



Ashbrook
RESEARCH & CONSULTANCY

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**RESEARCH RELATING TO SQA'S
NATIONAL STANDARDS**

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Report (Final Draft)

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National Standards**

Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report details findings from research undertaken on behalf of the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd.

This research explores further the findings from SQA's Evaluation of the 2023 Approach to the Assessment of Graded National Courses. In particular, the focus and purpose of the research was to elicit a range of information pertaining to SQA's National Standards. In particular:

- Understanding of the National Standards
- Methods, Processes and Resources Used to Support Understanding of the National Standards
- How Practitioners Apply the National Standard within their Learning, Teaching and Formative Assessment Practice
- Responsibility for Facilitating Practitioners' Understanding of the National Standards in their Subject Areas
- How Well SQA Resources to Support Practitioners in Relation to their Understanding of the National Standards Work
- Further Support and Resources that SQA Could Provide to Practitioners to Enhance their Understanding of the Standards
- SQA Increasing Opportunities for Practitioners to Engage with Understanding Standards Resources and Events
- Practitioners and Senior Staff in schools Suggestions Regarding How Practitioners Could be Allocated CPD Time or an Annual Opportunity to Specifically Engage with National Standards, Resources and Events
- Practitioner Training in Relation to Understanding Standards
- Evidencing Practitioners' Understanding of the National Standards
- Key Priority Areas for SQA to Consider When Supporting Practitioners to Have a Current Up-to-Date Understanding and Interpretation of the National Standard in their Subject Areas

During June 2024, a total of 32 in-depth interviews were undertaken with individuals in four audiences:

- Practitioners in schools and colleges (eight interviews – two of which were with individuals in colleges)
- Senior Staff in schools (such as Heads of Departments or SQA Co-ordinators – eight interviews)
- Senior Appointees (both Principal Assessors and Principal Verifiers – eight interviews)
- Qualifications Managers (eight interviews)

It should be noted that interviews with practitioners and Senior Staff in schools were undertaken across a range of subject areas and in centres across Scotland. In addition, interviews with Senior Appointees and Qualifications Managers were undertaken across a range of subject areas.

Section 3.0 to 13.0 detail outcomes in relation to each of the elements noted above, whilst Section 14.0 provides a series of key messages to emerge from the research.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Understanding of the National Standards

- There was a widespread consensus amongst practitioners interviewed that they had a good understanding of the National Standard for their subject area. However, amongst Senior Appointees and Qualifications Managers, there was a belief that there was a significant degree of variability in the extent to which they believed practitioners to have a good understanding of the National Standard for their subject area.
- Senior Staff in schools also believed that they have a very good or extremely good understanding of the standards.
- Furthermore, all of the Senior Appointees and Qualifications Managers interviewed believed that they have a well-developed, clear and comprehensive understanding of the standards.

Methods, Processes and Resources Used to Support Understanding of the National Standards

- Practitioners use a wide range of methods, processes and resources to support their understanding of the National Standards, with SQA emerging most prominently in this regard, particularly through its communications, documentation, newsletters and updates sent to practitioners, its understanding standards events and webinars, and through use of the SQA website.
- For Senior Staff in schools, it was very apparent that they are primarily dependent upon SQA resources to support their understanding of the National Standards, with primary reference being made here to SQA newsletters, SQA's website and SQA's events and webinars, many of which are used frequently.

- It was also apparent that Senior Appointees make use of a wide range of SQA resources to support their understanding of the National Standards, whilst this is also the case for Qualifications Managers (who are more likely than the other three audiences to work with the standards on a day-to-day basis as part of their role), with primarily mention being made here of SQA resources such as information and guidance received, looking back at previous questions when developing question papers and the expertise and knowledge within SQA per se and of specific colleagues in particular roles.

How Practitioners Apply the National Standard within their Learning, Teaching and Formative Assessment Practice

- Practitioners apply the National Standard within their learning, teaching and formative assessment practice, primarily through vigorously following and applying SQA guidance and guidelines, reviewing SQA information and resources and through regular team meetings with Principal Teachers or markers.
- Senior Staff in schools identified a number of ways in which they apply the National Standard within their learning, teaching and formative assessment practice, including by applying the National Standard in any teaching they undertake, by ensuring that teachers are using understanding standards materials when teaching a class for the first time or returning to teach a subject after a period of time, highlighting changes to the standard to teachers within their department and by ensuring that all staff are aware of any new documents pertaining to the standards.

Responsibility for Facilitating Practitioners' Understanding of the National Standards in their Subject Areas

- Across all four audiences, there was a strong consensus that SQA has a fundamental role to play in terms of facilitating up-to-date understanding of the National Standards amongst practitioners.
- Practitioner views here very much focus on a belief that they themselves have a fundamental role to ensure that they have an up-to-date and accurate understanding of the National Standard for their subject area, felt that markers within centres should have a responsibility to share their knowledge and understanding of the National Standards and that Local Authorities have a role in facilitating current and up-to-date understanding of the National Standards amongst practitioners.
- Amongst Senior Staff in schools, there was a primary focus on two 'others' to have a role to play in facilitating practitioners' up-to-date understanding of the National Standards in their subject areas, namely practitioners themselves and centres. In addition, a number of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed made reference to Local Authorities having a role to play in this regard.
- Senior Appointees primarily believe that practitioners, Local Authorities and centres themselves should have a role to play in facilitating practitioners' up-to-date understanding of the National Standard in their subject areas, whilst Qualifications Managers believed that both Education Scotland and Local Authorities should have a role to play in this regard.

How Well SQA Resources to Support Practitioners in Relation to their Understanding of the National Standards Work

- There was a widespread consensus amongst practitioners that SQA resources are of high quality and support practitioners well in their understanding of the National Standards. Despite this consensus, a number of improvements were suggested to SQA resources available to support practitioners, with primary reference in this regard being to SQA delivering more understanding standards webinars and events (particularly the latter).
- There was also a consensus amongst the Senior Staff in schools that the resources provided by SQA to support practitioners in relation to their understanding of the National Standards work well, with a belief that face-to-face events work particularly well. Despite the very largely positive profile provided by Senior Staff in schools here, a number of improvements were suggested, with these primarily focusing around providing more events per se (and, in particular, more 'local events'), working more in conjunction with Local Authorities and centres to deliver pertinent training and to communicate more directly with practitioners regarding understanding standards updates.
- Amongst Senior Appointees, there was, again, a strong consensus that SQA's understanding standards resources are effective, with particular reference being made here to understanding standards events. Despite this, a number of improvements were suggested, with these primarily focusing around having more understanding standards events and webinars (particularly the former) and, potentially, longer events and webinars.
- The views expressed by Qualifications Managers in this regard very much reflected those noted by Senior Appointees and, in particular, there was a belief that all of the SQA resources pertaining to

understanding standards work well, with specific reference being made, once again, of this being the case in relation to understanding standards events.

- Relatively few suggestions were made by Qualifications Managers for improving SQA understanding standards resources. However, a number were made, including improvements to the navigation of the SQA website, making resources more interactive and engaging, and SQA better signposting practitioners and others to resources relating to the National Standards.

