

## 1. Introduction

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP) commissioned Kerson Associates Ltd in April 2013 to conduct a study which gathered views of SCQF from Employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The study has considered the following:

- Employer perceptions, awareness and understanding of SCQF across the public, private and voluntary sectors and the barriers which may prevent engagement with the SCQF.
- The use, impact and benefits of SCQF among employers across the public, private and voluntary sectors.
- Actions that the SCQF Partnership could take to improve awareness and engagement with the SCQF.

Details of the terms of reference for the study are provided in **Annex 1**. Details of the Consultant Team from Kerson Associates Ltd are provided in **Annex 2**.

In summary the main research methods were:

- online surveys
- face to face and structured phone interviews
- focus group
- attendance at sectoral events
- review of other research.

Details of the research methodology are outlined in **Annex 3**.

A further study into the awareness and use of the SCQF by private Training Providers has been carried out. **Findings and recommendations from this study are provided in a separate report.**

The Study has been carried out at a time when there is significant reform to the education system in Scotland both in the school and post-16 education sectors. The Scottish Government has driven these changes through the roll out of 'Curriculum for Excellence' <sup>4</sup>, a more flexible and enriched curriculum for 3 to 18 year and significant reform of the post-16 sectors<sup>5</sup>. This has resulted in the introduction of new qualifications to the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)<sup>6</sup>.

## **2. Report Presentation**

Throughout the report a series of coloured boxes are used:

- Blue boxes provide details of the study that is being explored.
- Green boxes record quotes from those taking part in the study.
- Pink boxes provide illustrative examples of current practice.

Please note that the illustrative examples were drawn from the discussions with employer and intermediary groups. These are illustrative and it is acknowledged that there will be many other examples which are not reflected in this report.

---

<sup>4</sup> Curriculum for Excellence

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp>

<sup>5</sup> Putting Learners at the Centre- Delivering our Ambitions for Post-16 Education

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/357943/0120971.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework can be found online at: <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/>

### 3. Context

- 3.1 The study consulted employers from the public sector, private sector and voluntary sectors. The size of organisations covered within the study ranged from micro/small business employing less than 10 people to large multi-site organisations employing over 500 people. Key contacts, where possible, were either in an HR or senior management/executive role within the organisation consulted. The report highlights distinctions about awareness and use of the SCQF between those broad categories where possible. Significant challenges in engaging with employers with the study were, however, experienced during the consultation and responses to surveys and participation in focus groups and other data collecting activities **were low**. As a result, the findings are indicative. This difficulty in getting engagement with employers has been reflected in previous studies and employer engagement strategies.
- 3.2 As well as collecting opinions of the SCQF from individual employers in each of the three representative sectors, the study consulted with 'intermediary' organisations who represent and support employers. The term 'intermediary' has been defined as including:
- public sectors bodies such as SE, SDS, Chambers of Commerce, Councils, Business Gateways
  - employer networks, trade associations, sector skills councils, trade unions

The feedback and intelligence from Intermediary organisations gathered using a variety of methods has contributed significantly to the findings of the study. See **Section 3** of the report.

- 3.3 As stated above, organisations of different sizes were consulted. The size of the organisation was a factor influencing how human resource functions (e.g. staff recruitment and workforce development) were organised and managed. In general, micro and small organisations tended not to have a dedicated HR function. Generally they recruited infrequently, tended not to have (or have a need for) skills based job descriptions and typically carried out training on an ad-hoc basis. Medium to large organisations on the other hand generally had well developed and structured approaches to workforce development with, for example, skills based job descriptions and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes in place.

## 4. Awareness of the SCQF by Employers

In this part of the study the following were explored with employers and employer intermediaries:

- How aware of the SCQF are employers?
- What barriers exist that are preventing employers engaging with the SCQF?

4.1 The following summarises findings from employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors and 'intermediary' organisations who represent and support employers. Information was gathered using an online survey, telephone interviews, focus groups and feedback at sectoral events. Given the low response rate to the online survey, telephone interviews and focus groups (specifically those with intermediary organisations) set out to test and confirm initial feedback from the survey, which had been completed largely by employer representatives already familiar with the SCQF.

### Awareness of the SCQF

4.2 Whilst the majority of employers completing the online survey stated that they were aware of the SCQF, follow-up interviews and discussion with other employers and intermediary organisations indicated that awareness levels, more generally, were lower than the survey responses suggested in all three sectors. Specifically, the perception of most of the intermediaries consulted as part of a Focus Group was that awareness of the SCQF amongst the employers they represented was low. This was particularly true of small businesses.

#### Quotes:

*"Approximately 80% of small business owners had either not heard of the SCQF or didn't know."*

*"My role is to provide training and development support for employers but I have yet to come across an organisation using SCQF."*

- 4.3 Only a few trade associations participated in the study, but those who did indicated that the relevance and therefore awareness of the SCQF was highest with employers who supported learning/apprenticeship training in the workplace through work based qualifications such as SVQs.
- 4.4 Where employers had an awareness of the SCQF, awareness was highest in medium to large organisations, in public sector organisations and in organisations with HR and/or learning and development specialists.

