



Ashbrook
RESEARCH & CONSULTANCY

REPORT (FINAL DRAFT)

KEY AUDIENCE RESEARCH: CYCLE 2

June 2024

PREPARED FOR: Scottish Qualifications Authority

Report (Final Draft)

Key Audience Research: Cycle 2

Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd

June 2024

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report details findings to emerge from research undertaken on behalf of SQA by Ashbrook Research & Consultancy Ltd, and reports on the second Cycle of research undertaken amongst three key SQA audiences in 2023 and 2024:

- Employer and Training Provider audiences
- College audiences
- School audiences

Employer and Training Provider Audiences

The research focused around the derivation of information from four Employer and Training Provider audiences (ETPs):

- Employers (individuals responsible for training, recruitment or HR)
- ETP learners (individuals engaged in learning through ETPs)
- ETP teaching professionals (individuals with teaching responsibilities within ETPs)
- ETP managers (individuals with manager roles in ETPs)

Data was collected by means of the administration of structured telephone interviews with Employers and the administration of an online questionnaire with ETP learners, ETP teaching professionals and ETP managers.

A total of 159 structured telephone interviews were undertaken with Employers in February/March 2024, whilst the following number of online responses were achieved:

- 215 ETP learners
- 143 ETP teaching professionals

- 171 ETP managers

During the analysis process, equal weightings were applied to the audiences.

College Audiences

The three College audiences were as follows:

- Individuals with teaching responsibilities in Scottish FE colleges ('College lecturers')
- Individuals with management responsibilities in Scottish FE colleges ('College management')
- Individuals learning in Scottish FE colleges ('College learners')

The information was collected during November/December 2023 by means of the administration of an online questionnaire, with the following number of responses being achieved:

- Those in management roles (101)
- Lecturers (160)
- Learners (143)

Each of the three audiences were weighted equally during the analysis process.

School Audiences

The four School audiences were as follows:

- Parents and carers of learners in S4 to S6 ('parents/carers')
- School learners in S4 to S6 ('School learners')
- Teachers in secondary schools ('School teachers')

- Members of management teams within secondary schools ('School management')

The information for parents and carers was collected via face-to-face interviews, whilst an online methodology was used for the remaining three audiences.

The data was collected during November/December 2023.

The total number of completed questionnaires for each of these audiences was as follows:

- 250 parents and carers of learners in S4 to S6
- 1,104 School learners in S4 to S6
- 220 teachers in secondary schools
- 214 members of management teams within secondary schools

Equal weightings were applied to each of the four audiences during the analysis process.

Reporting

Detailed reports have been submitted to SQA for each of the audiences noted above.

This report provides a precis of key findings from the second Cycle of the Key Audience Research undertaken during 2023 and 2024 and provides two profiles:

- A profile for SQA (namely its credibility, satisfaction with SQA's overall performance, knowledge of SQA, a contact profile, a communications profile, and an SQA perceptions profile) – Section 2.0

- A profile of SQA qualifications (namely qualification knowledge, qualification credibility and changing views about qualifications) – Section 3.0

Finally, Section 4.0 provides a number of key messages to emerge from Cycle 2 of the Key Audience Research.

It should be noted that, where appropriate, this report draws comparisons between the surveys for Cycle 1 of the KAR Research (the fieldwork for which was undertaken between November/December 2022 and February/March 2023) and those undertaken for Cycle 2.

All of the variances noted in this report are statistically significant (unless it is stated that this is not the case). It should be stressed that the variances which are cited are the most notable statistically significant variances and that not all statistically significant variances are cited due to a desire to avoid producing an overly lengthy report.

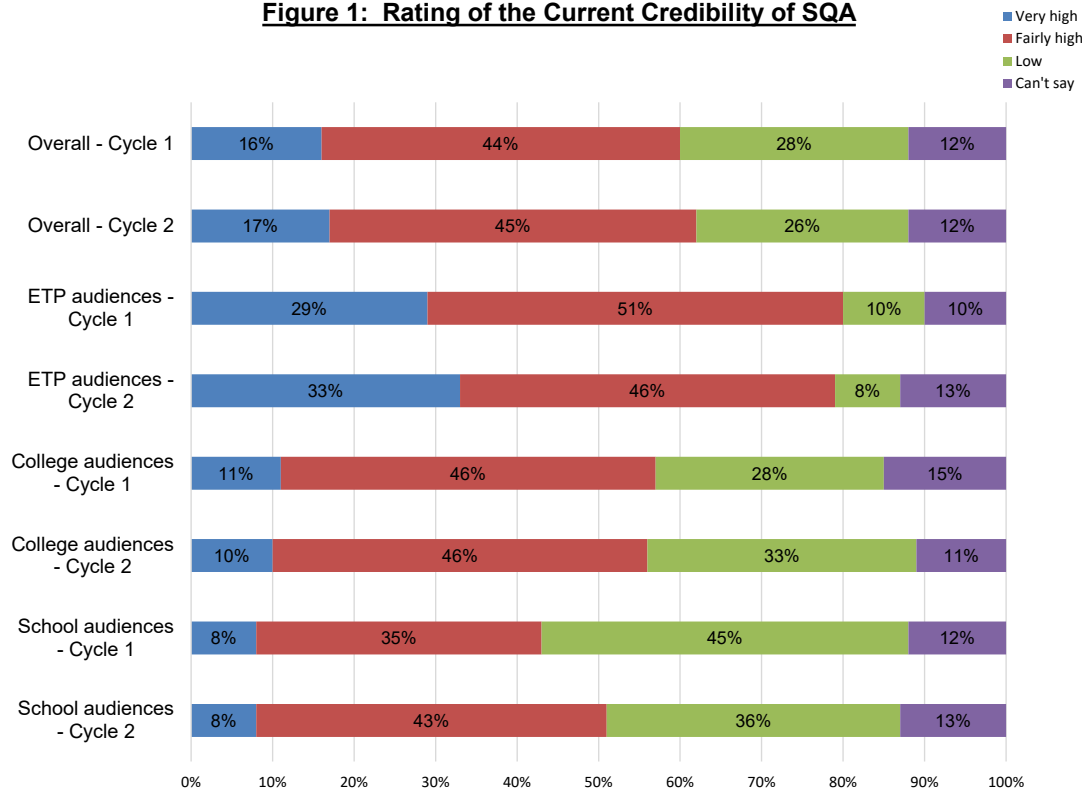
The statistical tests applied to the data to test the significance of variances found in the data samples were determined by the type of data/variable that was being tested and included chi-square tests, t-tests and analysis of variance, with SPSS being used to carry out both survey analysis and statistical testing.

2.0 SQA PROFILE

2.1 SQA’s Credibility

‘How would you rate the current credibility of SQA?’

Figure 1: Rating of the Current Credibility of SQA



Base: All Respondents

Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, three out of five respondents in Cycle 2 (62%) rated SQA’s credibility as being high, with this outcome being most notable amongst the ETP audiences and less notable amongst the College and School audiences.

Around one in six respondents overall (17%) specifically believed SQA’s credibility to be ‘very high’, with this outcome being most notable amongst the ETP audiences.

Overall, around a quarter of respondents in Cycle 2 (26%) rated SQA’s credibility as being low, with this outcome being most notable amongst the School and College audiences and least notable amongst the ETP audiences.

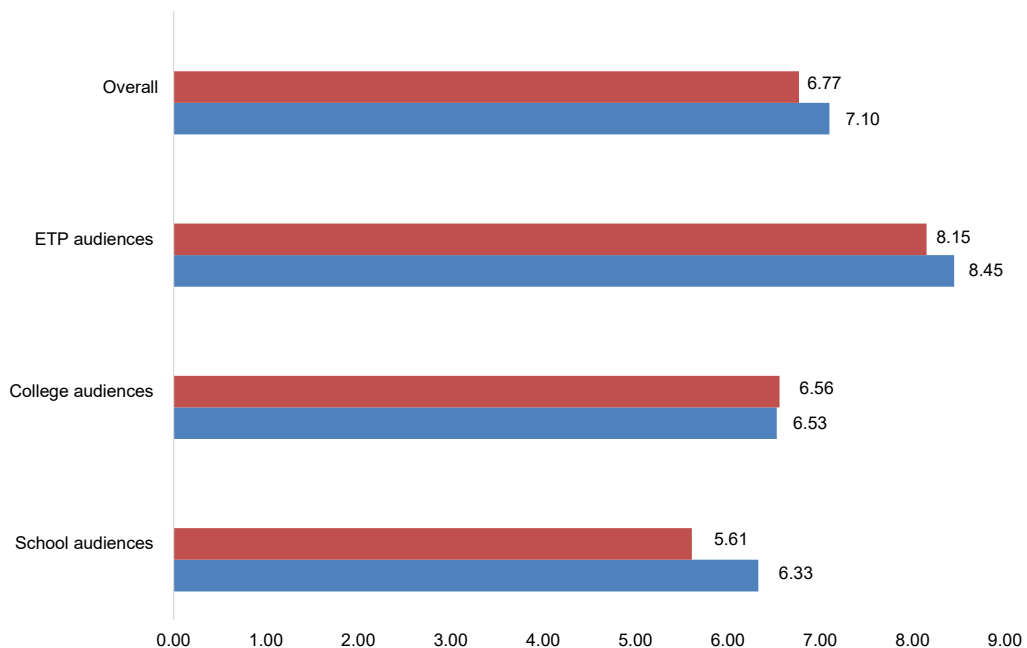
Changes Since Cycle 1

Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the extent to which the School audiences believed SQA to have high credibility, a decrease in the extent to which they believed SQA to have low credibility and an increase in the extent to which the College audiences believed SQA to have low credibility.

2.2 Satisfaction with SQA’s Overall Performance

‘How satisfied would you say you are with the performance of SQA overall, where ‘1’ means ‘completely dissatisfied’ and ‘10’ means ‘completely satisfied’?’