Further Support and Resources that SQA Could Provide to Practitioners to Enhance their Understanding of the Standards

- There was a strong consensus amongst practitioners that there is a very limited extent to which SQA could add to its current support and resources to enhance practitioners' understanding of the National Standards and, as a result, few suggestions were made in terms of how these could be added to, with these focusing around having more events (and more 'local events') and webinars, providing National Standards guidance which is more course/subject specific and updating documentation on SQA Secure (and ensuring that all outdated documents are removed).
- There was also a very limited extent to which Senior Staff in schools believe that there is a need for SQA to add to its current support and resources pertaining to enhancing practitioner understanding of the National Standards. In this regard, however, mention was made of a desire for marker meetings to be recorded and, in particular, if possible, video recorded (with these recordings then being made available).
- Senior Appointees were extremely positive about current support and resources provided by SQA to facilitate enhanced practitioner

understanding of the National Standards. However, there was also a strong consensus that these high-quality and relevant elements of support and resources need to be better utilised by practitioners, particularly through better signposting of these elements of support and resources by SQA.

- In addition, as with other audiences, a number of the Senior Appointees interviewed believed that there should be more SQA understanding standards events and webinars (and, again, in particular, more 'local events').
- As was the case with other audiences, there was a strong consensus amongst Qualifications Managers interviewed that there is little or no need for SQA to add to its current support and resources relating to enhancing practitioner understanding of the National Standards but, again, this belief was allied to a further belief that much of the support and resources available are not sufficiently used by practitioners.
- Despite the positive views expressed here by Qualifications Managers, a number of suggestions were made in terms of how SQA could add to its understanding standards support and resources, including consulting more with practitioners, more effectively signposting practitioners to resources available, placing a greater emphasis on newly qualified teachers and those teaching a subject at a level for the first time attending events and participating in webinars, and by having more understanding standards materials and documentation on the SQA website (although a number of the Qualifications Managers argued against this, due to their concerns about overload of information for practitioners).

SQA Increasing Opportunities for Practitioners to Engage with Understanding Standards Resources and Events

- Practitioners' responses in regard to suggestions or recommendations which could increase opportunities for practitioners to engage with the standards, resources and events focused on delivering more webinars and events, more 'local' face-to-face events, having more information online and having more face-to-face meetings with departments in schools.
- When Senior Staff in schools were asked to express their opinion here, two elements of context are worth noting, namely that there was a degree of uncertainty as to how SQA could increase opportunities for practitioners to engage with standards, resources and events, and that a number of those interviewed couldn't think of any suggestions or recommendations in this regard.
- Nonetheless, a number of suggestions were made by Senior Staff in schools here, including having more 'local' understanding standards events, having more understanding standards webinars, having more online or virtual meetings and providing more pre-recorded videos.
- Amongst Senior Appointees, two outcomes were apparent from this element of the discussions, namely a belief that SQA could do little more to increase opportunities for practitioners to engage with standards, resources and events and that respondents had few suggestions or recommendations in this regard, with those which were made focusing around having more in-person meetings and for SQA to encourage practitioners to access and use understanding standards resources and events to a greater extent.
- Most of the Qualifications Managers believe it would be difficult for SQA to do anything which would significantly impact on

opportunities for practitioners to engage with standards, resources and events due to their excessive workload. However, two suggestions were made here by this audience, namely ensuring that Head Teachers in schools are promoting to practitioners the importance of updating their knowledge and understanding of the standards and how they can enhance this and making more recorded materials available which can be used when practitioners have time to do so.

Practitioners and Senior Staff in Schools Suggestions Regarding How Practitioners Could be Allocated CPD Time or an Annual Opportunity to Specifically Engage with National Standards, Resources and Events

- The practitioners interviewed identified few suggestions on how practitioners could be allocated CPD time or an annual opportunity to specifically engage with National Standards resources and events, with those made focusing around centres having more workshops, practitioners being encouraged more by senior staff in their centre to undertake CPD activities, allocating specific times for CPD each working week for practitioners, having more online updates and the opportunity to ask questions online and have them answered online, and paying staff to undertake CPD activities outwith the school day or academic year.
- As was the case with practitioners, Senior Staff in schools struggled to provide suggestions here, with the suggestions provided primarily focusing around when CPD should be promoted and undertaken (namely between August and November, at the end of the academic year and during study leave time).

Practitioner Training in Relation to Understanding Standards

- There was an overwhelming consensus amongst the practitioners interviewed that understanding and then applying National Standards should be part of teacher training programmes and, in this regard, it is of interest to note that there was a widespread belief that when student teachers come on placement to schools or newly qualified teachers come to schools for their probation year, they tend to have little or no knowledge or understanding of the standard for their subject area, with this also applying to newly qualified teachers.
- All of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed believed that it was of fundamental importance that the curriculum for student teachers should include considerations of the National Standards and, in this regard, it should be noted that many of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed stated that their school includes consideration of the standards in the induction and training of newly qualified teachers.
- The views expressed by Senior Appointees here were similar to those expressed by Senior Staff in schools. In particular, there was a widespread consensus that teacher training programmes should include instruction regarding SQA's National Standards.
- It should also be noted that there was a limited extent to which the Senior Appointees interviewed that post-teacher training modules should include SQA's National Standards and, in this regard, it should be noted that many of the Senior Appointees interviewed believed that schools are committed to ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a current and comprehensive understanding of SQA's National Standard for their subject area.
- The views expressed by Qualifications Managers with regard to teacher training programmes and post-teacher training modules

very much reflected those noted by appointees, including a widespread belief amongst this audience that centres have a key role to play in terms of ensuring that newly qualified teachers – and, indeed, all teachers – have a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the standard for their subject area.

Evidencing Practitioners' Understanding of the National Standards

- Many of the practitioners interviewed stated that their centre already had processes in place to ensure that they are cognisant of the National Standard and there was also a strong view that, were SQA to introduce some form of formal process for practitioners to provide evidence of their understanding of the National Standard, this would be unwelcomed by practitioners, as it would add to their already heavy workload.
- The Senior Staff in schools interviewed also believed that there was no need for additional processes to be put in place that would provide evidence of a practitioner's understanding of the National Standard for their subject. In addition, there was a significant concern amongst the Senior Staff in schools interviewed that the introduction of a requirement by SQA to provide evidence here would add another layer to the excessive workload for practitioners and, as a result, would be unlikely to be welcomed by them.
- It was felt by the Senior Appointees interviewed that, in an ideal world, practitioners' understanding of the National Standard for their subject should be evidenced. However, it was also believed that the teaching profession is 'anything but ideal at the present time'.
- Senior Appointees also felt there was limited value in a practitioner's understanding of the standard being evidenced and provided few suggestions in this regard.

- The views expressed by the Qualifications Managers interviewed regarding the evidencing of a practitioner's understanding of National Standards were largely negative, on the basis of beliefs that Departmental Heads and Principal Teachers already review performance of practitioners on an annual basis (including their adherence to the standards), concerns about the introduction of a process of evidence collection and collation adding to tensions between centres and SQA, and concerns about attendance at events and participation in training not necessarily representing evidence of understanding and interpreting the National Standards correctly.

Key Priority Areas for SQA to Consider When Supporting Practitioners to Have a Current Up-to-Date Understanding and Interpretation of the National Standard in their Subject Areas

- The key priorities for Senior Appointees in terms of areas for SQA to consider when supporting practitioners with current up-to-date understanding and interpretation of the National Standard in their subject areas were for SQA to continually update its website regarding changes to the standards, new materials/documents and other actions and encourage (and facilitate) practitioner training and support by peers within their centre.
- The Qualifications Managers interviewed identified four key priorities for SQA to consider here, namely:
 - engaging more with practitioners (through, for example, CPD)
 - communicating more effectively with practitioners about what the standards are, why it is important for them to keep up to date with them and to be motivated to do so
 - to be more open and transparent in terms of quality assurance processes relating to understanding standards
 - doing more to ensure that the application of the standard in centres is correct

3.0 UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

3.1 Practitioners

There was a widespread consensus amongst the **practitioners** interviewed that they had a good understanding of the National Standard for their subject area (with terms being used to describe their understanding in this regard as being 'excellent', 'very well developed' and 'comprehensive'). It should be stressed that these positive beliefs extended to those who taught more than one subject area (for example Mathematics and Physics).