**Quotes:**

*“Level of awareness is low apart from some HR and L&D people and some of the younger apprentices.”*

*“Where organisations have HR Managers who are recruiting consistently they will keep up to date as much as possible and may appreciate the role of SCQF. Organisations who only do occasional recruitment are less likely to be aware of SCQF.”*

- 4.5 There were instances where individuals stated they were aware of the SCQF as a result of having children of school age, but were not using it in their professional capacity.

**Quote:**

*“As a parent I have some understanding of SCQF – as an employer it is less relevant.”*

## Barriers to Engaging with the SCQF

- 4.6 Employers have a diverse set of business objectives. This was apparent across all three sectors and business needs was a factor that significantly influenced the extent to which employers were interested in/or could be interested in and would prioritise engaging with the SCQF. Organisations that saw no need for, benefit from, or impact of the SCQF on the business indicated that they would not engage in discussions and would not apply time and resource to developments involving use of the SCQF. On the other hand, organisations that could see how the use of the SCQF could help them address a business need, would engage. The extent to which this was happening was minimal however.
- 4.7 The cost and time associated with investing resource in the use of the SCQF, without some business imperative leading to operational improvement, was considered a significant barrier that prevented employers in all three sectors from engaging with and using the SCQF.

### Quotes:

*“There needs to be clear business benefits before SCQF becomes relevant to employers.”*

*“The added value from using the SCQF is not clear to most employers.”*

*“There has to be real business benefits for using the tool and a return on investment of time...if there is a quick fix then may go back to it...there must be a hook.”*

*“Many smaller organisations prefer bespoke solutions for staff development – level or recognition are not key drivers – value for money and clear business benefits are more important.”*

- 4.8 Larger public sector organisations such as the National Health Service (NHS) and Universities and Colleges, were using the SCQF to inform the development of qualifications and training programmes/frameworks. Its use is seen relevant for academic development purposes but beyond these functions, the majority consulted indicated there was no real business imperative to use the SCQF to support HR functions such as staff recruitment and to inform workforce development strategies. There was some evidence that some colleges were using the SCQF to support staff recruitment/ development but, in general, it was seen as a ‘nice to do’ rather than an essential business tool.

**Quotes:**

*“There is no real merit in using the framework for job descriptions – with 11,000 staff who are already aligned to an internal framework, there are not enough benefits... it’s too time consuming.”*

- 4.9 There were examples where employers had engaged with SCQF when funding and support had been available. In these instances, the work undertaken had had benefit to the business, but when the funding was no longer available, it had been hard to sustain resource internally to continue the work and as a result, there has been no further development work.

**Illustrative Examples of Practice:**

**Semta**, the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies in the UK led a project in 2011 to implement a model which enabled employers to access the SCQF and Level Descriptors as a practical tool which they could use when dealing with skills. Semta successfully engaged with a number of employers, both large and SME, during the course of the project. The take up of the tool was not as high when direct support from Semta was no longer available.

**BAM Nuttall Ltd** was able to have an internal course credit rated with financial support from the SCQF. The company indicated that its decision to proceed was influenced by this funding and has not yet had any further courses credit rated, despite identifying business benefits from the process.

- 4.10 The larger organisations consulted indicated that they recruited on a UK basis. They indicated that this prevented them from referencing the SCQF in recruitment literature such as adverts and job descriptions as it was felt that in doing so, they would have to reference other relevant qualifications frameworks, to ensure literature was understood UK-wide. This was considered too time consuming and costly.

4.11 This has been missed out for some reason

## 5. Uses of the SCQF by Employers

In this part of the study the following were explored with employers and employer intermediaries:

- In what ways is the SCQF being used, or could it be used, by employers to assist employee recruitment and selection and workforce development?
- Is the SCQF helping employers to understand the range of qualifications available in Scotland and from other countries?
- To what extent is credit rating seen as a valuable business tool?
- What SCQF resources are employers using?

5.1 The following summarises findings from employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors and 'intermediary' organisations who represent and support employers. Information was gathered using an online survey, telephone interviews, focus groups and feedback at sectoral events. Given the low response rate to the online survey, telephone interviews and focus groups (specifically those with intermediary organisations) set out to test and confirm initial feedback from the survey, which had been completed largely by employer representatives already familiar with the SCQF.

### General Use of the SCQF

5.2 It would appear that employers in the **public sector** are most likely to be using the SCQF. With a few exceptions, there was very little evidence of employers in the **private and voluntary sectors** using the SCQF in any wide-spread way. This was particularly noticeable with small businesses. In instances where employers in the private sector had engaged with the SCQF, it had been driven by a specific business need.

#### Illustrative Example of Current Practice:

**Babcock International Group** (Marine Division) sought advice on levels and qualification types from SCQF when designing a ship building qualification.

- 5.3 Some intermediary organisations indicated that they used the SCQF when there was a need to advise members and clients with issues such as recruitment and workforce development, but notably, most did not refer to it on a regular basis.

**Illustrative Examples of Current Practice:**

**Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway** worked with SCQF staff to provide a briefing session for local employers who had an interest in skills development. This provided a platform for further discussions which could be supported by Scottish Enterprise Dumfries and Galloway.

**Aberdeen & Grampian Chamber of Commerce** reported that it was able to engage employers in discussions about the SCQF in the context of Modern Apprenticeships programmes.

**Use of the SCQF for Recruitment and Selection**

- 5.4 There is evidence that larger employers in all three sectors are using skills-based/competence job descriptions when recruiting staff, however, only a very few are making reference to the SCQF levels when developing their job descriptions. Of those few, the use of the SCQF for recruitment and selection is more evident in the public sector.