Figure 2: Overall Satisfaction with SQA’s Performance - Mean Scores ■ Cycle 1 ■ Cycle 2



Base: All Respondents (Excluding those Unable to Answer)

Cycle 2 Outcomes

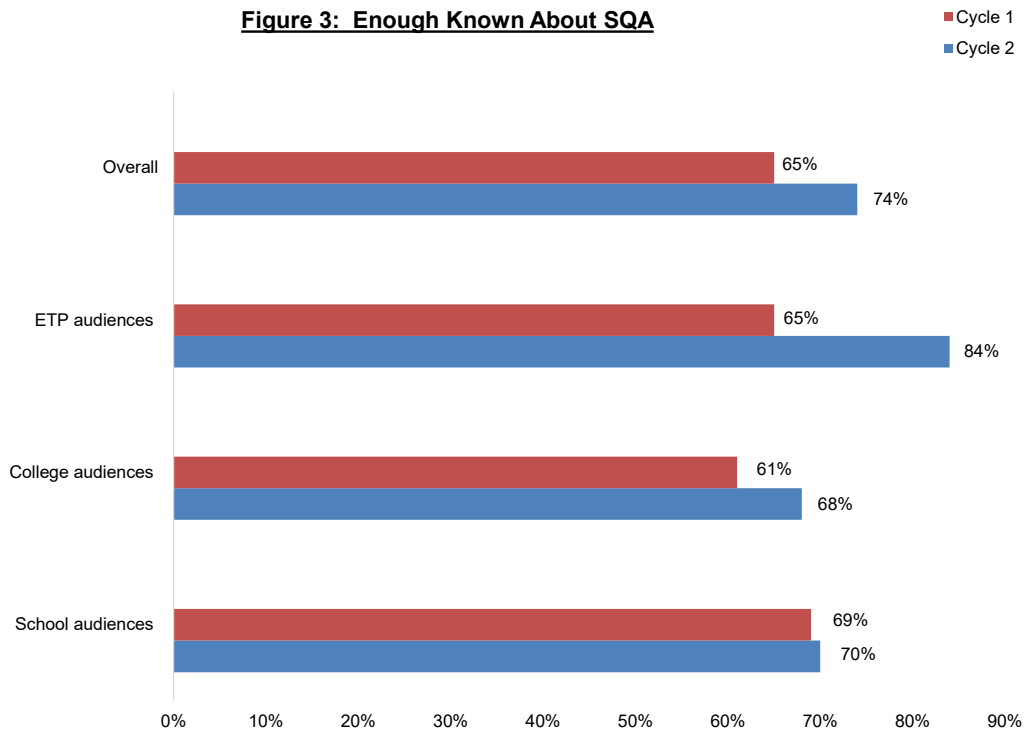
Overall, respondents in Cycle 2 provided an average score of 7.10 out of a possible 10 in terms of their satisfaction with SQA’s performance, with this figure being highest amongst the ETP audiences and lowest amongst the School audiences.

Changes Since Cycle 1

Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the average score for SQA’s overall performance (from 6.77 to 7.10), with this increase being primarily driven by the ETP and School audiences, particularly the latter.

2.3 Knowledge of SQA

‘Do you believe you know enough about SQA?’



Base: All Respondents

Cycle 2 Outcomes

Almost three quarters of respondents in Cycle 2 (74%) stated that they believe that they know enough about SQA, with this outcome being highest amongst the ETP audiences and lowest – and similar – amongst the College and School audiences.

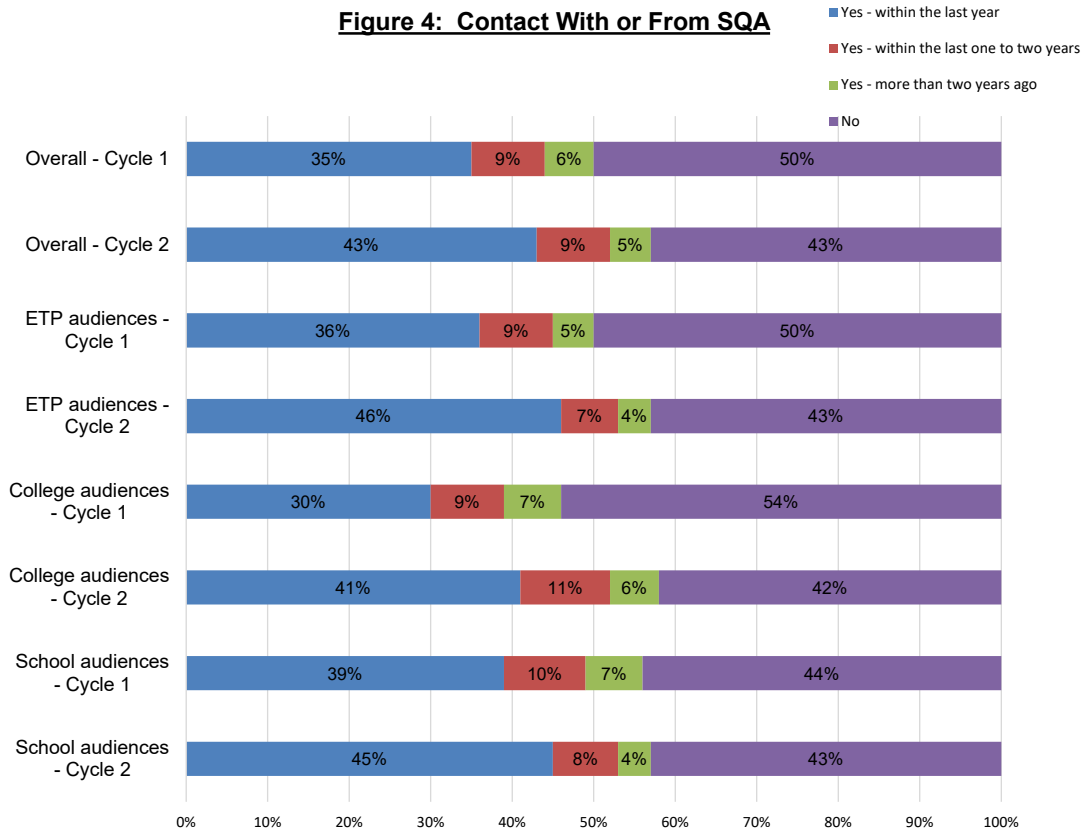
College and School learners are less likely to believe that they know enough about SQA than College and School practitioners.

Changes Since Cycle 1

Since Cycle 1, there was a notable change in terms of beliefs amongst the three audiences collectively that they know enough about SQA (rising from 65% to 74%). More specifically, there was an increasing extent to which the ETP and College audiences (particularly the former) believed that they knew enough about SQA.

2.4 Contact Profile

‘Have you had contact with or from SQA?’



Base: All Respondents

‘Overall, how would you rate your contact with or from SQA on a scale from 1 to 10, where ‘1’ is ‘very poor’ and ‘10’ is ‘very good’?’

Figure 5: Rating of Contacts With or From SQA - Mean Scores



Base: Had Contact with SQA (excluding those unable to answer)

Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, approaching three out of five respondents in Cycle 2 (57%) had had contact with SQA, with this outcome being very consistent across the three audiences. In addition, over two out of five respondents (43%) had had contact with SQA within the last year (with this outcome being similar across the three audiences).

College, School and ETP learners are all less likely to have contact with SQA than the three practitioner audiences.

Overall, respondents in Cycle 2 provided a mean score of 7.65 out of a possible 10 in terms of their rating of their contact with SQA, with the highest mean score being found amongst the ETP audiences.

Changes Since Cycle 1

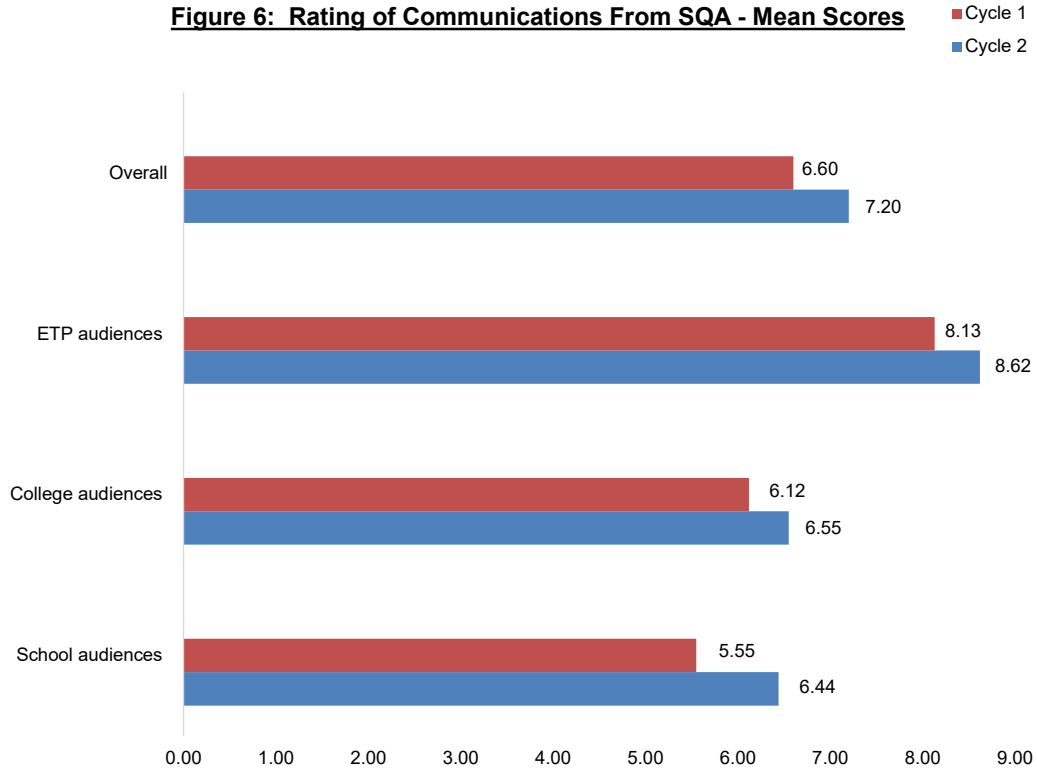
Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the extent to which the ETP and College audiences noted contact with or from SQA and also an increase across all audiences – both individually and collectively – in the extent to which they had had contact with or from SQA within the last year.

Since the last Cycle, overall, there was an increase in the average score for contacts with/from SQA (rising from 7.14 to 7.65 out of a possible 10), with this increasing score being primarily driven by the School audiences.

2.5 Communications Profile

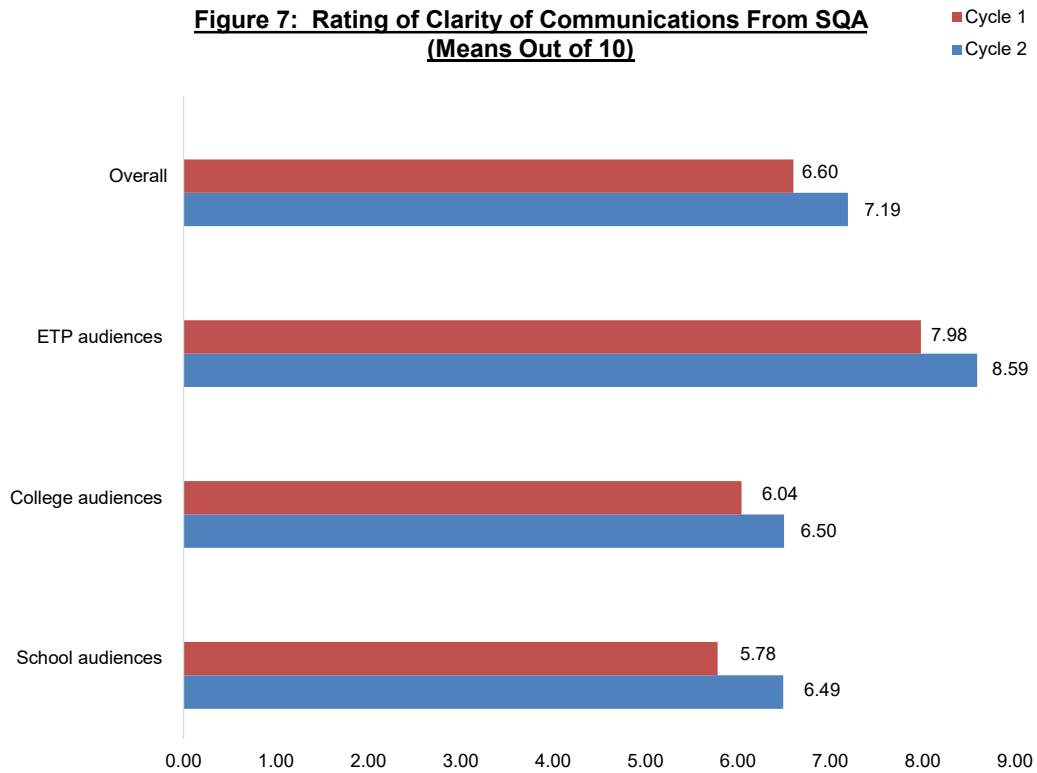
‘Overall, how would you rate communications from SQA on a scale from 1 to 10, where ‘1’ is ‘very poor’ and ‘10’ is ‘very good’?’