The exception here were the two individuals interviewed in colleges who believed that they did not understand the standards well and, in particular, believed that they are 'more geared up for schools rather than colleges'.

In this regard, it should be stressed that, amongst Senior Appointees and Qualifications Managers, there was a belief that there was a significant degree of variability in the extent to which practitioners have a good understanding of the National Standard for their subject area.

3.2 Senior Staff in Schools

Senior Staff in schools also believed that they had a very good or extremely good understanding of the standards, with specific reference being made here to respondents feeling 'comfortable' with their understanding of the standards.

In this regard and at this stage in the interview, a number of the senior staff made reference to their well-developed understanding of the standards being as a result of having taught a subject for many years.

It is also of interest to note that two of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed stated that, whilst they believed they had a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the standards, theirs was not as well developed as those who were currently teaching subjects, due to the fact that, as a senior member of staff at a school, they had other responsibilities to focus on.

3.3 Senior Appointees and Qualifications Managers

Furthermore, all of the **Senior Appointees** and **Qualifications Managers** interviewed also believed that they had a very well-developed, clear and comprehensive understanding of the standards.

Finally, it was be noted by a number of the Qualifications Managers interviewed that it can be a challenge for them to keep up to date with the standards where they have responsibility for a number of subject areas.

4.0 METHODS, PROCESSES AND RESOURCES USED TO SUPPORT UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

4.1 Practitioners

Practitioners use a wide range of methods, processes and resources to support their understanding of the National Standards, with SQA emerging most prominently in this regard, particularly through its communications, documentation, newsletters and updates sent to practitioners, its understanding standards events and webinars and, thereafter, through use of the SQA website.

Thereafter, notable secondary mention was made by practitioners to:

- School Heads of Department, Senior Staff in schools and Principal Teachers, and college senior managers
- Teachers in schools who are also markers
- Local Authority Education Departments
- Discussions with colleagues

Finally, more specific mention was made here of practitioners supporting their current understanding of the National Standards through:

- SQA Co-ordinators in their schools (which included monthly meetings)
- Administration teams
- Liaison officers and managers
- Their role as a marker
- Internal subject group meetings
- The SQA Quality Management forum (as noted by an individual in a college)

- The Teaching Qualifications in Further Education (again, as noted by those in colleges)
- Icon meetings (once again, as noted by a college)

The frequency of use of the support and resources noted above varied depending on their nature. For example, whilst ongoing use was made of SQA communications documents, newsletters and updates, SQA events and webinars were used less frequently.

Thereafter, interaction with, for example, Departmental Heads, senior staff and Principal Teachers (and, in the case of colleges, senior managers), tends to be on an 'as required basis', with this also applying to the other methods, processes and resources noted above.

4.2 Senior Staff in Schools

It was very apparent that **Senior Staff in schools** are primarily dependent upon SQA resources to support their understanding of the National Standards, with primary reference being made here to SQA newsletters, SQA's website and SQA events and webinars, secondary reference being made of the use of SQA Secure and SQA's understanding standards documentation and materials, and more specific reference being made here to use of the SQA Academy.

It should also be noted, in this regard, that many of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed made particular reference to using a number of the resources noted above frequently, including the SQA website and weekly newsletters.

Furthermore, it is of interest to note that there was a widespread belief that there are insufficient places available at SQA events and webinars, which are viewed as a highly valuable resource in terms of developing and supporting the understanding of National Standards amongst teaching staff and Senior Staff in schools.

It was also apparent that many Senior Staff in schools make use of other elements of support, including through:

- Their role as an appointee, team leader, marker or verifier
- Quality assurance meetings (which include planned verification and moderation meetings)
- Candidate evidence

Finally, more specific mention was made here by Senior Staff in schools of supporting their current understanding of the National Standards through:

- Discussions with Principal Teachers in particular subject areas
- Being an SQA Co-ordinator
- Participating in curricular groups
- Participating in markers' meetings
- Their CPD activities

4.3 Senior Appointees

It was also apparent that **Senior Appointees** make use of a wide range of SQA resources to support their understanding of the National Standards, with reference being made here to, for example:

- SQA documentation (which is issued to them on a regular basis)
- SQA newsletters (which are received weekly)
- Receipt of regular emails from SQA pertaining to the National Standards
- Attending SQA understanding standards events and webinars
- Discussions with SQA Qualifications Managers and officers
- An annual cycle of training (in order to, for example, ensure that Principal Assessors and Assistant Principal Assessors have a good understanding of the standard for their subject area)

- Reviewing reports from their marking team
- Using the SQA website
- Using video recordings from Verifiers and Principal Assessors

Thereafter, mention was made by Senior Appointees to facilitating their current understanding of the National Standards through:

- Participating in markers' meetings (and receiving feedback from markers)
- Seeking feedback from Principal Assessors in their centre and others within their senior core team and team leaders
- Discussions with teachers (including via social media)
- Discussions with employers
- Personal research
- Their professional body
- Keeping up to date with university requirements
- Reading the Hayward Review
- Reviewing results from previous years

It is of particular interest to note that there was a widespread consensus amongst the Senior Appointees that the methods, processes and resources that they use to support their current understanding of the National Standards are comprehensive and highly effective, with one individual describing them as being 'robust and forensic'.

4.4 Qualifications Managers

Finally, it was apparent that **Qualifications Managers** also use a wide range of SQA methods, processes and resources to support their current understanding of the National Standards. In this regard, however, it should be noted that Qualifications Managers work with the standards on a day-to-day basis as part of their job role and, as such,

have an ongoing familiarity with the standards. Interestingly, in this regard, one respondent made reference here to 'learning through osmosis'.

In this context, it is of interest to note that notable reference was made here to support available from SQA, primarily relating to:

- Information and guidance received from within SQA (for example, in relation to the examination diet, the verification cycle and course reports)
- Looking back at previous questions when developing question papers
- The expertise and knowledge within SQA per se and of specific colleagues in particular roles in SQA

It should also be noted that Qualifications Managers made notable reference here to direct contact with centres (including interacting with teachers which allows them to 'tap into learner views and experiences').

Thereafter, more specific reference was made here by Qualifications Managers to:

- Discussions with external verifiers (who can bring their views regarding, for example, developments pertaining to the standards)
- Discussions with Principal Assessors

5.0 HOW PRACTITIONERS APPLY THE NATIONAL STANDARD WITHIN THEIR LEARNING, TEACHING AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT PRACTICE

5.1 Practitioners

When **practitioners** were asked how they apply the National Standard within their learning, teaching and formative assessment practice, their responses were relatively limited but primarily focused around through:

- Vigorously following and applying SQA guidance and guidelines
- Reviewing SQA information and resources (including during in-service days)
- Regular team or faculty meetings with Principal Teachers or markers which discuss the application of the National Standard

Thereafter, more specific mention was made here of doing so through:

- Teaching and assessing to the SQA standard
- Regular use of the SQA website
- The use of SQA marking schemes

5.2 Senior Staff in Schools

The **Senior Staff in schools** interviewed identified a number of ways in which they apply the National Standard within their learning, teaching and formative assessment practice. These included:

- By applying the National Standard in any teaching they undertake (and ensuring that this is the case amongst all teaching staff within their department)
- By ensuring that teachers are using understanding standards materials when teaching a class for the first time or returning to teach a subject after a period of time

- By finding examples/exemplars at different levels (through the SQA understanding standards page on the SQA website and SQA Secure)
- By ensuring that they and other teachers are using candidate evidence in class to help pupils better understand the standard
- By highlighting changes to the standards to teachers within their department
- By ensuring that all staff are aware of any new documents pertaining to the standards, eg course specifications
- By engaging with pupils to ensure that they can access information about the standards which will be of value to them
- By using course reports to identify where marks can be gained or lost
- By ensuring that they and teaching staff share scripts and commentaries with pupils

6.0 RESPONSIBILITY FOR FACILITATING PRACTITIONERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS IN THEIR SUBJECT AREAS

As a starting point in this section of the report, it should be stressed that, **across all four audiences**, there was a strong consensus that SQA has a fundamental role to play in terms of facilitating up-to-date understanding of the National Standards amongst practitioners and others.