**Illustrative Examples of Current Practice:**

**Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)** regularly uses SCQF levels within its job adverts.

**Orkney Island Council.** All staff in the Human Resources/ Learning and Development team at Orkney Council are aware of the SCQF. They use the SCQF in recruitment and selection to assist short listing during recruitment to compare applicant qualifications from other parts of UK. These qualifications are mapped to SCQF first then to other relevant Qualifications Frameworks (usually for the rest of the UK) as appropriate.

**Forth Valley College.** All staff in the Human Resources team in the college are aware of the SCQF. They use the SCQF in recruitment and selection to prepare person specifications. In this instance, core competencies, relevant to the grade are defined first. SCQF is then used to map these qualifications to the grade. In general terms, the SCQF is used to ensure that the level of the qualification being asked for equates to the grade of the post. In selecting candidates for interview, the SCQF is used to make sense of qualifications from other parts of the UK and overseas. SCQF is core to this.

- 5.5 Organisations who have used references to SCQF in their job adverts indicated that this was always in parallel with other criteria as there was a concern that applicants could be confused.

**Illustrative Example of Current Practice:**

**Easterbrook Hall** (one of South West Scotland's premier event venues) is committed to the use of implementation of SVQs and has used the SCQF employer guides as a support for rewriting some job descriptions. The company has used the guides on 2 occasions within adverts when recruitment posts, although other information such as qualification details and relevant experience required for the level of job needed to be provided as the market is not yet familiar enough with the SCQF. The SCQF was used to support the interview process and assess the skills of applicants. A longer term objective could be the use of the SCQF to support career mapping.

- 5.6 Of those employers using skills-based/competence job descriptions when recruiting staff, the majority indicated that they tended to define the level of qualification required for a post by qualification type/title along with relevant experience in recruitment adverts and job descriptions, but tended not to reference or specify this by SCQF level. In the majority of instances, the rationale for this was that qualification titles were considered to be sufficient and more widely meaningful to potential applicants than defining them by SCQF level. That said, some employers in sectors where work-based qualifications were more commonplace, felt that the use of the SCQF could assist them to provide a means of communicating parity between academic and more vocation qualifications (VQs) when recruiting to encourage applications from people holding (VQs) as well as more traditional academic qualifications.
- 5.7 A significant number of employers in all three sectors indicated that they received job applications from across the UK and sometimes from Europe and other international countries. There was some evidence that some employers used the SCQF and found it useful to compare qualifications from other UK/European countries when short listing applicants. There was evidence that some organisations were using the SCQF alongside other UK qualifications frameworks to complete this task.

5.8 Of those employers stating they were using the SCQF to support staff recruitment and selection, a significant number cited that they were using it to:

- Get a better understanding of Scottish qualifications and how they relate to each other.
- Compare Scottish qualifications with qualifications from the rest of the UK and Europe.
- To help write job descriptions, job adverts, and person specifications for different levels of job roles.
- To help recruit staff with the correct skill levels.

### **Workforce Development**

5.9 The majority of larger employers in all three sectors indicated that they were using a range of processes and mechanisms to support and encourage employees to engage in workforce development. Most commonly used were:

- Regular appraisals.
- Structured training programmes and CPD programmes.
- Skills audits and assessment of on-the-job competence.
- Recognition for in-house training courses.

5.10 There is very little evidence to suggest that employers are using the SCQF in any planned/strategic way to support workforce development. Despite this, of those employers encouraging staff to participate in workforce development initiatives, a significant number stated that the biggest challenge they experienced in workforce development was having the ability to assess the skills level of their employees in a consistent manner and determine the correct level of training required for their employees.

5.11 Only a very small number of organisations stated they were using the SCQF to support workforce development. Of those, the examples found were in the public sector and not in private or voluntary sectors. Of those using the SCQF to support workforce development, it was being used most to:

- Inform the selection of training courses and qualifications with employees.
- Develop a competency framework.
- To support career planning and determine the correct level of training required for employees.
- To assist employees to plan further learning.
- To gain credit for internal training/CPD programmes.
- To undertake employee skills audits.

**Illustrative Example of Current Practice:**

**Historic Scotland** has used SCQF to assist with career planning for craft apprentices who have gained SVQs. The majority of employees are linked to civil service job grades which recognise academic qualifications. The framework has allowed vocational qualifications to be compared with academic routes and individuals following a craft route can now demonstrate how their skills can be matched against the more traditional academic route. It is hoped that this will facilitate more flexible career routes.

**The National Health Service (NHS).** SVQ teams in the NHS reference and use the SCQF when discussing workforce development needs and planning career development with employees. A Workforce planning and education 'pathways project' has used the SCQF to explore 'Job Families' so that a wider range of qualifications can be referenced when presenting workforce development options to employees.