Figure 6: Rating of Communications From SQA - Mean Scores



Base: All Respondents (excluding those unable to answer)

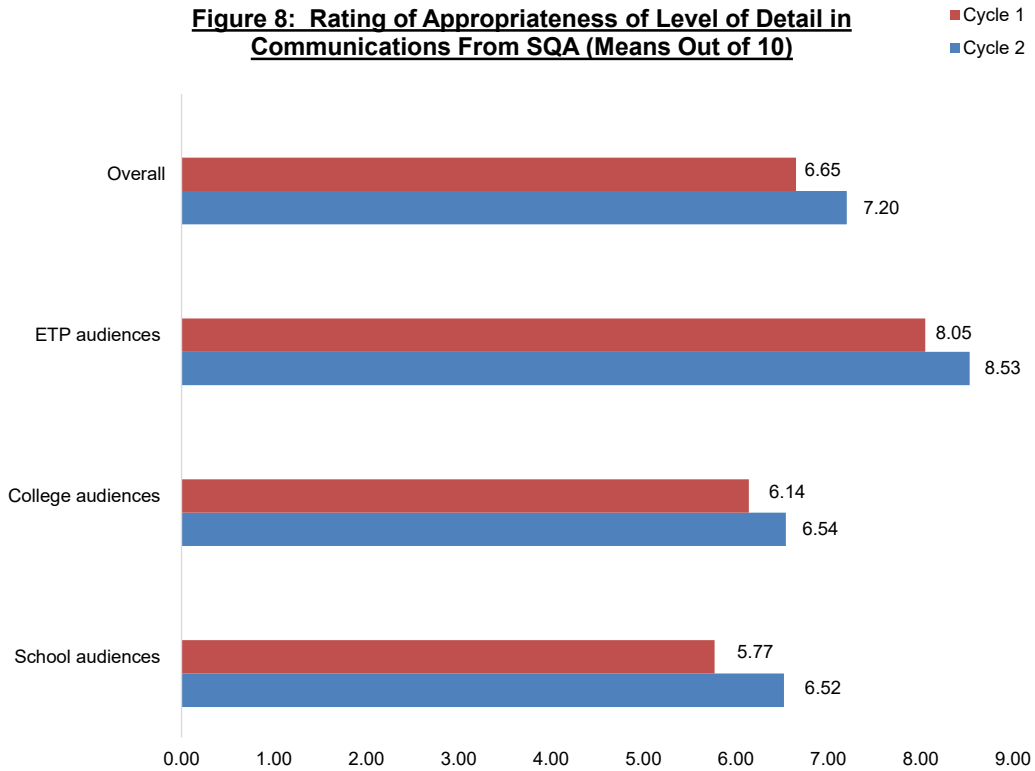
‘How would you rate the clarity of communications from SQA on a scale from 1 to 10, where ‘1’ is ‘very poor’ and ‘10’ is ‘very good’?’



Base: All Respondents (Excluding those Unable to Answer)

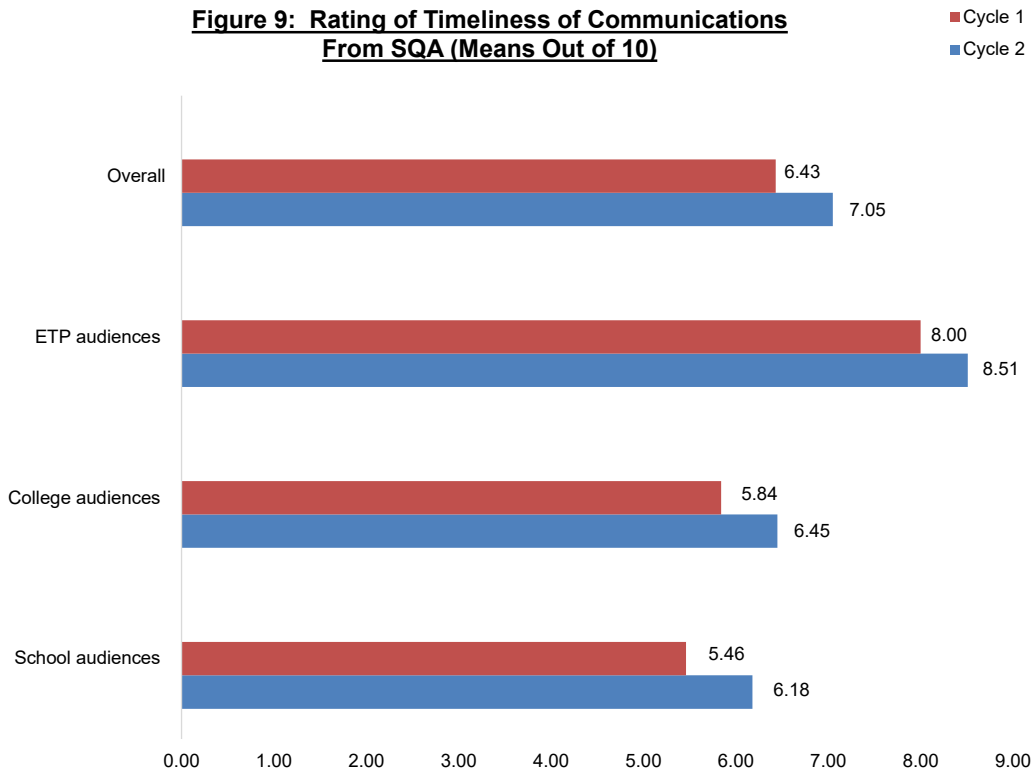
‘How would you rate the appropriateness of the level of detail of communications from SQA on a scale from 1 to 10, where ‘1’ is ‘very poor’ and ‘10’ is ‘very good’?’

Figure 8: Rating of Appropriateness of Level of Detail in Communications From SQA (Means Out of 10)



Base: All Respondents (Excluding those Unable to Answer)

‘How would you rate the timeliness of communications from SQA on a scale from 1 to 10, where ‘1’ is ‘very poor’ and ‘10’ is ‘very good’?’



Base: All Respondents (Excluding those Unable to Answer)

Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, respondents to Cycle 2 provided a rating of 7.20 out of a possible 10 in terms of their communications from SQA, with this outcome being highest amongst the ETP audiences and lowest amongst the School audiences.

Overall, respondents provided a rating of 7.19 out of 10 in terms of the 'clarity' of communications from SQA, 7.20 in terms of 'how appropriate the level of detail was in communications' and 7.05 in terms of the 'timeliness of communications'.

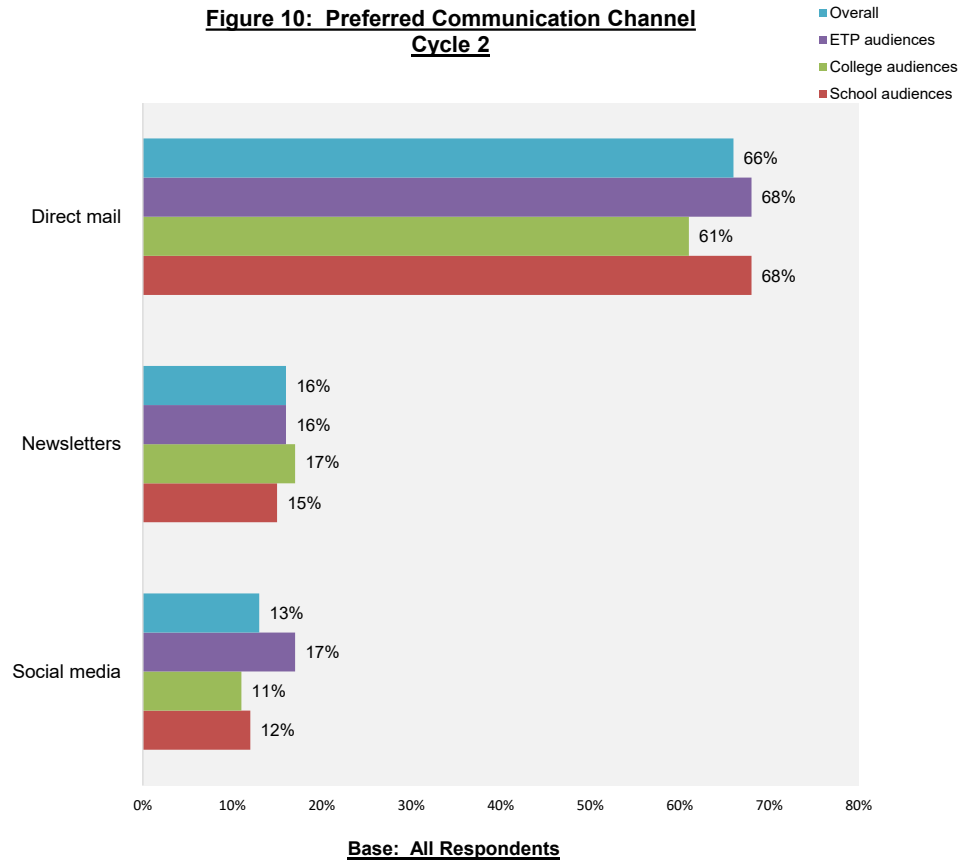
The ETP audiences provided the highest ratings for each of these aspects of communications.

Changes Since Cycle 1

Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the average score for communications from SQA (rising from 6.60 to 7.20 out of a possible 10), with this rise being driven by all three audiences, particularly the School audiences.

