Background

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is focused on helping all young people in Scotland to take their place in a modern society and economy. It provides a framework that will enable children and young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens, and effective contributors.

SQA is one of the partner national organisations involved in Curriculum for Excellence – the others being the Scottish Government and Education Scotland. We work with these and other partners on all strands of the development and implementation.

Role of SQA

Our principal role has been to develop the new qualifications in partnership with the teaching profession, Scottish Government, and national and local partners. These new qualifications are based on the values, purposes and principles of CfE and are intended to build upon the learning that has been gained during the Broad General Education.

The curriculum models that are employed and the presentation of the young people for qualifications is a matter for schools and Local Authorities and falls outwith the remit of SQA. Advice on curriculum models has been provided by Education Scotland.

The development and implementation of the qualifications and their assessment and quality assurance has been a major undertaking for SQA and has impacted on all aspects of the organisation over the past several years and continues as the revisions to course assessment are undertaken.

As part of the Curriculum for Excellence that was introduced across Scotland, SQA was asked to develop a new suite of National Qualifications that build upon the learning achieved by young people in their Broad General Education and that aligned with the principles and aims of Curriculum for Excellence. It was also essential, that the standards and credibility of the qualifications achieved by Scotland's young people were maintained to allow for successful progression into college or university or directly into the world of work.

SQA was specifically tasked with the development of new qualifications to replace Standard Grade and Intermediate 1 and 2. National 4 and National 5 will offer increased flexibility, provide more time for learning, more focus on skills and applying learning, and more scope for personalisation.

National Qualifications at other levels, Higher and Advanced Higher, were also revised to ensure that they provide good progression from National 4 and 5 and that they reflect the values, purposes and principles of Curriculum for Excellence.
Programme Management and Governance

Delivery of Curriculum for Excellence across the education system in Scotland required close collaboration and partnership between the national, local and regional bodies in Scotland, and the CfE Management Board acted as a key coordinator and oversight body for the delivery of CfE from ages 3 to 18.

Within the overall CfE programme, SQA’s responsibilities and key deliverables were clearly defined and agreed with the Scottish Government and CfE Management Board. SQA’s responsibilities primarily relate to the design, development and operational delivery of the national qualifications.

The development and operational delivery of the complete set of national qualifications and their assessments is an extremely complex and resource intensive programme of work. It was essential that SQA established detailed programme management mechanisms to ensure the safe delivery of the qualifications within the time frame agreed by the CfE Management Board.

SQA’s internal governance arrangements link closely to the Scottish Government’s overall programme governance arrangements. At key points within the CfE development programme, approval and oversight was undertaken at the national level through the Scottish Government governance arrangements. A key example of this was the establishment by the CfE Management Board of the Qualifications Governance Group. This Group developed the design model of the new qualifications which was then approved by the CfE Management Board.

Progress Reporting

Detailed programme planning of all aspects of activity necessary within SQA was undertaken to ensure the successful delivery of the programme and the identification of key milestones, risks and internal and external dependencies. This allowed the organisation to track progress and address issues as they arose. Regular updates on activities and delivery to milestones were reported through the governance mechanisms in place within SQA, notably the SQA CfE Programme Board, the SQA Qualifications Committee and the SQA Board. Regular updates were also provided on progress, dependencies, risks and issues. These were discussed at the Senior Accountable Officers’ meeting, the Implementation Group and the overall CfE Management Board at a national programme level to ensure coordination and overall successful delivery of the programme.

Any additional activities that were required of SQA to support the introduction of the national qualifications were also planned and delivery tracked using the mechanisms described previously, with progress updates being shared both within the SQA and through the Implementation Group.

Evaluation and Review

An initial monitoring and evaluation programme for the (new) National Qualifications was approved by SQA’s Qualifications Committee in autumn 2014. This focused on National Course Design and Assessment; and Internal Unit-based Assessment across SQA Product Types and was completed in spring 2016. The changes currently being made to National Course Design and Assessment limit the extent of this initial evaluation. However, SQA continues to monitor the standard of assessment in our qualifications through a research and evidence-based approach to ensure that they are fit for purpose and maintain credibility with stakeholders.