5.12 The value of the SCQF as a tool to support professional recognition was highlighted by a couple of larger organisations:

**Quotes:**

*"The SCQF is a useful tool for gaining professional recognition:*

- *translating qualifications from professional bodies in a consistent way*
- *benchmarking the skills of overseas workers*
- *benchmarking the skills of individuals who have been out of the education system for 10-30 years*
- *Getting a consistent approach across all sites."*

## Understanding Qualifications

- 5.13 Many employers across all three sectors indicated that they continue to lack understanding and be confused about qualifications offered in Scotland, rest of UK and from other countries in the European Union and don't appear to appreciate that the SCQF could assist them to further their understanding. Intermediary organisations stated further that the many employers they represent have difficulties in keeping track of the changes to qualifications at School level and this was being compounded by the introduction of new qualifications as the 'Curriculum for Excellence' was being rolled out.
- 5.14 Many employers across all three sectors indicated that they continue to lack understanding of the parity between vocational qualifications such as SVQs with more traditional academic qualifications. That said, in some sectors (particularly the craft sectors), Vocational Qualifications are highly prized and SCQF was a useful tool to help make comparisons.
- 5.15 The majority of employers stated that the biggest challenge they experienced when recruiting and selecting staff was in relation to comparing qualifications applicants held from other parts of the UK (and in a minority of cases, from Europe) with Scottish qualifications.

### Quotes:

*"Many organisations struggle to understand qualifications – organisations with HR departments have a better understanding but many have very limited understanding."*

*"There is a lack of awareness of parity between qualifications – in particular between SVQs at level 4 and 5 (SCQF 9-10) VQs and academic qualifications. Recognition of VQs needs to be built with key personnel such as HR."*

*"Many organisations don't trust qualifications, value experience more highly and prefer to recruit through their network and people they know."*

*"A lot of smaller organisations don't understand how school qualifications will be relevant in the workplace – they are unsure what to expect from school pupils."*

*"Some organisations are heavily weighted toward HE qualifications and there is a great deal of acidic snobbery and lack of understanding of vocational qualifications and craft apprenticeships."*

## Credit Rating as a Valuable Business Tool

5.16 Based on analysis of the SCQF's database of qualifications and learning programmes credit rated into the SCQF and feedback from employers and intermediaries consulted, there is evidence that credit rating is seen as a valuable tool for some sectors:-

- Public Sector organisations generally value credit rating and there is some evidence that local authorities and other public sector organisations (e.g. NHS and some executive agencies (e.g. Police are credit rating workforce development and other employee training provision or are having their provision credit rated (e.g. Fire Service). Public Sector provision accounts for approximately 80% of all programmes listed on the SCQF database. However, this is dominated by the Higher Education Institutions (HEI), Colleges and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) who account for (79%) of all credit rated qualifications and other training provision listed. However this probably rightly reflects the fact that these organisations produce the most qualifications. As well as listing their national qualifications, the SQA and other Credit Rating Bodies such as some of the Universities and Colleges offer a credit rating service to other organisations, and as a result some of the provision listed by them will show other organisations as owners.
- A small number of Voluntary Sector organisations (approximately 1% of all voluntary sector provision listed on the SCQF database) indicated that they value having either the training and development programmes they offer to their clients or CPD provision they offer to their own staff/volunteers credit rated. It is to be remembered that there is a cost to credit rating and these are the organisations which would most struggle to meet that cost
- A small number of awarding bodies (excluding SQA), professional bodies (such as the Chartered Institute of Bankers in Scotland), sector skills councils, training providers and trade associations indicated that they value having the training and development programmes they offer to their members/clients credit rated into the SCQF. A key driver for some of the aforementioned is that credit rating assists them is to secure funding for courses but for others it is the value in being part of the national infrastructure or indeed to support international marketing.

**Illustrative Example of Current Practice:**

**Historic Scotland** has worked with SQA to use the SCQF to develop and credit rate a National Progression Award (NPA) for Stonemasonry – this is the only one in the UK. The NPA is aligned against Historic Scotland’s Competence Framework.

5.17 There is little indication to suggest that credit rating is considered a valuable business tool by individual employers in the Private Sector (excluding Private Training Providers, awarding bodies and professional associations). There were only a very few examples found of employers using credit rating and of those companies, funding is often a key driver.

**Illustrative Example of Current Practice:**

**BAM Nuttall Ltd** has had an internal course credit rated. A key driver for this was to draw down funding. The company has since identified a number of benefits that have arisen from the process, for example, providing recognition, encouraging commitment to training, providing a benchmark.

5.18 There are some positive examples of organisations that are using the SCQF to promote a better understanding of standards and qualifications.

**Illustrative Examples of Current Practice:**

**Federation for Industry Sector Skills & Standards** has developed an apprenticeship certificate that shows a breakdown of all the component parts of apprenticeship programmes with levels and credit value from all the relevant awarding bodies for issuing by Sector Skills Councils.

**OPITO**, the Skills Organisation for Oil and Gas is currently developing a contextualised framework that will form part of a global framework of standards. The objective is to ensure that Training and Occupational Standards can be recognised and benchmarked across the world. The Oil and Gas Framework clearly defines the skills expectations for each level and the intention is to benchmark the framework against the SCQF, the QCF and EQF. This process will begin by credit rating new technical standards within the SCQF. The Oil and Gas Framework will also be promoted as an effective tool for workforce development objectives for example:

- defining the profile of skills required in a job role
- identifying skills gaps
- supporting career planning and progression planning
- benchmarking in-house competence standards against a global framework.
- Having learning provision recognized/credit rated

### **SCQF Resources being used by Employers**

5.19 The SCQF Partnership developed a strategy to promote and engage employers with the SCQF that was implemented in 2008 and updated in 2010/11. As a result of this, and through working collaboratively with the SCQF Partnership Forum, a range of targeted resources has been produced for employers and is accessible online from the SCQF Website<sup>7</sup>. Despite a strategic and targeted approach by the SCQF Partnership and despite the ongoing production of resources targeted at promoting the SCQF to employers, some of which have been produced in partnership with organisations (e.g. video case studies), there remains a challenge of bringing them to the attention of employers and encouraging their use as a prompt to getting more employers actively using the SCQF.

