

22 June 2017

James Dornan MSP
Convener
Education & Skills Committee
T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr Dornan

RE: School infrastructure inquiry

Thank you for your letter of 16 June 2017, asking for SQA's view on the comments made by the Scottish Building Federation (SBF) at the Committee's evidence session last week.

SQA is responsible for developing qualifications and assessments that meet the needs and requirements of Sector Skills Councils (SSC) across the country, in this instance the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB).

Like every other SSC, CITB is responsible for determining its own National Occupational Standards, its assessment strategy, and the structure of the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) within the sector, and will have consulted directly with industry on these. It is then up to awarding bodies, such as SQA, to make a submission to award the SVQs. The SVQs certificated by SQA are designed to be awarded on the basis of competence.

It is for CITB to consider how the findings of the Cole Report should be implemented with regards to the content of the Bricklaying SVQ, and any queries regarding this would need to be answered by CITB.

I'd now like to directly address some of the concerns raised by SBF at the committee.

Removal of the skills tests from Level 3 Craft SVQs

Please be assured that at no point have the skills tests been removed from the SVQs.

SQA Awarding Body had been delivering the Construction Craft SVQs with a skills test that was administered by the craft federations rather than through a regulated awarding body.

As this meant that the skills tests were unregulated components within a regulated qualification, the regulator, SQA Accreditation, placed a condition upon SQA Awarding Body five years ago requiring the skills tests to be included as a regulated component within the SVQs or to be removed.

At a meeting with representatives from Scottish Government, SQA Awarding Body, SQA Accreditation, CITB and industry, including the SBF, it was agreed to include a skills test within the new Level 3 Craft SVQs. This skills test will now be administered and quality assured by accredited awarding bodies, and will be regulated. The CITB assessment strategy has been updated to reflect this.

Once approved, the new SVQs will be ready during autumn 2017. We are currently liaising with and supporting centres, and will continue to work closely with CITB Scotland to ensure the smooth transition from the current to the new SVQs.

Skills test assessors

The updated assessment strategy does not specify that a CITB or a Scottish Building Apprenticeship & Training Council (SBATC) or a Scottish Painting and Decorating Apprenticeship Council (SPADAC) assessor must be used, as shown in the excerpt below:

“Awarding organisations must ensure that assessors meet the occupational expertise requirements as detailed in section 4.1 of the Assessment Strategy.”

This is the same criteria used for all other SVQs across the construction sector.

The assessor role is to uphold the integrity and standards during the skills test and to make judgement and final assessment decisions after the test. Final assessment decisions should be accurately recorded for evidence.

Skills test industry expert witnesses will also be used by awarding bodies to assist the assessor, and the assessment strategy sets out certain requirements that these expert witnesses need to meet.

Under the previous system, the assessors were appointed by SBATC or SPADAC, and did not require to have any formal assessor qualifications nor did anyone quality assure their decisions.

Introduction of Level 2 SVQs

SVQ level 2s were first introduced in 1993, and various iterations were available until 2012 when, due to low numbers, they appeared to be no longer viable and SQA Awarding Body withdrew them.

The reintroduction of the SVQ level 2s (SCQF level 5 on the Scottish Credit & Qualifications Framework (SCQF)) has been largely as a result of Historic Scotland engaging with CITB as Historic Scotland has a demand for craft SVQs at this level. CITB led on this “Heritage Skills in Construction Crafts” project.

Further rationale for the reintroduction of SVQ Level 2s came from the withdrawal of the Construction Related Occupation (CRO) card by the Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) on 31 March this year.

While not required in law, in practice the majority of workers undertaking construction activities need a CSCS card because these cards are required by most major contractors and provide proof that workers on construction sites have undertaken the required training and qualifications for the work they carry out.

The withdrawal of the CRO affects around 23000 workers in Scotland. Some of these workers will be covered in the future by a Visitor card or other CSCS card, but those who are not face the potential of being unable to access sites which require a valid CSCS card.

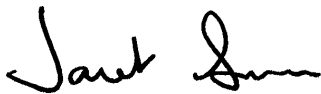
SQA Awarding Body's submission to have SVQ Level 2 qualifications accredited, notes "there will be a need for these qualifications for candidates who can no longer gain a Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card by claiming to work in a Construction Related Occupation (CRO)."

SQA has been working very closely with CSCS to identify the main areas that require an SVQ at SCQF Level 5 to ensure they will be put in place for the industry.

It is thought likely that candidates achieving a Construction SVQ at SCQF Level 5 will receive a CSCS Blue Skill Card while those who achieve a Construction SVQ at SCQF Level 6 (the old SVQ Level 3) will receive a CSCS Gold Card. This will enable employers to clearly distinguish the level of competence/capability of the worker and the appropriate level of pay for them simply by looking at the CSCS card.

I hope this information is helpful to you, your Committee colleagues, and your ongoing inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Brown', written in a cursive style.

Dr Janet Brown
Chief Executive