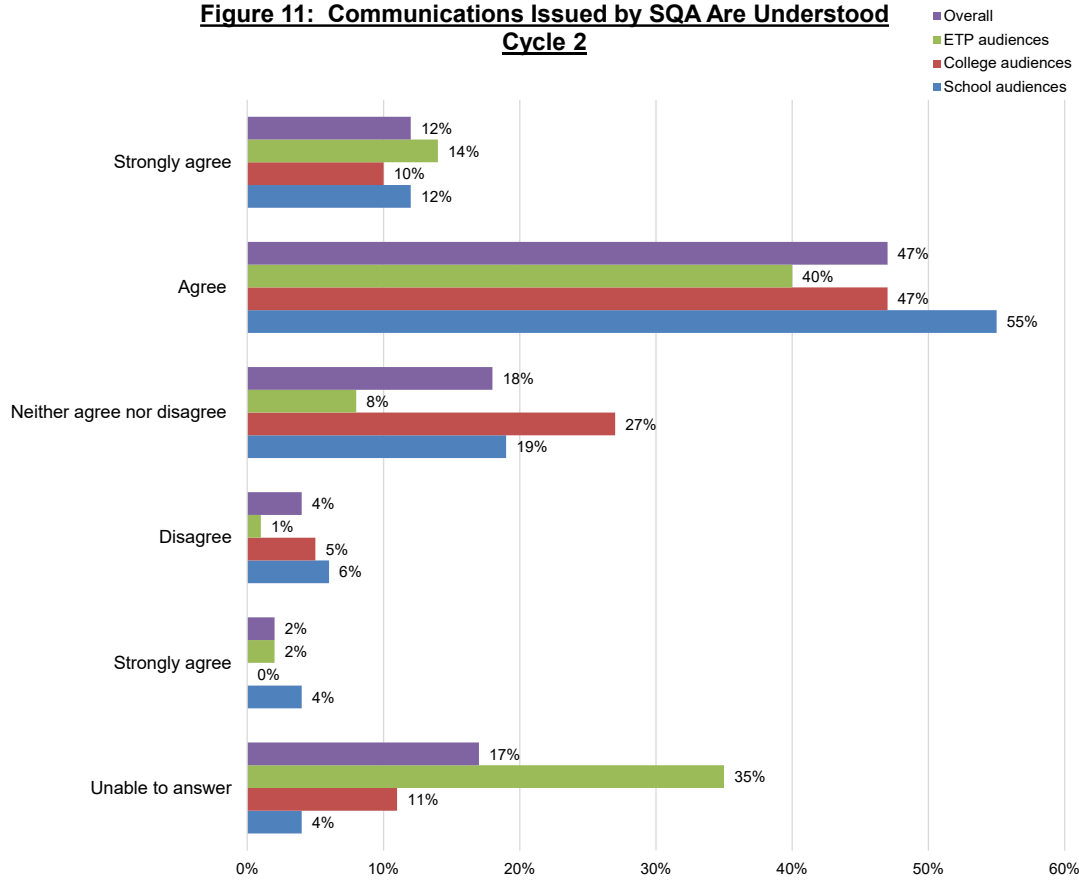
Since the last Cycle, there was also an increase in the rating of the 'clarity of communications from SQA' – from 6.60 to 7.19 out of a possible 10, an increase in the rating of 'the appropriateness of the level of detail in communications from SQA' – from 6.65 to 7.20 out of a possible 10 and an increase in the rating of the 'timeliness of communications from SQA' – rising from 6.43 to 7.05 out of a possible 10. These increased ratings were driven by all three audiences.

'What is your preferred communication channel?'



'I understand the communications issued by SQA'

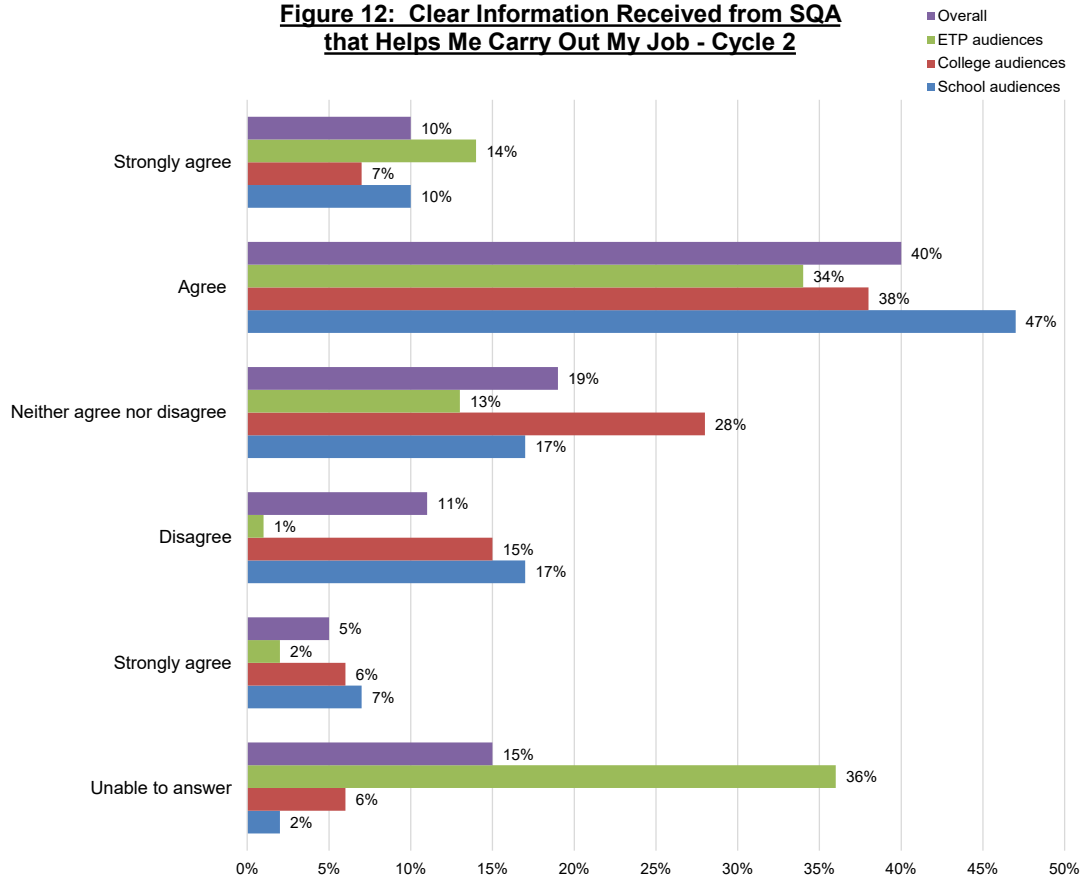
**Figure 11: Communications Issued by SQA Are Understood
Cycle 2**



Base: All Respondents

'I receive clear information about SQA that helps me carry out my role'

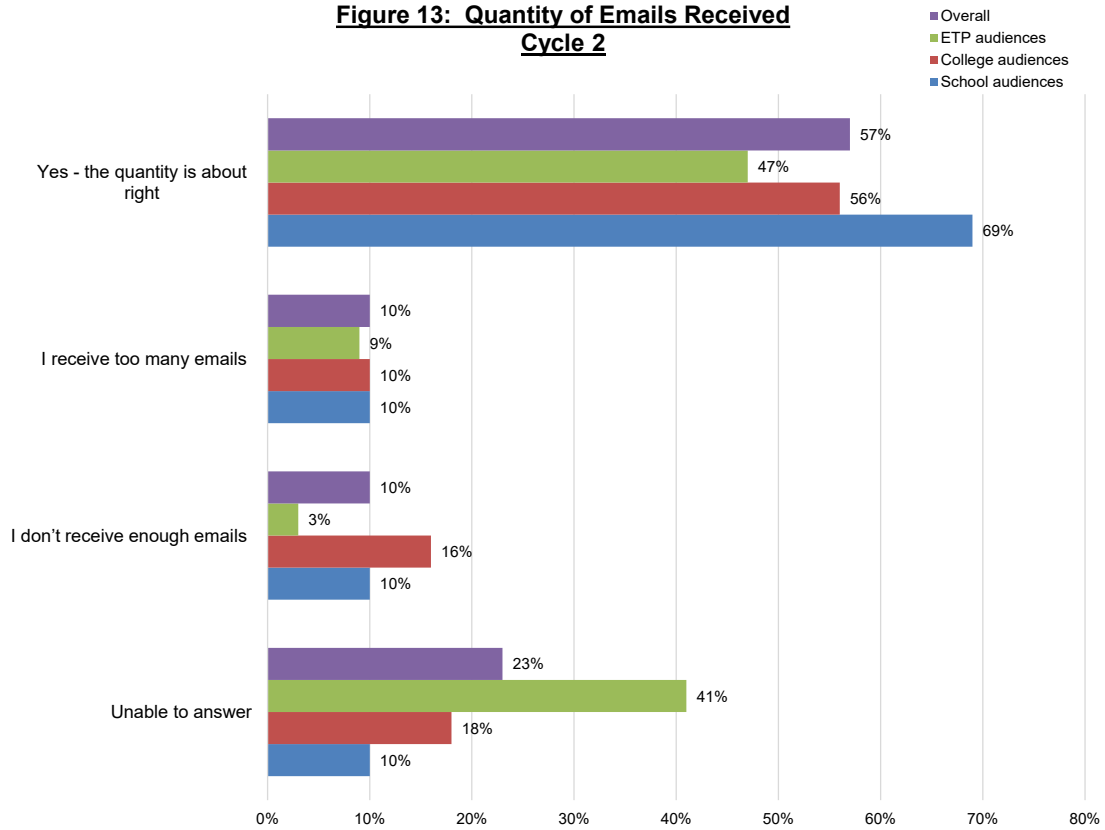
Figure 12: Clear Information Received from SQA that Helps Me Carry Out My Job - Cycle 2



Base: All Respondents

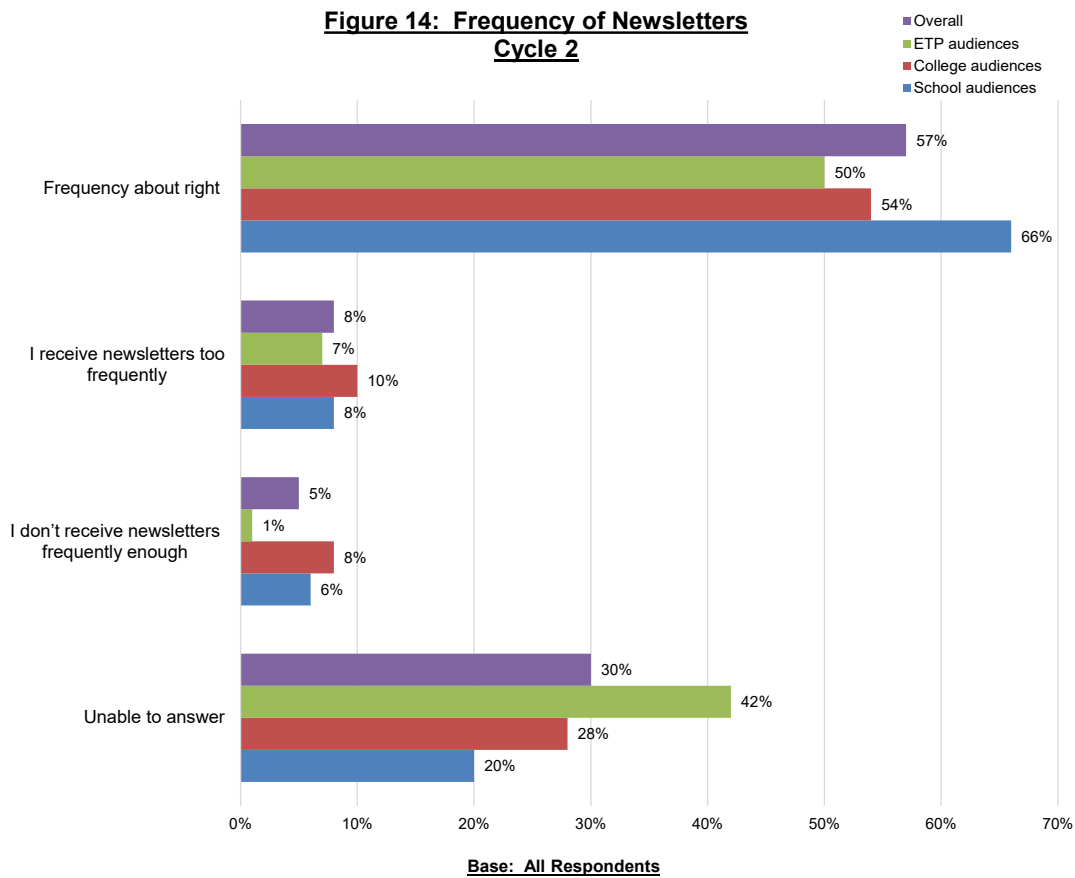
‘Do you think that the quantity of emails you receive from SQA is about right?’