6.1 Practitioners

Practitioner views very much focused on a belief that they themselves have a fundamental role to ensure that they have an up-to-date and accurate understanding of the National Standard for their subject area and, in particular, take ownership of ensuring that this is the case. Key to this was a belief that SQA has a fundamental responsibility to ensure that SQA and centres make it clear to practitioners – not just newly qualified teachers – that they have this responsibility and emphasise the importance of practitioners continually updating and appropriately applying National Standards in their subject area.

It was also felt that markers within centres should have a responsibility to share their knowledge and understanding of the National Standards with other staff. In particular, it was felt that this would be a highly effective means by which other members of staff could gain a current insight into applying the National Standards appropriately.

Finally, practitioners made reference here to it being the responsibility of Local Authorities to facilitate current and up-to-date understanding of National Standards amongst practitioners and, in this regard, it was felt that Local Authorities should work closely with SQA in order to ensure that there is no duplication of effort and that there are no gaps in this regard.

6.2 Senior Staff in Schools

Amongst **Senior Staff in schools**, there was a primary focus on two 'others' who should have a role to play in facilitating practitioners' up-to-date understanding of the National Standards in their subject area, namely:

- Practitioners themselves (in terms of ensuring that their teaching practice is up-to-date and in accordance with all appropriate requirements), with reference also being made to practitioners promoting their understanding of the standards through being part of a marking team
- Centres (including support from Principal Teachers, Departmental Heads and SQA Co-ordinators)

In addition, a number of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed made reference to Local Authorities having a role to play in this regard, including through their quality improvement personnel and through organising events and meetings to promote understanding of National Standards to practitioners and to facilitate networking in this regard.

6.3 Senior Appointees

Senior Appointees primarily believe that practitioners, Local Authorities and centres themselves should have a role to play in facilitating practitioners' up-to-date understanding of the National Standard in their subject areas, ie:

- Practitioners: through accessing information on the SQA website, reading documentation to which they have been signposted or have been sent, interacting with colleagues to enhance their knowledge and understanding in this regard and attending understanding standards events and webinars if they get the opportunity to do so

- Local Authorities: through making efforts to ensure that teachers have more time to improve their knowledge and understanding of the National Standard for their subject area, setting up networks (part of which would include discussions about understanding standards) and offering training opportunities
- Centres themselves: through sharing best practice with newly qualified teachers and others (including through forming internal teams for this purpose and the key role of SQA Co-ordinators in this regard). In the relation to the latter, it was emphasised that there is a need to ensure that new SQA Co-ordinators are fully briefed and trained and that, on an ongoing basis, SQA Co-ordinators are kept up-to-date with changes to the standards

Thereafter, Senior Appointees made more specific references here to:

- Education Scotland: in terms of having a role to play in relation to aspects of learning and teaching which are pertinent to the standards
- GTC Scotland: in terms of the implementation of teacher skills
- The Scottish Government: which should have some form of overview of processes and their effectiveness in respect of developing understanding of National Standards amongst practitioners

6.4 Qualifications Managers

Finally, **Qualifications Managers** believed that both Education Scotland and Local Authorities should have a role to play in facilitating the up-to-date understanding of the standards amongst practitioners, ie:

- Education Scotland: in terms of having a role to play in the CPD of practitioners which should include reference to the standards, together with more dialogue between SQA and Education Scotland

in relation to content issues (ie centres teaching 'too much' or 'too little' content, which can have an impact on the ability of candidates to achieve the standard). In this regard, however, it should be stressed that a number of those interviewed believed that the input of Education Scotland here should be relatively peripheral

- Local Authorities: in terms of, for example, putting together networking events and getting practitioners together to discuss issues surrounding the standards (which, it was believed, had been done in the past)

Finally, it is of interest to note that two of the Qualifications Managers interviewed believed that Skills Development Scotland **should not** have a role to play here and, in particular, as noted by one respondent, 'should do what they were set up to do'.

7.0 HOW WELL SQA RESOURCES SUPPORT PRACTITIONER UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

7.1 Practitioners

There was a widespread consensus amongst **practitioners** that SQA resources are of high quality and support practitioners well in their understanding of the National Standards (with specific reference being made here to understanding standards events and webinars, SQA information online and SQA's website).

Despite the consensus noted above, a number of improvements were suggested to SQA resources available to support practitioners, with the primary reference in this regard being to SQA delivering more understanding standards webinars and events – particularly the latter – in order to allow a greater number of practitioners to attend webinars/ events. In this regard, specific mention was also made of delivering more course-specific events and webinars, more events outwith the Central Belt and delivering webinars and events which are more specific to colleges.

Thereafter, more specific reference was made to potential improvements here in terms of:

- Providing more online resources (in order that practitioners don't have to leave their school to, for example, attend an event)
- Improving the SQA website (to make it more user friendly, streamlined and clearer – with this also applying specifically to SQA Secure)
- SQA staff making more visits to centres (although it was recognised that this would be a financial challenge for SQA)
- Providing more subject-specific guidance
- Providing more resources that are specific to colleges in terms of how the standards apply to them

7.2 Senior Staff in Schools

There was also a consensus amongst the **Senior Staff in schools** that the resources provided by SQA to support practitioners in relation to their understanding of the National Standards work well, with a belief that face-to-face events work particularly well (on the basis that they allow the opportunity for practitioners to hear from – and ask questions of – SQA staff and network with other practitioners in relation to understanding standards). In addition, specific reference was made here to webinars and videos working well.

With specific regard to course specifications – which are used regularly – it was felt that they are of good quality and relevance, but tend to be content heavy (although it was recognised that this requires to be the case).

Despite the very largely positive profile provided by Senior Staff in schools in terms of how well SQA resources provided support to practitioners in relation to their understanding of the standards, there were a range of improvements suggested, with these primarily focusing around:

- Providing more events per se (and, in particular, more 'local events')
- Working more in conjunction with Local Authorities and centres in order to deliver training pertinent to the National Standards (including participation by SQA in in-service days)
- SQA communicating more directly with practitioners regarding understanding standards updates

Thereafter, more specific mention was made here of improvements in terms of:

- Moving more to online meetings which can either be pre-recorded or in the form of live video chats incorporating breakout rooms for discussions
- Illustrating the standard within a course document
- Recording marker meetings (the recordings of which could be accessed at a later date and time by practitioners)

With specific reference to course specifications, although – as noted earlier – views about them were very largely positive, a number of improvements were suggested by Senior Staff in schools, including:

- Beliefs that it would be of value for a short summary document to be produced which could be shared with learners
- Beliefs that course specifications could be more precise
- Beliefs that course specifications 'don't go into the specifics enough'
- Beliefs that course specifications are not visually appealing
- A request to improve the accessibility of course specifications that are on the SQA website (for example, making it easier to find units for a group award with multiple units)

With reference to the improvements noted above, it should be stressed that the one most commonly noted was the suggestion that a short summary document should be produced which could be shared with learners and, in particular, which was 'pupil friendly'.