5.20 Some employers consulted indicated awareness of some employer-specific SCQF resources, particularly ‘the framework’ diagram’ but very few stated they were using them on a regular basis.

5.21 There were still a considerable number of employers who indicated that they were unaware of the SCQF website. Those that were aware of it did not see it as their first point of call when requiring information, choosing in preference to seek information from their relevant Business Gateway, Chambers of Commerce and/or trade and professional body websites.

---

<sup>7</sup> SCQF Website- Employers Section. Found online at <http://scqf.org.uk/employers/>

5.22 Of the minority of employers stating they had used the SCQF Employer resources, the ones most used were:

- The Framework Diagram and Interactive Framework.
- Framework postcard.
- Old versus New table

5.23 There was positive feedback for the new **Employer Guides**, but some organisations indicated that the style of the guides and the writing approach/focus taken currently was too generic, too 'academic' and not focused enough on the added value to a business or satisfying a business need.

5.24 In questioning the reasons why employers and intermediary organisations were not using SCQF resources aimed at employers, finding time to explore the Employer Section of the SCQF website and find resources that would be of use was stated as the main barrier. Others (especially intermediary organisations consulted) stated that the resources were not targeted enough and that to get higher levels of use, the SCQF Partnership needed to have a more targeted, contextualised approach to promoting the SCQF and supporting its use by businesses and organisations. For example, promotional messages/case studies targeted at specific sectors or types of business (micro/small) to help them to identify how the SCQF could support their specific business objectives or issues. It was recognised, however, that the SCQF Partnership was doing what it could to engage employers with the resources it was able to dedicate to employer engagement.

Quotes:

*"From an employer's view there is a lot of complexity around a simple idea ...potential benefits need to grab an employer's attention within a few minutes."*

*"Resources can be too text heavy – employers need a simple a to b guide."*

*"SCQF material comes across as too academic – it is not reaching out to employers and grabbing their attention."*

*"SCQF material needs to be focused – information provided on SCQF is often too detailed and employers quickly glaze over."*



## 6. Actions for SCQF Partnership to engage Employers

In this part of the study the actions which might be taken by the SCQF Partnership to encourage employers and their employees to engage more proactively with the SCQF were explored with employers and intermediaries.

- 6.1 The following summarises views from employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors and intermediary organisations who represent and support employers who participated in the study. In presenting these views, it is important to acknowledge that the SCQF Partnership, through its employer engagement strategy is actively targeting employers, albeit that the SCQF Executive team has a very limited staffing resource available currently to assign to bespoke employer engagement activities and relies heavily on the support of the SCQF Partnership Forum to assist progress with this agenda. The proposals presented were ideas suggested by employers and intermediaries and are offered in the knowledge that reaching employers continues to be extremely challenging. **The ideas suggested are not new**, but may offer some comfort to the SCQF Partnership and Partnership Forum that the approaches being taken to increase employer engagement with the SCQF are generally considered by employers to be correct, despite the fact that they may have been tried in the past, with varying levels of success.
- 6.2 The majority of employers/intermediaries indicated that further work was needed to raise the awareness level of the SCQF. Those contributing ideas suggested that the following would be most effective:
- Using existing promotional material, such as postcard, Old vs New, which just focus on the framework as part of general awareness raising strategy
  - Working with partners to build a better understanding of qualifications in general and school and work based qualifications in particular.
  - Ensuring that links to the SCQF are built into sources of information that employers use most regularly e.g. sector newsletters, Business Gateway and Chambers' websites.

**Quotes:**

*“Not enough people understand the framework to make it useful.”*

*“Work with Chamber of Commerce and professional bodies to raise awareness of the framework.”*

*“Timing for the release of information on SCQF is important – it must be at a time that is relevant to employers – e.g. article on schools qualifications at the time of year when school pupils are recruited.”*

6.3 Many of those interviewed indicated that a targeted approach would be the most effective way to engage with employers. Suggestions included:

- Working with partners and intermediaries to ensure that SCQF material is provided at relevant times for employers i.e. to meet a specific business needs or to coincide with particular business activities (e.g. recruiting graduates/school leavers, appointing apprentices, etc). This approach would work best when partners/intermediaries have already got an established working relationship with employers and could determine the most appropriate time to introduce the SCQF as an effective business tool as part of on-going discussions.

**Quotes:**

*“Messages need to be targeted at different types of business - what is important for a micro business will be different to the needs of a larger organisation.”*

*“More visuals, faces, key messages that bounce off the page. Key messages for employers – how can you stay ahead when things are tough? Only have a few seconds to grab the attention of an employer.”*

*“Champions are a good way to get relevant information to employers on the business benefits.”*

## 7. Conclusions

This section presents the conclusions from the Employer Study.