**Figure 13: Quantity of Emails Received
Cycle 2**



Base: All Respondents

‘Do you think the frequency of newsletters is right?’



Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, respondents in Cycle 2 most commonly stated that their preferred communication channel was ‘direct mail’ (66%), with this outcome being similar across the three key audiences. Thereafter, preferences for ‘social media’ and ‘newsletters’ were far lower (16% and 13% respectively)¹.

Almost three out of five respondents in Cycle 2 (59%) stated that they understand communications issued by SQA, with this being most likely to be the case amongst the School audiences, whilst half of respondents (50%) stated that they receive clear information from SQA that helps them carry out their role, with this most likely to be the case amongst the School audiences².

¹ This question was asked for the first time in Cycle 2

² These questions were asked for the first time in Cycle 2

College and School learners in Cycle 2 were less likely to understand communications from SQA than College and School practitioners.

Overall, in Cycle 2, approaching three out of five respondents (57%) believed that the quantity of emails they receive from SQA is 'about right' (with this most likely to be the case amongst the School audiences), with one in ten respondents, overall, (10%) believing that they receive 'too many emails' and the same proportion 'that they don't receive enough emails' (with the last of these outcomes being most notable amongst the College audiences)³.

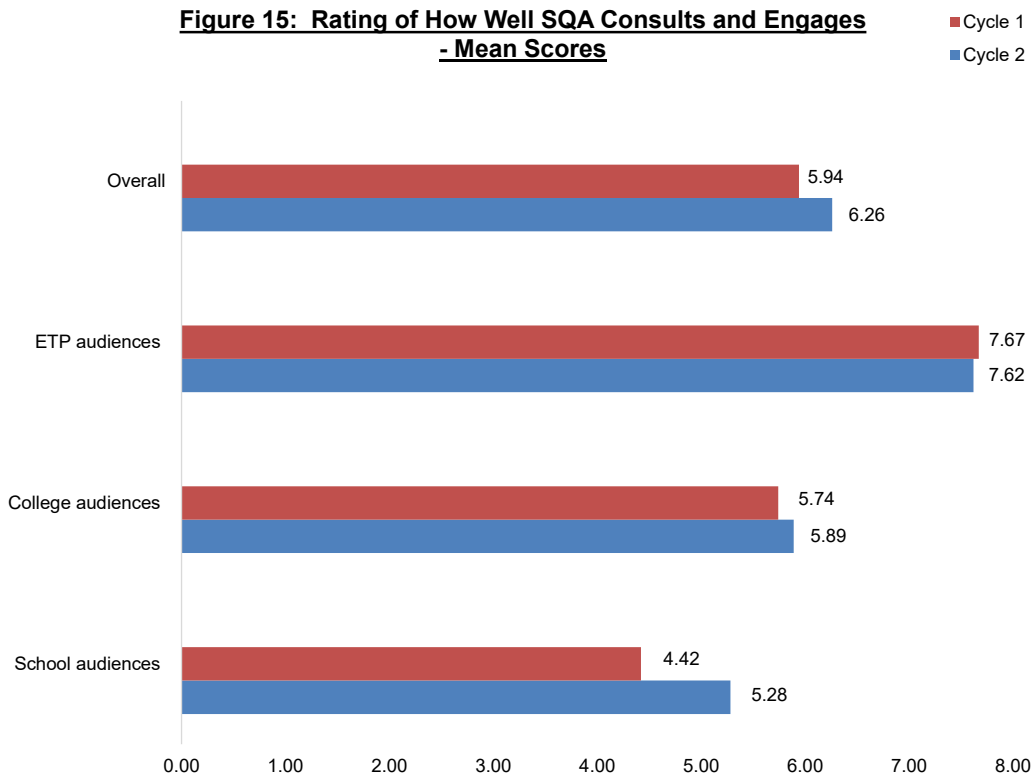
In Cycle 2, approaching three out of five respondents (57%) believed that the frequency of newsletters they receive from SQA is 'about right' (with this most likely to be the case amongst the School audiences). Thereafter, few respondents, overall, in Cycle 2 believed that they receive newsletters 'too frequently' or that they don't receive newsletters frequently enough (8% and 5% respectively), with these outcomes being low across all three audiences⁴

³ This question was asked for the first time in Cycle 2

⁴ These questions were asked for the first time in Cycle 2

2.6 Consultation and Engagement Profile

‘How would you rate how well SQA consults or engages?’



Base: All Respondents (excluding those unable to answer)

Cycle 2 Outcomes

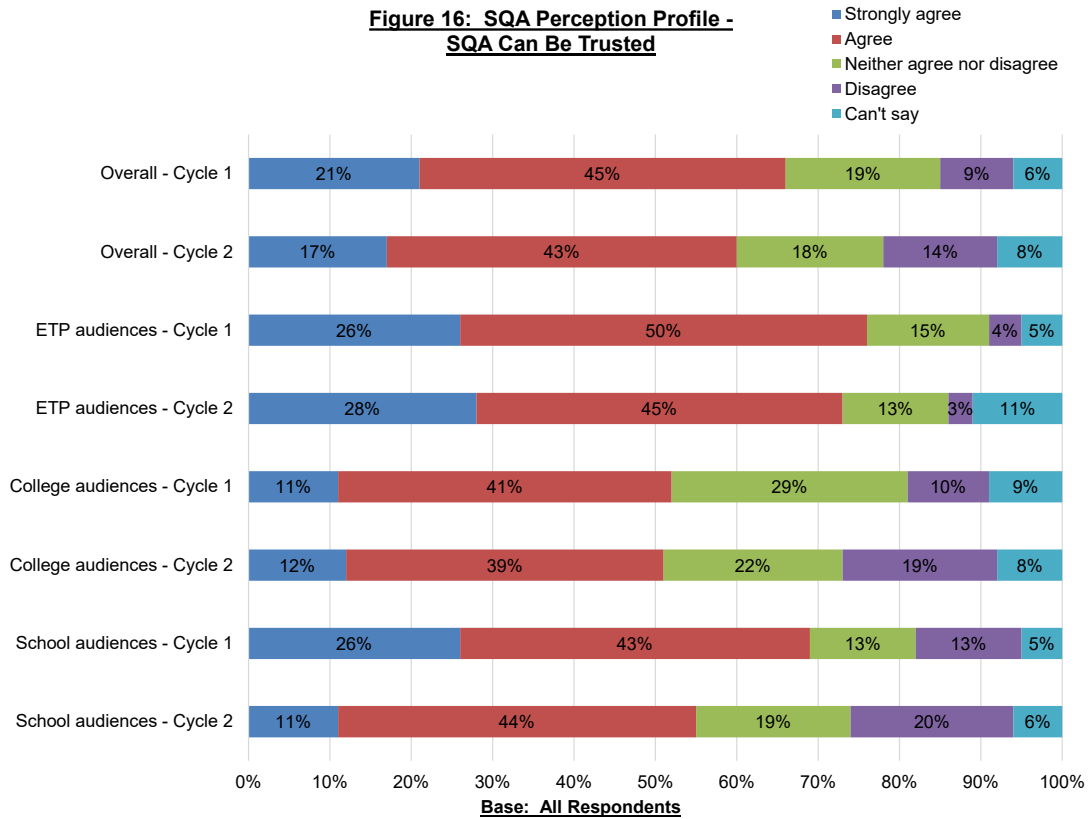
Overall, respondents in Cycle 2 provided a rating of 6.26 out of 10 in terms of how well SQA consults and engages, with the highest rating here being noted by the ETP audiences and the lowest by the School audiences.

Changes Since Cycle 1

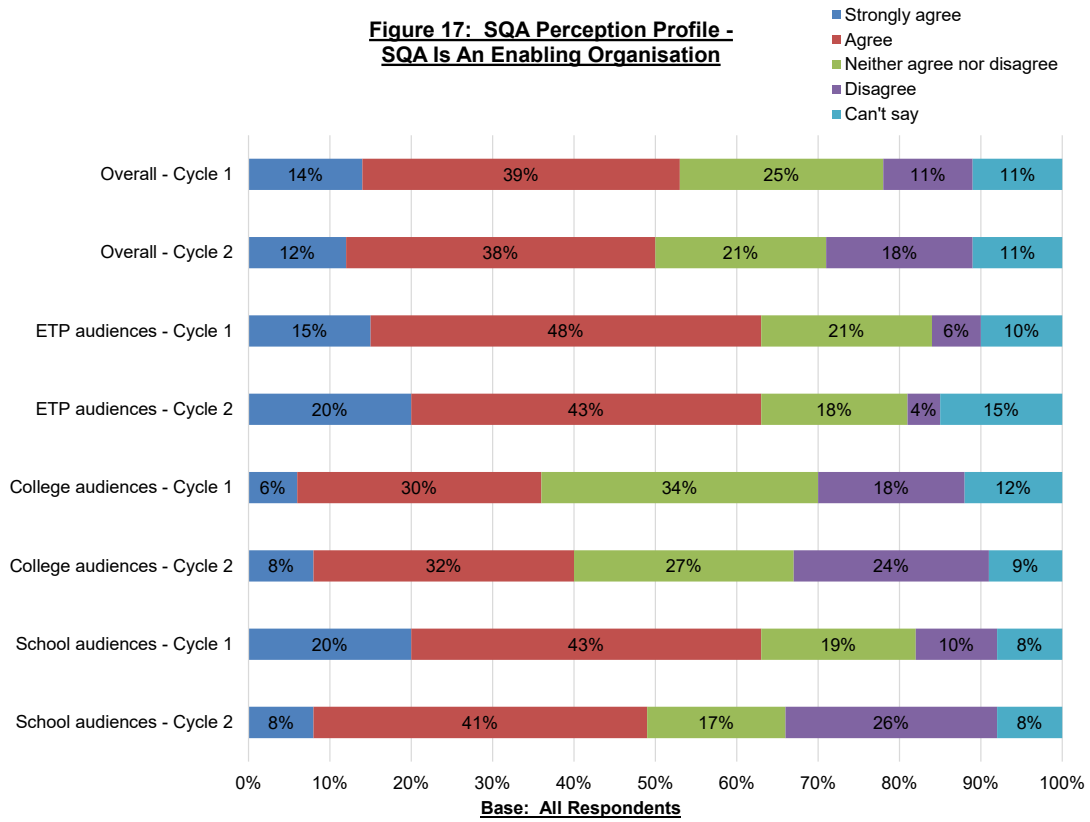
Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the average score of the rating of how well SQA consults and engages – from 5.94 to 6.26 out of a possible 10 – with this increase being almost exclusively driven by the School audiences.