7.3 Senior Appointees

Amongst **Senior Appointees**, there was, again, a strong consensus that SQA's understanding standards resources are effective, with particular reference being made here to understanding standards events and online resources, such as commentaries and videos.

Despite this strong positive consensus, a number of suggestions were made by Senior Appointees in terms of improving these resources, with these primarily focusing around having more understanding standards events and webinars (particularly the former) and, potentially, longer events and webinars (although there was a recognition that, with respect to more and longer understanding standards events, there would be financial implications of this).

Thereafter, more specific improvements were mentioned, including:

- Delivering more online events (as well as understanding standards webinars)
- Having more meetings with markers (in order to reduce 'grey areas' pertaining to the standards)
- Having the opportunity for newly qualified teachers to sign up for emails regarding changes to the standards to be sent to them directly (although it was recognised that this may be difficult from a technical perspective and time consuming for SQA)
- Better signposting of understanding standards resources by SQA

There were also a number of specific improvements noted by Senior Appointees that related to SQA's website, including:

- Making SQA resources regarding understanding standards more accessible on its website (on the basis that some respondents stated that it can be time consuming to find what they're looking for)
- Making website resources more engaging (for example, through having more video clips and animations)
- Having more past papers on the SQA website
- Having more recorded materials on the SQA website

It was also suggested that there could be the potential for SQA to look at best practice in other countries in terms of promoting understanding of National Standards.

It should be stressed, however, that there was a concern raised regarding the cascading of newsletters, the effectiveness of which varied between centres.

It is also encouraging that there was a limited extent to which Senior Appointees believed that there were aspects of SQA's understanding standards resources which work poorly.

Finally, a key issue was identified by a number of the Senior Appointees interviewed, namely that, although SQA's understanding standards resources tend to be of high quality and relevance, there was a belief that practitioners don't engage sufficiently with them due to a lack of time to do so.

7.4 Qualifications Managers

The views expressed by **Qualifications Managers** very much reflected those noted by Senior Appointees and, in particular, there was a belief that all of the SQA resources pertaining to understanding standards work well, with particular reference here being made, once again, to this being the case in relation to understanding standards events.

In this regard, it is again of interest to note that, whilst this positive view was held regarding resources, there was a strong belief that practitioners don't make sufficient use of them.

Relatively few suggestions were made by Qualifications Managers for improvement to the SQA understanding standards resources. However, a number are worthy of note, including:

- Improvements to the navigation on the SQA website (the improvement which emerged most prominently from the discussions)

- Making resources more interactive and engaging (with, again, references being made here to more video clips and animation)
- SQA better signposting practitioners and others to resources in relation to understanding standards
- SQA communicating more effectively to practitioners in terms of what understanding standards resources are available and how they can be accessed
- SQA providing more targeted subject-specific communications relating to the standards

In these regards, it was felt that Qualifications Managers could contribute to these improvements if they got more feedback from practitioners.

Finally, it should be noted that a number of the Qualifications Managers interviewed believed that it would be of value for SQA to explore whether or not its existing understanding standards resources are sufficient.

8.0 FURTHER SUPPORT AND RESOURCES THAT SQA COULD PROVIDE TO PRACTITIONERS TO ENHANCE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE STANDARDS

8.1 Practitioners

With the exception of the two individuals interviewed in colleges, there was a strong consensus amongst **practitioners** that there is a very limited extent to which SQA could add to its current support and resources to enhance practitioner understanding of the National Standard and, as a result, few suggestions were made in terms of how these could be added to.

The exception referred to above (for two individuals interviewed in colleges) focused around their belief that SQA's support and resources is heavily schools focused and, as a result, they suggested that SQA should focus more on colleges in terms of supporting staff in relation to their understanding of the National Standards of the National Qualifications they deliver.

The most notable suggestion made by school practitioners was a desire for SQA to do more to ensure that non-marker teachers have a clear understanding of the standards.

It should also be noted that a number of references were made here to SQA improving rather than adding to its current support and resources to facilitate enhanced practitioner understanding of the National Standard, with these including:

- Having more events (and more 'local events') and webinars (in order to increase the range of dates which would be available to practitioners to participate and, thereby, would promote practitioner attendance)

- Providing National Standards guidance which is more course/subject specific (particularly online)
- To update documentation on SQA Secure and ensure that all outdated documents are removed (due to issues relating to verification and avoiding 'grey areas')

8.2 Senior Staff in Schools

There was also a very limited extent to which **Senior Staff in schools** believed that there was a need for SQA to add to its current support and resources pertaining to enhancing practitioner understanding of the National Standards. In this regard, however, mention was made of a desire for marker meetings to be recorded and, in particular, if possible, video recorded (with these recordings then being made available).

Thereafter, specific suggestions were made which included:

- Ensuring updates and changes to the standards are sufficiently explicit (with reference being made here to the reintroduction of coursework this year, in relation to which this was not the case)
- Having more understanding standards events and webinars
- Doing more to share best practice
- Doing more to ensure that newly qualified teachers are being provided with sufficient and appropriate support/resources by SQA, together with ensuring that centres are also doing so (with this extending to a suggestion that SQA should introduce a structured training programme specifically directed towards newly qualified teachers and their understanding of the standards)
- Providing additional guidance on standards regarding externally assessed assignments
- SQA having more podcasts relating to the understanding of the standards (which, it was believed, would be a particularly good way to communicate with younger members of staff)

8.3 Senior Appointees

Senior Appointees were extremely positive about current support and resources provided by SQA to facilitate enhanced practitioner understanding of the National Standards. However, there was also a strong consensus that these high-quality and relevant elements of support and resources need to be better utilised by practitioners and, in this regard, numerous references were made to SQA better signposting these elements of support and resources (with this also applying to senior leaders – such as SQA Co-ordinators – within centres also doing so).

It should also be noted that there was a belief expressed by Senior Appointees that SQA needs to do more in relation to centres that are not performing to the standard, including providing feedback on how to approach assignments, providing more information on how to go about preparing prelims and providing a better explanation of providing estimates in relation to exceptional circumstances.

Thereafter, specific suggestions were made in relation to SQA providing additional support and resources in terms of:

- Ensuring that newly qualified teachers are fully aware of the National Standard for their subject area
- Providing specimen marked papers to practitioners and student teachers on a regular basis
- Providing more guidance and help in relation to internal assessment (for example, more resources, support and advice on units for National 4 subjects)
- Holding a national training event
- Ensuring that new SQA Co-ordinators have a very well-developed knowledge and understanding of the National Standards

- Incorporating more about the standards during in-service days (although there was a recognition that in-service days cover 'a lot of ground' already)
- Reintroducing revision guides for each subject

In addition, as with other audiences, a number of the Senior Appointees interviewed believed that there should be more SQA understanding standards events and webinars (and, again, in particular, more 'local events') as they give the opportunity for practitioners to interact with SQA staff who are knowledgeable about the National Standards. In this regard, it was stressed that events are particularly important as they provide SQA with an opportunity to make sure that practitioners have a sufficient knowledge of the standards and why they need to keep up-to-date with them.

Finally, it should be noted that a number of the Senior Appointees interviewed recognised that there may be resource and financial implications for SQA if it was to introduce additional support or resources in relation to the understanding of National Standards by practitioners. In addition, there was a concern that adding any additional support and resources may represent 'overload' for practitioners.