- 7.1 The Scottish Government through its 'Economic Strategy' (2011)<sup>8</sup> and refreshed 'Skills for Scotland Strategy' (2010)<sup>9</sup> continues to highlight the importance of the SCQF in supporting employers and their workforce, in a lifelong learning context, to continue to develop and use the skills needed to support economic recovery and success. Despite this, there are still large numbers of employers who remain unaware of the SCQF and, if aware, don't see the SCQF as a business priority and don't appreciate its potential benefits to their organisation. As a result, it continues to be extremely challenging to actively engage employers across the public, private and voluntary sectors to purposefully use the SCQF in workforce recruitment and in planning and executing workforce development. This challenge remains particularly high with small businesses.
- 7.2 A significant number of employers struggle to understand the range of qualifications they may come across when employing staff, in particular those offered in schools in Scotland, vocational qualifications (VQS) and from other parts of the UK/EU. With new qualifications now added to the SCQF following senior phase rollout of Curriculum for Excellence, this problem is compounded. Importantly, a significant number of employers don't appreciate that they could be using the SCQF as a tool to help them better understand the qualifications offered in Scotland and understand levels of qualifications when selecting candidates for job interview.

---

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government (2011), Economic Strategy. Found online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/09/13091128/0>

<sup>9</sup> Scottish Government (2010), Skills for Scotland Strategy. Found online at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/10/04125111/0>

7.3 In general, the resources provided by the SCQF Partnership are not well utilised by employers. A range of recently developed resources aimed at employers have been well received but have not yet had time to make a significant impact. Feedback has confirmed that the SCQF Partnership and Partnership Forum should continue to pursue its employer engagement strategy and use it to continue to develop simple, targeted and contextualised material for employers that continues to:

- Raise awareness of the SCQF and promotes its business benefits to employers
- Illustrate to employers how others are using and benefitting from using the SCQF in their organisations
- Provide tools and training to support the use of the SCQF by employers
- Illustrate how the SCQF can specifically support small businesses.

As well as providing these resources, there is a need to have mechanisms that will allow the SCQF Partnership to assess the value and impact of the resources they provide to employers.

7.4 The approach taken by the SCQF Partnership to widen employer engagement through a collaborative approach with the SCQF Partnership Forum has had a degree of success, but is still not getting sufficient numbers of employers and/or intermediaries engaged with and using the SCQF in their workforce recruitment and development strategies and approaches. Feedback suggests that collaborative working continues to be the preferred model, and highlights the benefits of the SCQF Partnership continuing to expand the number of intermediary organisations<sup>10</sup> it works with in the implementation of future employer engagement strategies. It is difficult to see how the expansion of collaborative networks could be achieved, however, without increasing the staffing resource available within the **SCQFP Executive Team** to lead and coordinate this work. Further discussion with relevant funding bodies (e.g. SFC) could prove beneficial in enabling the SCQFP Executive team more flexibility to use available funding to progress this work.

---

<sup>10</sup> Intermediaries could include public sector bodies such as Scottish Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, Chambers of Commerce, Councils, Business Gateways; employer networks, member organisations; trade associations; sector skills councils; professional bodies; trade unions.

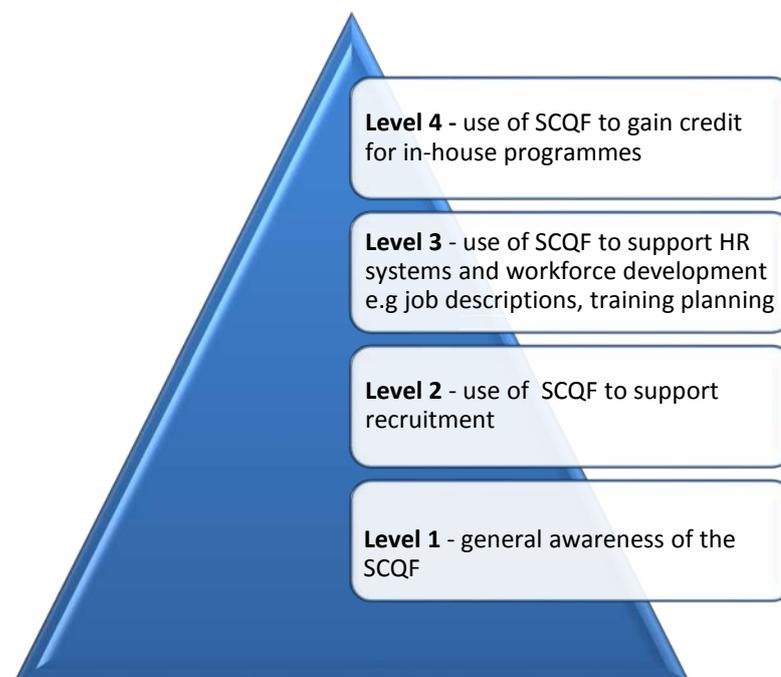
## 8 Recommendations

This section presents the recommendations from the Employer study.

8.1 The recommendations made, aim to:

- Continue to raise the level of employer awareness and engagement with the SCQF in each of the three sectors.
- Encourage more employers to see it as relevant to their business development and actively embed the use of the SCQF into their workforce recruitment and development strategies.

8.2 The recommendations made are based on a layered approach that works on the premise that, for the majority of employers, building awareness is the first step and this needs to be in place before employers can recognise the potential business benefits of the SCQF and start to use it effectively in their businesses. The potential market for more in-depth engagement is smaller and there is a need, therefore, for a diversified approach which recognises the range of employer needs.