2.7 SQA Perception Profile

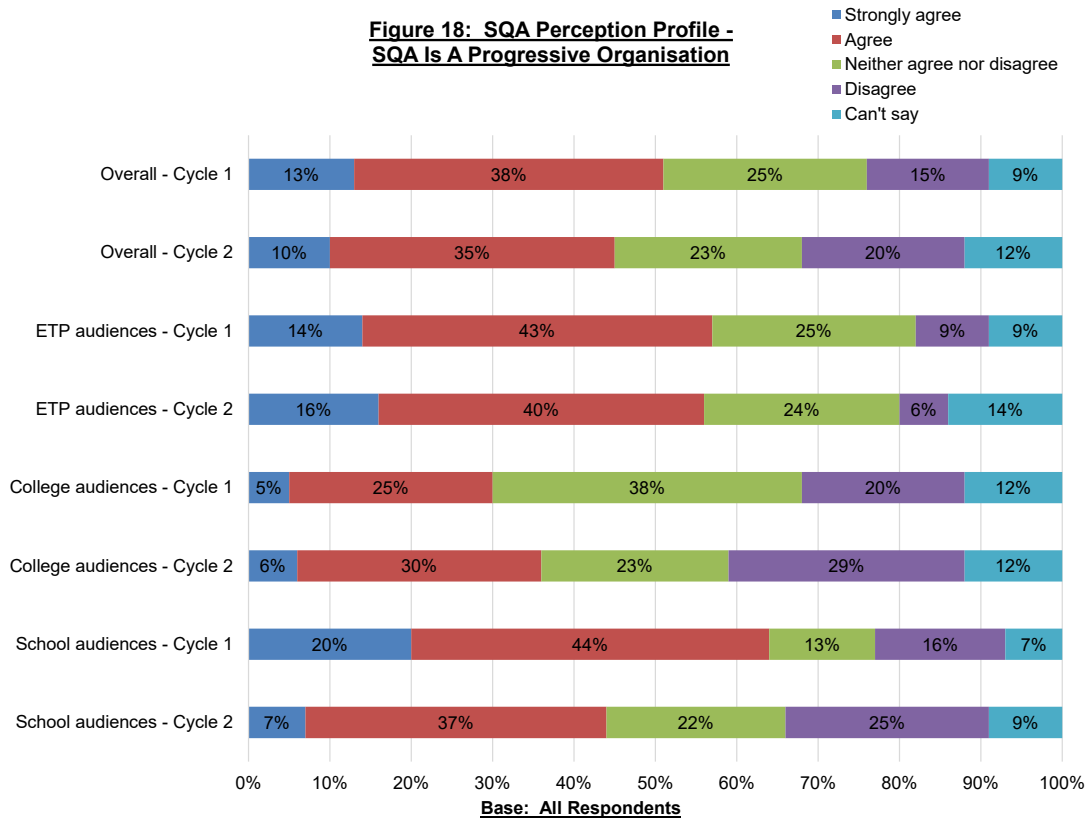
‘How strongly would you agree or disagree that SQA can be trusted?’



‘How strongly would you agree or disagree that SQA enables organisations to carry out their roles more effectively?’



‘How strongly would you agree or disagree that SQA is a progressive organisation?’



Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, three out of five respondents in Cycle 2 (60%) agreed that ‘SQA can be trusted’, with this applying to half of respondents (50%) in terms of their agreement that ‘SQA is an enabling organisation’ and well over two out of five respondents (45%) in terms of the agreement that ‘SQA is a progressive organisation’.

The ETP audiences were most likely to agree that:

- SQA can be trusted
- SQA is an enabling organisation
- SQA is a progressive organisation

Overall, around one in six respondents in Cycle 2 (17%) specifically strongly agreed that ‘SQA can be trusted’, whilst one in eight (12%)

specifically strongly agreed that 'SQA is an enabling organisation' and one in ten (10%) strongly agreed that 'SQA is a progressive organisation'.

The ETP audiences were most likely to strongly agree with each of the SQA attributes under consideration here.

Overall, one in seven respondents in Cycle 2 (14%) disagreed that 'SQA can be trusted' (with this outcome being highest amongst the College and School audiences), approaching one in five (18%) disagreed that 'SQA is an enabling organisation' (with this outcome, again, being highest amongst the College and School audiences) and one in five (20%) disagreed that 'SQA is a progressive organisation' (with this outcome, once again, being most notable amongst the College and School audiences).

ETP learners were less likely than ETP practitioners to agree that SQA is an enabling organisation.

Changes Since Cycle 1

Since Cycle 1, there was a decrease in the extent to which, overall, respondents believed that 'SQA can be trusted' (falling from 66% to 60%), with this decrease being due to increased disagreement amongst the School and College audiences that this is the case.

Since the last Cycle, there was a slight decrease in the extent to which, overall, respondents agreed that 'SQA is an enabling organisation' (falling from 53% to 50%), with this decrease being driven by the School audiences. In addition, during that time, there was a decrease in the extent to which the School audiences specifically strongly agreed that SQA is an enabling organisation and an increase in the extent to which these audiences disagreed that this was the case.

Since Cycle 1, there was a decrease in the extent to which respondents, overall, agreed that 'SQA is a progressive organisation' (falling from 51% to 45%), with this primarily being a function of an increase in the extent to which respondents, overall, disagreed that SQA is a progressive organisation.

Since the last Cycle, there was a decrease in agreement amongst the School audiences that SQA is a progressive organisation. This was a function of a decrease in the extent to which these audiences specifically strongly agreed **and** agreed that this was the case, and an increase in disagreement that SQA is a progressive organisation.

Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in disagreement amongst the College audiences that SQA is a progressive organisation.

3.0 QUALIFICATIONS PROFILE

3.1 Qualifications Knowledge

‘Do you think you know enough about the following qualifications?’

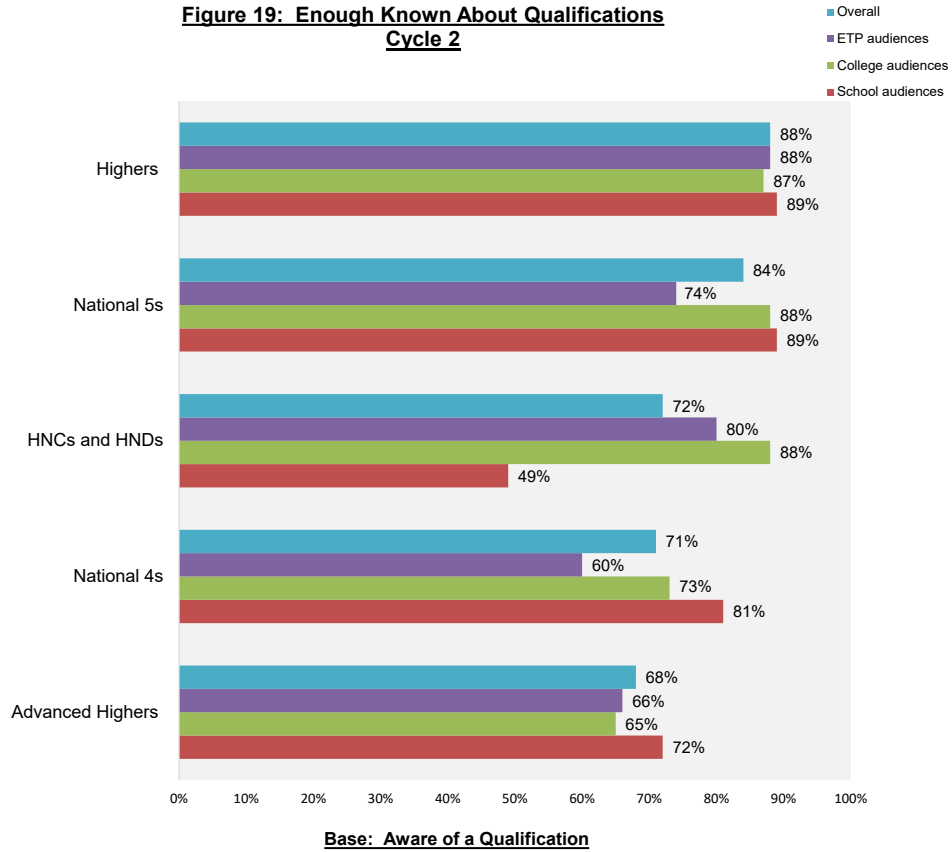
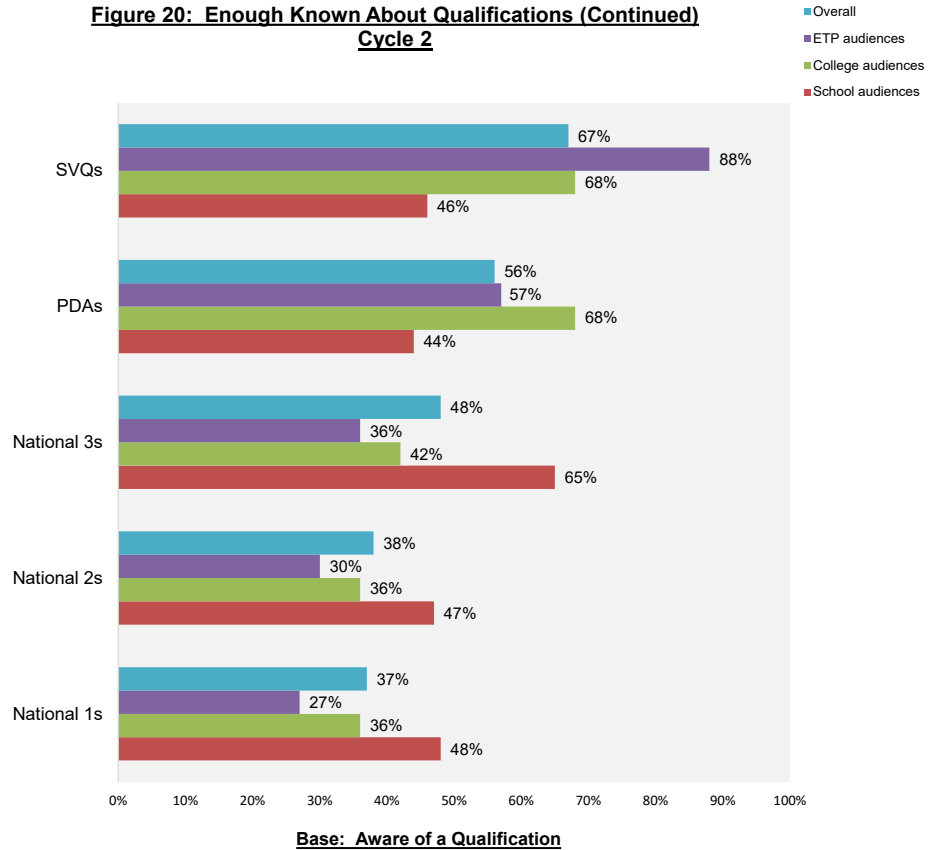