8.4 **Qualifications Managers**

As was the case with the other audiences, there was a strong consensus amongst the **Qualifications Managers** interviewed that there is little or no need for SQA to add to its current support and resources relating to enhancing practitioner understanding of the National Standards. This belief was, again, allied to a further belief that much of the support and resources available are not sufficiently used by practitioners.

Despite the views of Qualifications Managers being positive in relation to understanding standards support and resources, a number of suggestions were made in terms of how SQA could add to these, including:

- Consulting more with practitioners (for example, during informal network meetings) when considering updates to standards
- Placing a greater emphasis on newly qualified teachers and those teaching a subject at a level for the first time attending events and participating in webinars (with this being illustrated by one respondent stating that 'there are too many people attending events and webinars who don't need to be there')
- Having more understanding standards materials and documentation on the SQA website (although a number of the Qualifications Managers argued against this, on the basis that there is a huge amount of information there already and that any further information could lead to 'overload' for practitioners)
- More visits by SQA staff to student teachers (in order to introduce them to the standards and make it clear why it's important that they keep up-to-date with them and how they could do this). Although it was recognised that this would be resource intensive, it was believed that this could be potentially very beneficial, not only in terms of promoting understanding of the standards amongst those training to become teachers, but also introducing them in a positive way to SQA and, as such, them potentially being more willing to engage with SQA once qualified

Finally, it should be noted that many of the Qualifications Managers interviewed believed that SQA should more effectively signpost practitioners to existing resources and support materials.

9.0 SQA INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PRACTITIONERS TO ENGAGE WITH UNDERSTANDING STANDARDS RESOURCES AND EVENTS

9.1 Practitioners

When **practitioners** were asked if they had any suggestions or recommendations which could increase opportunities for practitioners to engage with the standards, resources and events, their responses focused on four areas:

- Delivering more webinars and events (as this would make it easier for practitioners to find time to participate in one or other)
- Having more 'local' face-to-face events (which has been referred to earlier in this report) which are more effective in terms of time for practitioners to attend
- Having more information online (including at a subject-specific level) which can be accessed when practitioners have the time to do so, backed up with regular communications regarding changes in resources or information/guidance pertaining to the standards
- Having more face-to-face meetings with departments in schools which, it was felt, although would be time consuming, would be time well invested (albeit that there was a recognition that there could be issues here, for example in terms of getting cover for classes)

Finally, it should be noted that two practitioners suggested that SQA should consider holding events at weekends which, it was felt, would encourage participation, particularly if staff were paid to attend them. However, it should be stressed that ongoing evaluation of SQA understanding standards events by Ashbrook has indicated that, when they are undertaken at weekends, this is disliked by many participants.

9.2 Senior Staff in Schools

When **Senior Staff in schools** were asked to express their opinion here, two elements of context are worth noting, namely that:

- There is a degree of uncertainty as to how SQA could increase opportunities for practitioners to engage with standards, resources and events
- A number of those interviewed couldn't think of any suggestions or recommendations in this regard

Nonetheless, a number of suggestions were made by Senior Staff in schools here, including:

- (As referred to by practitioners) Having more 'local' understanding standards events (which is far more effective from a time perspective for practitioners)
- Having more understanding standards webinars which incorporate breakout rooms for smaller group discussion
- Having more online or virtual meetings (which should be of a relatively small scale to allow input and participation from those attending)
- Providing more pre-recorded videos (including, for example, of markers' meetings)

In the context of the suggestions noted above, it should be stressed that a number of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed raised issues in relation to:

- The extent to which practitioners will commit – and be motivated – to engage with SQA standards, resources and events outwith the working day

- The difficulties for Senior Staff in schools in terms of monitoring the extent to which practitioners are engaging with resources and events outwith their school day

9.3 Senior Appointees

Amongst **Senior Appointees**, two outcomes were apparent for this element of the discussions, namely:

- A belief that SQA could do little more to increase opportunities for practitioners to engage with standards, resources and events
- Respondents had few suggestions or recommendations in this regard

In relation to the last of these two outcomes, it should be noted, however, that suggestions were made in relation to:

- Having more in-person meetings (with, for example, subject implementation officers) which, although it was recognised would be time consuming, would represent a valuable investment of time for centres
- SQA encouraging practitioners to access and use understanding standards resources and events to a greater extent (including the better signposting of these resources and events)

It is also of interest to note that two specific – and radical – suggestions were made here, namely:

- Adding an additional week into a practitioner's academic year which would be devoted to training and development (part of which could relate specifically to the National Standards)
- Increasing the number of in-service days to facilitate greater discussion of the standards (at the expense of teaching hours for learners)

It should be stressed, however, that – as noted above – these suggestions were specific in nature on the basis that they were only noted by two individuals.

9.4 Qualifications Managers

Most of the **Qualifications Managers** interviewed believed it would be difficult for SQA to do anything which would significantly impact on opportunities for practitioners to engage with standards, resources and events, as their workload – even outwith school hours – is excessive and ‘part of the learning ecosystem’.

In addition, the Qualifications Managers interviewed, again found difficulty in identifying ways in which SQA could increase opportunities for practitioners to engage with standards, resources and events. However, two suggestions were made here by this audience, namely:

- Ensuring that Head Teachers in schools are promoting to practitioners the importance of updating their knowledge and understanding of the standards and how they can enhance this (including through accessing and using SQA support and resources)
- Making more recorded materials available which can be used when practitioners have time to do so

It should also be noted that, in the context of practitioner workload, there was a strong consensus amongst the Qualifications Managers interviewed that enhancing their knowledge and understanding of the National Standards doesn't represent a high priority.

Finally, it was stressed by a number of those interviewed that they believed that the Scottish Government has a fundamental responsibility for increasing the number of teachers in Scotland which, in turn, would increase the opportunity for practitioners to engage with

support and materials relating to the standards and that, furthermore, there was a belief that Local Authorities have a key role to play in terms of finding ways for practitioners to increase the amount of their non-contact time.

10.0 PRACTITIONER AND SENIOR STAFF IN SCHOOLS SUGGESTIONS REGARDING HOW PRACTITIONERS COULD BE ALLOCATED CPD TIME OR AN ANNUAL OPPORTUNITY TO SPECIFICALLY ENGAGE WITH NATIONAL STANDARDS, RESOURCES AND EVENTS

10.1 Practitioners

The **practitioners** interviewed identified few suggestions on how practitioners could be allocated CPD time or an annual opportunity to specifically engage with National Standards resources and events.

This outcome should be placed in the context that there was a clear consensus amongst those interviewed that regular CPD is very important to practitioners (although perhaps to a lesser extent amongst those who have been teaching for a number of years).

In this context, the following suggestions were made:

- Centres having more workshops (which, it was believed, would be a valuable and effective use of time)
- Practitioners being encouraged more by senior staff in their centre to undertake CPD activities
- Allocating specific times for CPD each working week for practitioners
- Having more online updates and the opportunity to ask questions online and have them answered online
- Paying staff to undertake CPD activities outwith the school day or academic year

In considering the suggestions noted above by practitioners, it should be stressed that there was an overwhelming desire for CPD to be undertaken during school hours and within term time.

10.2 Senior Staff in Schools

As was the case with practitioners, **Senior Staff in schools** struggled to provide suggestions here, with the suggestions provided primarily focusing around **when** CPD should be promoted and undertaken, namely:

- Between August and November
- At the end of the academic year
- During study leave time

In addition, although not strictly time related, it was suggested that CPD should be more targeted to those who may not understand the standards well (particularly those relatively new to teaching a subject).

It should also be stressed that it was felt that it would be difficult to fit in an annual opportunity for practitioners to specifically engage with National Standards, resources and events, in the context of the extensive workload of practitioners and also an overwhelming desire for any annual event to be undertaken within the academic year (which, again, would be difficult due to time constraints).