**Figure 1**

## **Recommendation 1**

**The SCQF Board** should revisit the **SCQF Employer Engagement Strategy** in consultation with the **SCQF Partnership Forum**, ensuring that it builds on previous work and is designed to continue to support the Scottish Government's objectives relating to skills and economic development. In preparing the Strategy it is proposed that:

- **All partners in the SCQF Partnership** actively contribute to the objectives and actions set out in the SCQF Employer Engagement Strategy.
- Objectives are set which relate to the four levels of engagement.
- Mechanisms are specified in the Strategy that would allow the SCQFP Executive Team and SCQF Board assess the extent to which the Strategy is impacting on employer use of the SCQF over the three year period and to inform future action needed.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The SCQFP Executive Team** should review the resourcing, effectiveness, composition and working arrangements of the SCQF Partnership Forum with a view to continuing to find effective ways of working in collaboration with other 'intermediaries' representing different employer groups to promote and encourage the use of the SCQF in a targeted way. In reviewing the Forum, the SCQFP Executive Team should make further use of intermediary groups, such as Federation of Small Businesses, Chambers of Commerce, targeted trade associations and sector skills councils that would reflect the diverse nature of the employer sector and in particular, assist them to promote the use of the SCQF to small businesses.

### **Recommendation 3**

**The SCQF Partnership** should work with the **Partnership Forum** to review how best to target existing resources and communication methods used to promote the SCQF to employers. In conducting the review consideration should be given to feedback from employers consulted during this study specifically:

- Identify employers for whom SCQF employer guides can be matched to their current business needs i.e. providing 'just in time' solutions for employers.
- Evaluate the most effective communication approaches for promotional messages to reach employers, including exploration of social media solutions.
- Explore solutions that provide targeted promotional messages which are linked to specific business needs and act as 'hooks' to get the attention of employers, for example, recruitment challenges such as employing school leavers, asylum seekers, Eastern European staff.
- Continue to ensure that there is clear signposting to the employer section of the SCQF website from other Partnership Forum member websites.
- Continue to build a bank of case studies and success stories which demonstrate how the SCQF can impact on real business issues, for example, high turnover, skills shortages. Wherever possible, these should be matched to different employers segments i.e. big vs small employers; private vs voluntary sectors.
- Evaluate the impact of existing work with sectors and identifying opportunities to work with priority sectors to develop contextualised approaches, for example, contextualised frameworks with sectoral qualifications and/or training/CPD pathways (for example, those with regulatory requirements); promotional material targeted specifically at micro/small business.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The SCQF Board** should consider the need to enhance the staffing resource within the **SCQF Executive Team** to undertake the co-ordination of the implementation of the employer engagement strategy with partners and a potentially augmented partnership Forum.

It is envisaged that additional staffing resource is needed to for example:

- Review and expand the SCQF Partnership Forum.
- Use the Partnership Forum to gather intelligence about the needs of different groups of employers and to provide feedback on promotional material/initiatives aimed at employers.
- Run further workshop based sessions in Forum meetings to specifically discuss business issues facing employer and develop cross organisational strategies.
- Work with public agencies such as Business Gateway, Chambers of Commerce, Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland to build the SCQF into the toolkits and resources provided for employers.
- Work with partners such as Federation of Small Businesses to evaluate the needs of, and potential of the SCQF to support, micro/small business where there is no dedicated HR function and a history of little investments in workforce development.
- Work with relevant professional bodies such as CIPD to increase the knowledge of the SCQF amongst HR and learning and development professionals.
- Investigate the scope for embedding awareness of the SCQF into professional/CPD provision.
- Investigate the scope for working with recruitment specialists/organisations to increase their understanding and use of the SCQF.

# **Annex 1 - Terms of Reference from the SCQF Partnership**

## **Project Specification – Aims and Objectives**

### **1. Evaluation of the perceptions, awareness and understanding of the SCQF as well as its impact and use among employers across the public, private and voluntary sectors**

The SCQF strategic plan acknowledges the fact that the SCQF is an essential resource that has many benefits for employers across all sectors. Our operational plan also demonstrates a commitment to continually develop targeted resources that employers can use to effectively plan their recruitment and workforce development. We also acknowledge however that historically employers have been difficult to engage for a variety of reasons.

This exercise should therefore:

- a) Assess the extent to which the SCQF is understood by employers in the public, private and voluntary sectors
- b) Determine how the SCQF is helping employers to understand the range of qualifications available in Scotland
- c) Examine the range of ways in which employers are using the SCQF including, for example, recruitment, writing job descriptions and in workforce development

### **2. Evaluation of awareness and understanding of the benefits the SCQF offers to employers across employment sectors**

The SCQF has developed a number of resources aimed at helping employers to understand the Framework and to make best use of the resources available on the SCQF website. In order for us to forward plan, the work should also seek to:

- a) Determine the levels of understanding of the different benefits the Framework can deliver for employers
- b) Examine the extent to which employers are using the resources available to them from the SCQF Partnership
- c) Identify examples of good practice where employers are proactively using the SCQF in a range of ways

The SCQF is regarded as an extremely useful tool to promote lifelong learning. It is recognized as a valuable resource for learners as well as for staff and management in schools and in Further and Higher education. We envisage this research as providing evidence of the ways in which engagement with employers and raising awareness of the SCQF across employment sectors is improving understanding of the SCQF among employers and thereby helping them to meaningfully engage with the Framework.