Figure 20: Enough Known About Qualifications (Continued)
Cycle 2



Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, a significant majority of respondents – and, in some cases, the vast majority – believed they knew enough about a number of qualifications of which they were aware, including:

- Highers (88%)
- National 5s (84%)
- HNCs and HNDs (72%)
- National 4s (71%)
- Advanced Highers (68%)
- SVQs (67%)

Thereafter, it was least likely that respondents believed that they knew enough about three other qualifications, namely:

- National 3s (48%)

- National 2s (38%)
- National 1s (37%)

Changes Since Cycle 1

Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the extent to which respondents aware of a number of qualifications believed they knew about them, including:

- National 1s (rising from 31% to 37%)
- National 2s (rising from 31% to 38%)
- SVQs (rising from 61% to 67%)

In all three cases, these rises were primarily driven by the School audiences.

Since the previous Cycle, there was a decrease in the extent to which respondents, overall, believed they knew enough about a number of qualifications of which they were aware, including:

- National 3s (falling from 54% to 48%)
- National 4s (falling from 77% to 71%)
- Advanced Highers (falling from 73% to 68%)

In all cases, these decreases were primarily or entirely driven by the School audiences.

3.2 Qualification Credibility

‘How do you rate the credibility of the following qualifications of which you are aware?’

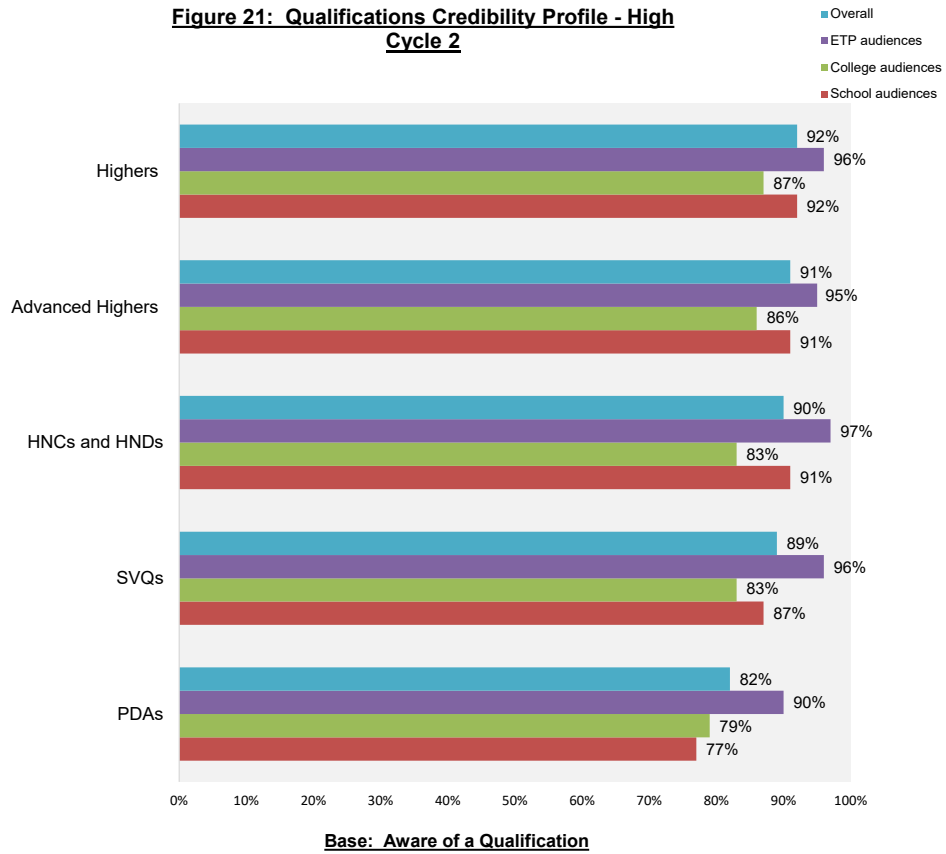


Figure 22: Qualifications Credibility Profile - High (Continued)
Cycle 2

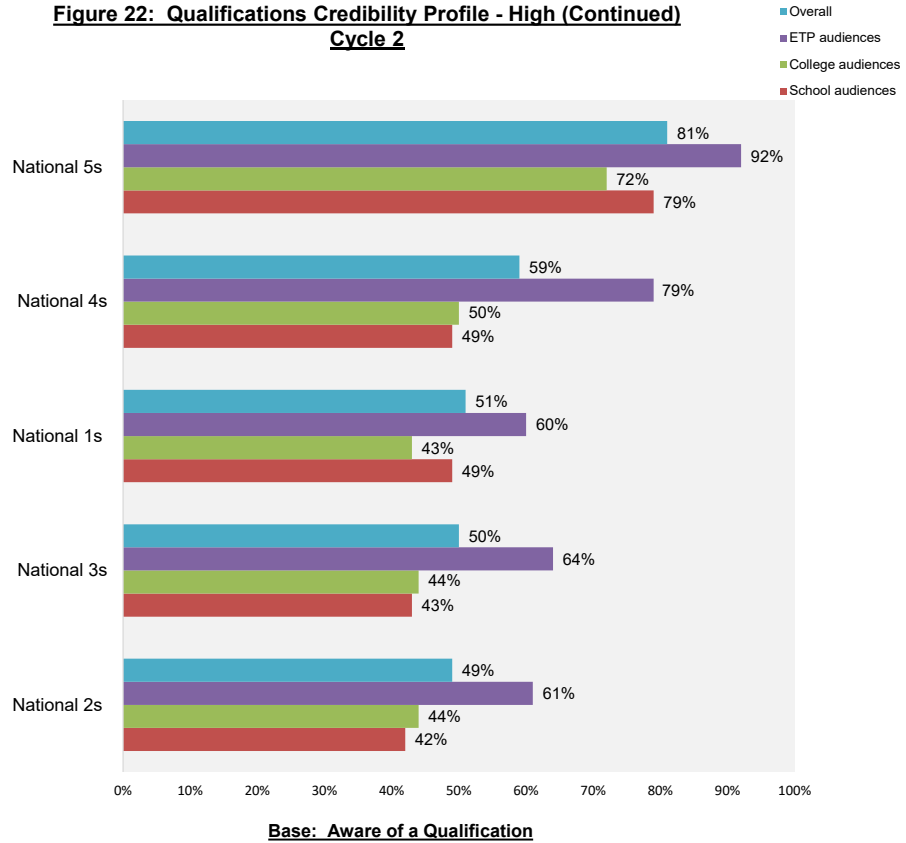


Figure 23: Qualifications Credibility Profile - Low
Cycle 2

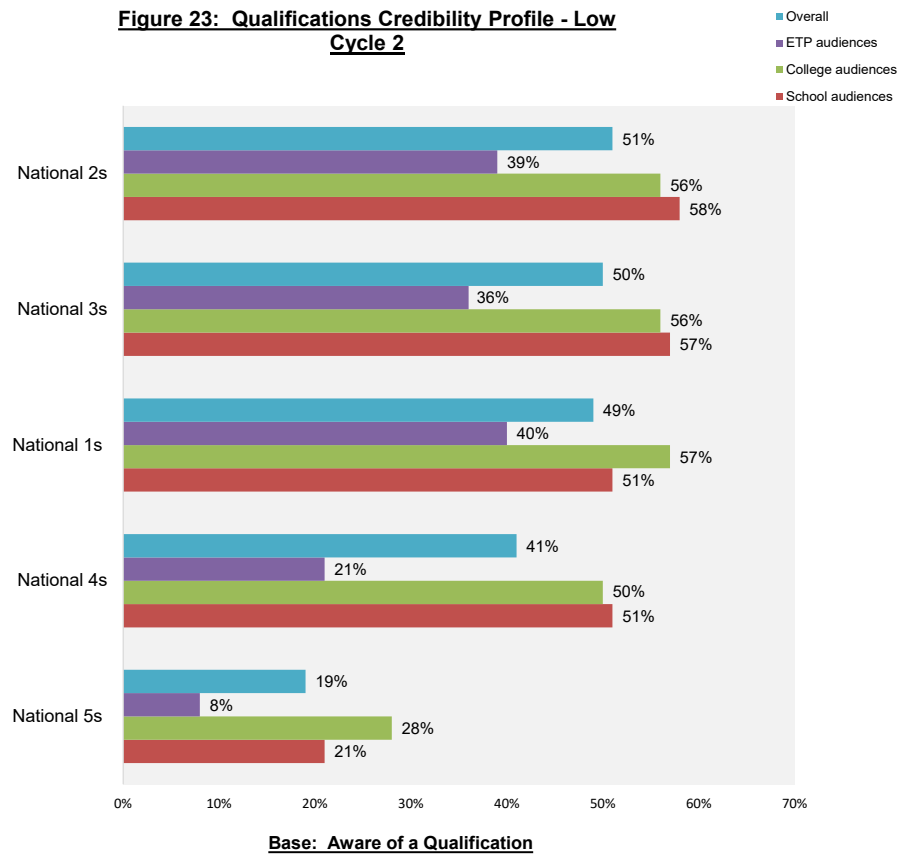
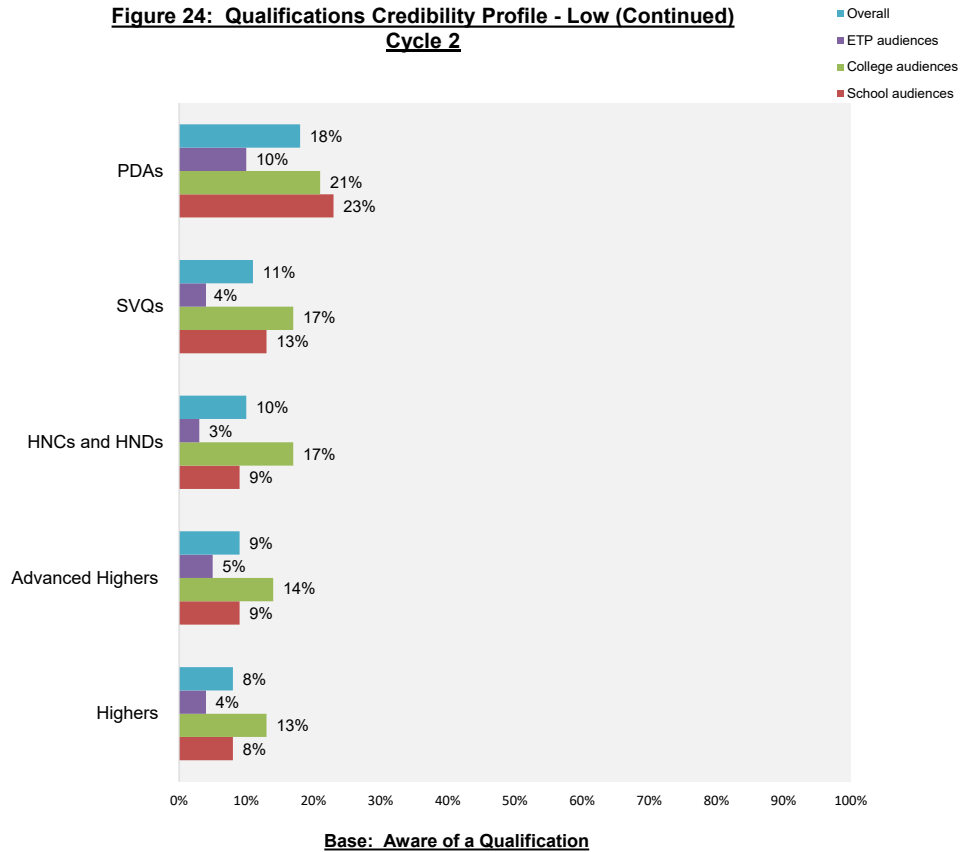