Finally, reference was made here to a belief that it would be difficult for SQA to impact on how practitioners could be better allocated CPD time, on the basis that 'a teacher's professional learning is a process of negotiation with their line manager in terms of their professional learning targets for the coming year'.

11.0 PRACTITIONER TRAINING IN RELATION TO UNDERSTANDING STANDARDS

11.1 Practitioners

There was an overwhelming consensus amongst the **practitioners** interviewed that understanding and then applying National Standards should be part of teacher training programmes. This is for a number of reasons, including:

- That it is of critical importance for students – and, thereafter, newly qualified teachers – to have a well-developed and current understanding of the standard in their subject area
- A well-developed knowledge and understanding of the standards being of critical importance to teaching practice

In this regard, there was a widespread belief that, when student teachers come on placement to schools and newly qualified teachers come to schools for their probation year, they tend to have little or no knowledge and understanding of the standard for their subject area and, indeed, this applies to newly qualified teachers.

Although this is frustrating for schools (particularly those who are mentoring student teachers or newly qualified teachers), it was apparent that many schools are committed to – and do – instruct newly qualified teachers regarding the standards (particularly through their interaction with markers).

It should be stressed here that a number of the practitioners interviewed stated that they believed that some staff in further and higher education institutions **do** inform their students about the importance of the standards per se and the importance of them in ensuring that they have an up-to-date knowledge and understanding of

them. However, there was a belief that this tends to be outwith the curriculum for student teachers.

Finally, virtually all of the practitioners interviewed stated that their centre includes considerations of the standards during induction. However, there was little evidence of the standards forming school training programmes for experienced teachers.

11.2 Senior Staff in Schools

All of the **Senior Staff in schools** interviewed believed that it was of fundamental importance that the curriculum for student teachers should include considerations of the National Standards. This was for a number of reasons, including:

- So that schools can have confidence that teachers are applying the standards appropriately in their teaching and assessment
- Due to the broadening of the curriculum
- Due to the extent of challenges for centres to bring newly qualified teachers 'up to speed' as a result of time availability issues
- As this would make newly qualified teachers more confident when they start teaching in their probation year
- As this would give student teachers and newly qualified teachers 'a greater understanding of the overall concept of what is expected from learners'

It should also be noted that many of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed stated that their school includes consideration of the standards in the induction and training of newly qualified teachers. However, again, there was limited evidence that consideration of the standards is a significant part of training for more experienced teachers (including as part of their CPD).

11.3 Senior Appointees

The views expressed by **Senior Appointees** were similar to those expressed by Senior Staff in schools. In particular, there was a widespread consensus that teacher training programmes should incorporate content relating to SQA's National Standards (in terms of what they are, their importance and the importance of teachers reviewing their understanding of the standard for their subject area on a regular basis). This view was on the basis of two beliefs, namely that:

- Student teachers come into jobs unprepared in many ways, including in relation to the standards
- Student teachers will be better prepared for – and perform better – whilst on placement

In both of these regards, it is of interest to note that a number of the Senior Appointees interviewed expressed their belief that teacher training per se is far poorer now than it was in the past.

It should be noted that there was a limited extent to which the Senior Appointees interviewed believed that post-teacher training modules should include SQA's National Standards.

For those who **did** believe that this was the case, it was felt that, in their personal development, all practitioners should consider their knowledge and understanding of the standard for their subject area.

However, for those who **didn't** believe this was the case, this was partly due to their belief that, whilst newly qualified teachers will be eager to engage in post-teacher training programmes that included SQA's National Standards, this would be far less likely to be the case for experienced practitioners, primarily due to their lack of time to do so. This is a particular concern as this can result – and raise the risk of

– experienced practitioners having an out of date understanding of National Standards.

Furthermore, it should be noted that many of the Senior Appointees interviewed believed that schools are committed to ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a current and comprehensive understanding of SQA's National Standard for their subject area (including through mentoring), although it was stated that this is time consuming for experienced practitioners due to other demands on their time.

11.4 Qualifications Managers

The views expressed by **Qualifications Managers** with regard to teacher training programmes and post-teacher training modules – including SQA's National Standards – very much reflected those noted by appointees.

In particular, there was a strong consensus that teacher training programmes should provide guidance and information about SQA's National Standards, based on a belief that there is substantial evidence that teachers come into a post without a sufficient understanding in this regard. Furthermore – as with Senior Appointees – Qualifications Managers tended to have a more limited desire for post-teacher training modules to include SQA's National Standards.

Finally, it should also be noted that there was a widespread belief amongst Qualifications Managers that centres have a key role to play in terms of ensuring that newly qualified teachers – and, indeed, all teachers – have a well-developed knowledge and understanding of the standard for their subject area. In this regard, it was suggested by two of the Qualifications Managers interviewed that SQA should play a more proactive role through liaising with schools and, potentially, having more visits to schools (although it was recognised that this would be a challenge and time consuming for SQA).

12.0 EVIDENCING PRACTITIONERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

12.1 Practitioners

When considering whether a practitioner's understanding of the National Standard should be evidenced, the **practitioners** interviewed overwhelmingly believed that they are teaching and assessing to the National Standard for their subject area.

In this regard, many of the practitioners interviewed stated that their centre already has processes in place to ensure that they are cognisant of the National Standard, with these including team meetings and reviews with Head or Principal Teachers where practitioners are required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the standard for their subject area. In addition, specific reference was made by practitioners here of their competence being demonstrated in their teaching and assessment performance.

Despite this, it was believed that, when keeping records of their CPD and CLPD activities, practitioners could make reference to their centre's internal processes providing evidence that they teach and assess to the standard, together with, for example, making reference to attendance at SQA understanding standards events or webinars or other relevant training pertaining to understanding of the standards.

There was also a strong view that, were SQA to introduce some form of formal process for practitioners to provide evidence of their understanding of the National Standard, this would be unwelcomed by practitioners, on the basis that – as well as being perceived as not being required – it would add to their already heavy workload.

12.2 Senior Staff in Schools

The **Senior Staff in schools** interviewed also believed that there was no need for additional processes to be put in place that would provide evidence of a practitioner's understanding of the National Standard for their subject. In particular, many references were made here to schools having existing robust processes to review practitioner understanding of the standard for their subject.

In addition, it was believed that moderation provides evidence of practitioners' knowledge and understanding of the standard which would then form part of subsequent discussions undertaken with practitioners and the introduction of remedial actions should a practitioner not be performing to the standard.

There was a specific suggestion made – with which a number of Senior Staff in schools agreed with – that there may be value in SQA delivering online courses which are designed to enhance practitioner understanding of the standards, with SQA issuing a certificate of course completion (which would represent evidence of competence in this regard).

It should also be noted that a number of the Senior Staff in schools interviewed stated that it would be useful for candidates to have evidence of their understanding of the standards when making job applications.

Despite this belief and the previous suggestion noted, there was a significant concern amongst the Senior Staff in schools interviewed that the introduction of any new tool by SQA to provide evidence would add to another layer to the excessive workload for practitioners and, as such, is very unlikely to be welcomed by them.

12.3 Senior Appointees

It was felt by the **Senior Appointees** interviewed that, in an ideal world, practitioners' understanding of the National Standard for their subject should be evidenced. However, it was also believed that the teaching profession is 'anything but ideal at the present time'.