This part of the project should assess the extent to which the SCQF is understood by employers in the sectors mentioned. Key issues which this part of the project should engage with should include:

- How the SCQF is helping employers and employees to understand the range of qualifications available in Scotland.
- How the SCQF is helping work-based learners understand the value of learning they have achieved and how this could be used for further participation in lifelong learning.
- How the SCQF has helped work-based learners to make decisions about their future learning.
- What barriers may exist which might prevent employers from engaging with the Framework and ways in which these might impact on learners in the workplace.
- How employers are using the Framework to support effective recruitment and plan workforce development.

Specific deliverables based on the above will also demonstrate:

- How well the SCQF is understood by management and chief executives in sectors.
- How aware management and chief executives are of SCQF resources available to them.
- How well the benefits of the Framework are understood by employees in different sectors.
- What actions may help the SCQF Partnership to further improve awareness of and engagement with the SCQF in the sectors mentioned.
- What factors may influence and inform future work in further implementation of the SCQF in this area.

## **Annex 2 - Consultant Team - Kerson Associates Ltd**

The lead consultants for this study were:

### **Heather Sanderson - Project Lead**

Heather has over 25 year experience of working both in the private and education sectors to develop academic and vocational frameworks and qualifications at various levels within the SCQF Framework. Heather established Kerson Associates in 1999 and has considerable experience of working in the private sector developing national and bespoke work based development solutions and supporting strategic initiatives aimed at increasing the uptake of training and vocational qualifications.

Heather is also an experienced project manager in education sector working with FE/HE partnerships and is currently managing the ELRAH Articulation Hub. Prior to establishing Kerson Associates, Heather worked for SQA for 15 years in various curriculum development and accreditation roles.

Email: [heather-sanderson@sky.com](mailto:heather-sanderson@sky.com)

### **Andrew Comrie - Consultant**

Andrew has worked in the College and Higher Education sectors for over 20 years holding academic, management and senior management posts. Andrew was Assistant Principal at Lauder College (now Carnegie College) in Fife from 1999 until 2006 with responsibilities for learning and teaching, curriculum development and quality enhancement.

In 2007, Andrew joined Kerson Associates Ltd as a Director and co-owner. Recent work has included Project Director for the SFC funded e-learning transformation project TESEP, Consultant and Critical Friend to the HE Academy's Pathfinder programme and Consultant to the JISC Transforming Curriculum Delivery programme.

For the last five years Andrew has been Director of the Edinburgh, Lothians, Fife and Borders Regional Articulation Hub (ELRAH) which is establishing articulation as an embedded and sustainable route to degree study for College students holding HN Qualifications in South East Scotland.

Andrew has also had a long association with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland where he is Programme Leader for the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Arts Education and has been acting as Director of Academic Development, project managing the reform of the Conservatoire's postgraduate reform since July 2013.

Email: [acomrie@kersonassociates.co.uk](mailto:acomrie@kersonassociates.co.uk)

## **Annex 3 – Data Gathering Methodology**

The following research methods were used.

### **Online surveys**

One survey was designed to gather feedback from employers from the private, public and voluntary sector. Survey questions included:

- Organisation details – number of employees, sector, type of HR function.
- Staff recruitment - how often staff are recruited, whether qualifications and SCQF levels are specified in job adverts, range of qualifications considered.
- Workforce development issues and priorities.
- Awareness of the SCQF and supporting resources.
- Examples of how the SCQF has been used.

One survey was designed to gather feedback from intermediary organisations – including public sectors bodies such as SE, SDS, Chambers of Commerce, Councils, Business Gateways; employer networks; trade associations; sector skills councils; trade unions.

Survey questions included:

- Key skills issues affecting members/clients/sector.
- Aspects of workforce development assessed as being important to members/clients/sector.
- Awareness of the SCQF and resources.
- Potential benefits of the SCQF for members/clients/sector.
- Barriers which may exist which may prevent employers from engaging with the SCQF.

Over 500 surveys were issued – 54 were completed giving a return rate of just over 10%.

## **Interviews/in-depth discussions**

A range of approaches were used to provide further insight into the needs of employers and their usage of the SCQF. This included:

- **Face to face and structured phone interviews** using structured questions sets.
- A **Focus Group** with a representative sample of employers and with a range of intermediary organisations
- **Discussions with sectoral groups.**

Discussion topics included:

- Level of awareness of the SCQF amongst employers.
- Extent to which the SCQF could act as a valuable tool to support recruitment and workforce development activities.
- Examples of good practice of the SCQF being used.
- Barriers may exist which might prevent managers and employees from engaging with the SCQF.
- Actions which may help the SCQF Partnership to further improve awareness of and engagement with the SCQF.

## **Analysis and Quality Checking**

The evidence gathered from online surveys, interviews and Focus Group was then analysed to:

- Identify key findings, messages and themes through a process of constant comparison and triangulation.
- Identify barriers that would prevent further progress in the use of the Framework in the sectors.
- Identify factors that could influence and inform future work in further implementation of the SCQF for employers.
- Prepare recommendations for the SCQF Partnership.