Figure 24: Qualifications Credibility Profile - Low (Continued)
Cycle 2



Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, a significant majority of respondents in Cycle 2 – and, in some cases, the vast majority – believed that qualifications which they had heard of had high credibility and, in particular:

- Highers (92%)
- Advanced Highers (91%)
- HNCs and HNDs (90%)
- SVQs (89%)
- PDAs (82%)
- National 5s (81%)

Thereafter, levels of perceived high credibility of qualifications of which respondents were aware were more limited in relation to National 1s to National 4s, ie:

- National 1s (51%)
- National 2s (49%)
- National 3s (50%)
- National 4s (59%)

Perceptions of low credibility amongst those aware of most qualifications tend to be far more limited, but most notable in relation to National 1s to National 3s (ranging from 49% to 51%).

Changes Since Cycle 1

Since the last Cycle, there was an increase in the extent to which respondents, overall, believed that qualifications of which they were aware had high credibility, including:

- National 1s (rising from 44% to 51%)
- National 2s (rising from 41% to 49%)
- National 3s (rising from 33% to 50%)
- National 4s (rising from 42% to 59%)

Once again, these increases were primarily or exclusively driven by the School audiences.

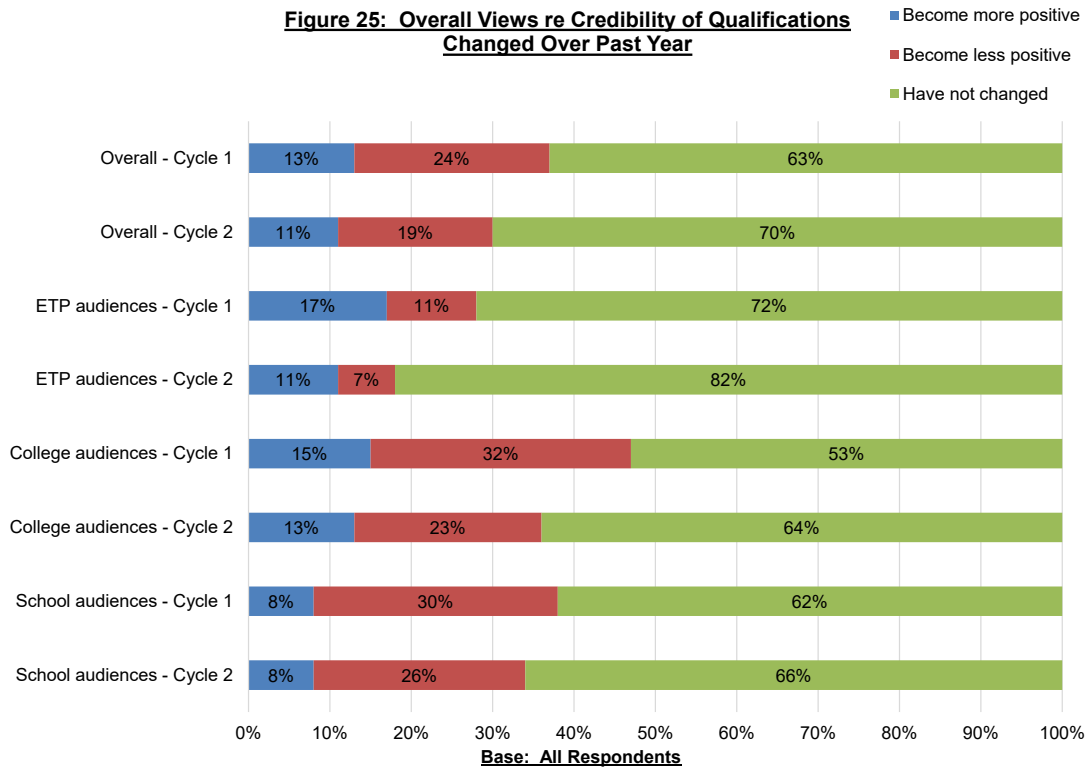
Since the last cycle, there was a slight – but not statistically significant – decrease in the extent to which respondents believed a number of qualifications of which they were aware to have low credibility, including:

- National 1s (falling from 56% to 49%)
- National 2s (falling from 59% to 51%)
- National 3s (falling from 67% to 50%)
- National 4s (falling from 58% to 41%)
- SVQs (falling from 17% to 11%)

Again, these decreases tended to be primarily or entirely driven by the School audiences.

3.3 Changing Views About Qualifications

‘Have your overall views on the credibility of all of the qualifications you have heard of taken together changed over the last year?’



Cycle 2 Outcomes

Overall, three out of ten respondents in Cycle 2 (30%) stated that their views on the credibility of all of the SQA qualifications they had heard of taken together had changed over the last year. For one in five respondents (19%), their views had changed and had become less positive, whilst for around one in ten (11%), their views had changed and had become more positive.

ETP learners were more likely than ETP practitioners to have changed their views about SQA qualifications in the past year.

College, School and ETP learners were all more likely to state that their views about SQA qualifications had changed and become more positive than the three practitioner audiences here.

Changes Since Cycle 1

Overall, since the last Cycle, there was a decrease in the extent to which the views of respondents regarding the credibility of qualifications of which they were aware had changed and become less positive, with this being driven by all three audiences, particularly the College audiences.

Since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the extent to which respondent views about the credibility of qualifications of which they were aware had not changed, with this increase being driven by all three audiences, particularly the ETP and College audiences.

4.0 KEY MESSAGES

4.1 SQA Profile

Overall, most of those in the key audiences believe SQA to have high credibility. However, their continues to be an extent to which some of those in the key audiences view SQA as having low credibility (although this has decreased since Cycle 1 amongst the School and College audiences).

The key audiences provided a generally positive score in terms of their satisfaction with SQA's performance.

Most of those in the key audiences believe they know enough about SQA, with this being increasingly the case since Cycle 1.

Respondents who had had contact with SQA in Cycle 2 provided a generally positive score in terms of their satisfaction with their contacts and this score being better than in Cycle 1, particularly the School and ETP audiences.

In Cycle 2, the key audiences provided a generally positive rating of their communications with or from SQA and, indeed, the ratings provided in the latest Cycle were better than those in the previous Cycle, both overall and for each of the three audiences.

In addition, the key audiences provided generally positive ratings regarding the clarity, level of detail and timeliness of SQA communications, with there being improvements in these regards across all three of the key audiences.

Overall, most respondents in Cycle 2 noted a preference to receive communications through direct mail, with secondary mention being made in this regard of the use of newsletters and social media.

Overall, almost three out of five respondents in Cycle 2 understand the communications issued to them by SQA and half feel that the information they get from SQA helps them carry out their job.

In Cycle 2, overall, approaching three out of five respondents believed that they receive about the right quantity of emails from SQA, with relatively few believing they receive too many or not enough emails.

In Cycle 2, approaching three out of five respondents thought that the frequency with which they receive newsletters from SQA is about right, with very few believing that they receive newsletters too frequently or not frequently enough.

Respondents in Cycle 2 provided a satisfactory rating of how well SQA consults and engages with them, with the views expressed here being more positive than they were in Cycle 1, particularly amongst the School audiences.

Most of the key audiences in Cycle 2 believe that SQA can be trusted, half that it is an enabling organisation, but less than half that it is a progressive organisation, with the beliefs expressed in all three regards being highest amongst the ETP audiences.

Since Cycle 1, there were decreasing beliefs that SQA can be trusted, is an enabling organisation and is a progressive organisation.

4.2 Qualifications Profile

The key audiences very largely believe that they know enough about a range of SQA qualifications of which they are aware. Indeed, for a number of qualifications, this belief was very high. It was also apparent that, since Cycle 1, there was an increase in the extent to which those aware of National 1s, National 2s and SVQs believe they know enough about these qualifications.

In addition, there was a far more limited extent to which those aware of National 1s to National 3s believe they know enough about them, there was a decrease in the extent to which this was the case in relation to National 3s, together with a decrease in the extent to which those aware of National 4s and Advanced Highers believed that they know enough about them. Furthermore, since Cycle 1, there was an increasing extent to which those aware of National 1s, National 2s and SVQs believe that they knew enough about these qualifications.

The key audiences very largely believe that a range of SQA qualifications have high credibility and, indeed, in some cases, the vast majority of those aware of a number of qualifications believe this to be the case.

Although those aware of National 1s to National 4s are less likely to believe these qualifications to have high credibility, this has improved since Cycle 1 in all four cases, with these increases, once again, being primarily or exclusively driven by the School audiences.

Perceptions of low credibility of qualifications of which respondents are aware tend to be far more limited and are most notable in relation to National 1s to National 4s. However, since Cycle 1, perceptions of low credibility of these four qualifications fell.

For most respondents, their views on the credibility of all of the SQA qualifications that they had heard of taken together hadn't changed over the last year. For those whose views **had** changed in this regard, it was more likely that they had become less positive than more positive.

Finally, there was a lesser extent in Cycle 2 than in Cycle 1 for respondent views to have changed in this regard and become less positive, and an increase in the extent to which respondents stated that their views hadn't changed.