In addition, it was felt that there is limited value in a practitioner's understanding in this regard being evidenced due to beliefs that:

- Introducing an additional layer of bureaucracy which would impact on the time that teachers would have to engage in other critical activities
- In the event teachers were not teaching and assessing to the standard, this would be quickly identified within schools and could be rectified quickly through guidance and training
- It would be difficult to collate evidence as this would not be a 'tick box process'

Despite the overall negative stance taken here by Senior Appointees, two suggestions were made, namely:

- That SQA could issue a batch of scripts for practitioners to mark and return which would provide clear evidence about practitioners' understanding and ability pertaining to the standards
- That there may be value in SQA speaking with GTC Scotland about this matter

Finally, it is of interest to note that a number of the Senior Appointees interviewed believed that there has to be a degree of trust in practitioners in terms of actions they take to ensure they have an up-to-date and accurate understanding of the National Standard for their subject area.

12.4 Qualifications Managers

The views expressed by the **Qualifications Managers** interviewed regarding the evidencing of a practitioner's understanding of National Standards were also largely negative, on the basis of, for example:

- Beliefs that Departmental Heads and Principal Teachers already review performance of practitioners on an annual basis, including their adherence to the standards
- Concerns about the introduction of a process of evidence collection and collation resulting in – or adding to – tensions between centres and SQA
- Concerns about attendance at events not necessarily representing evidence of understanding and interpreting the National Standards correctly

Two further points are worthy of note here from the discussions undertaken with the Qualifications Managers are that SQA needs to:

- Do more to ensure that centres are appropriately applying the standards
- Ensure that those who provide guidance and advice to newly qualified teachers with regard to the standards are passing on correct and up to date information and guidance (which links to the previous issue highlighted of senior staff in schools lacking time to engage with understanding standard resources)

There were, however, concerns that – although the points noted above were valid in principle – it may well be difficult to put them into practice.

13.0 KEY PRIORITY AREAS FOR SQA TO CONSIDER WHEN SUPPORTING PRACTITIONERS

The Senior Appointees and Qualifications Managers interviewed were asked what they thought should be the key priority areas for SQA to consider when supporting practitioners with current up-to-date understanding and interpretation of the National Standard for their subject areas.

In this regard, it should be stressed that there was a strong consensus amongst both audiences that 'SQA should continue to do what it does' as its current offerings are entirely appropriate, of high quality and of great relevance.

13.1 Senior Appointees

The primary priorities for **Senior Appointees** here were for SQA to:

- Continually update its website regarding changes to the standards, new materials/documents and other actions (such as understanding standards events and webinars, and other training sessions that relate to the standards)
- Encourage – and facilitate – practitioner training and support by peers within their centre

Thereafter Senior Appointees identified more specific priorities for SQA here, including:

- More regular face-to-face engagement with practitioners, such as delivering more understanding standards events (although it was recognised this would be resource intensive)
- Exploring ways in which Local Authorities could do more to ensure practitioner understanding of understanding standards (and, potentially, working more in conjunction with SQA in this regard)

- Promote more content relating to understanding standards in teacher training programmes (particularly for student teachers, potentially with input to teaching courses at universities)
- Encouraging leaders within schools to promote the importance of practitioners updating their knowledge of the standards and accessing appropriate resources, events and so on (through better signposting)
- Ensure sufficient flexibility is in place to allow practitioners to access resources and support
- Target centres taking on new qualifications and new teachers in terms of their understanding of the National Standards

13.2 Qualifications Managers

The **Qualifications Managers** interviewed made reference to what they believed to be the key priorities for SQA to consider when supporting practitioner understanding and interpretation of the National Standard, namely:

- Engaging more with practitioners through, for example, CPD (particularly newly qualified teachers)
- Communicating more effectively with practitioners about what the standards are and why it is important for them to keep up-to-date with them and to be motivated to do so
- Being more open and transparent in terms of quality assurance processes in order to demonstrate how rigorous and robust they are
- Doing more to ensure that the application of the standard in centres is correct, particularly in the context of beliefs that there is a lack of consistency in this regard at the present time

14.0 KEY MESSAGES

Virtually all of those taking part in the research believed that they had a good understanding of the National Standards. However, the evidence provided by Senior Appointees and Qualifications Managers suggested that this isn't always the case amongst practitioners.

Amongst all of those participating in the research, there was a strong consensus that SQA plays – and should play – a key role in supporting the understanding of National Standards amongst practitioners and other appropriate individuals within colleges through a wide range of resources (with these resources varying between the four audiences).

There's a widespread belief that practitioners themselves should have responsibility for facilitating their understanding of the National Standards in their subject areas, together with an equally held belief that SQA has a key role to play in supporting them in this regard, as have centres themselves, particularly with newly qualified teachers.

It was very apparent that SQA's resources support practitioners in terms of their understanding of the National Standards, are highly regarded, with understanding standards events being particularly praised, not only in terms of promoting understanding of the standards amongst those who attend them, but also the opportunity which they provide for practitioners to network with other teachers in their subject area.

Despite this, there were a range of areas which it was believed the understanding of National Standards could be improved, including:

- Better collaboration between SQA, Local Authorities and centres to promote the delivery of local events and in-service days which focus on National Standards
- The role of Education Scotland and GTCS in this regard

- The role of the Scottish Government in terms of increasing teacher numbers
- Including the National Standards in the teacher training curriculum and the newly qualified teacher induction processes
- Delivering more and better resources and events for college staff delivering National Qualifications
- Recognising the role of markers in cascading information to practitioners and their centres
- Recognising the role of centres and senior staff in schools in terms of raising awareness of National Standards
- Delivering bespoke CPD resources and events dependant on the group of staff (and separate for CPD resources and events for newly qualified teachers)
- Improving signposting to understanding standard resources and events
- Improving SQA's website and podcasts

There was a limited extent to which it was believed SQA could add to its existing support and resources that are designed to enhance practitioner understanding of the standards. This is a reflection of how well existing resources work and concerns that providing more could lead to a degree of overload for practitioners. However, there is a need for enhanced communications about – and the better signposting of – existing support and resources, together with more opportunities for engagement with SQA's existing support and resources.

There is a degree of uncertainty as to how practitioners could be allocated CPD time or an annual opportunity to specifically engage with National Standards. However, there were a number of suggestions made in this regard, including:

- Centres having more workshops (which, it was believed, would be a valuable and effective use of time)

- Practitioners being encouraged more by senior staff in their centre to undertake CPD activities
- Allocating specific times for CPD each working week for practitioners
- Having more online updates and the opportunity to ask questions online and have them answered online
- Paying staff to undertake CPD activities outwith the school day or academic year
- Targeting CPD to those who may not understand the standards well (particularly those relatively new to teaching a subject)

In this regard, it should be stressed that it was apparent from elements of the discussions with those participating in the research that centres and Local Authorities (and, indeed, the Scottish Government in terms of increasing teacher numbers) have a responsibility to ensure that there are enhanced opportunities for CPD.

Senior staff are often responsible for cascading information and overseeing the induction process for newly qualified teachers. Accordingly, that there may be a requirement for understanding standards resources to be developed to provide CPD opportunities for senior staff in this regard, with this also being the case in relation to the challenge for Qualifications Managers to keep up to date with standards where they have responsibility for a number of subject areas.

There is a significant desire for understanding standards to be part of teacher training programmes, on the basis that student teachers coming on placements and newly qualified teachers tend to have limited understanding of the standards, which means that centres have to devote time (particularly to newly qualified teachers) to ensure that they are brought up to speed as soon as possible in this regard.

There was very limited support for practitioners' understanding of the National Standard for their subject area to be evidenced. This was built on a belief that centres review practitioner understanding of the standards on an ongoing basis and concerns that, were there to be a requirement to evidence a practitioner's understanding of the standard for their subject area, this would add a burden to the already heavy workload of practitioners.