



# Lifespan of SQA qualifications

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Policy author	Policy and Research Manager
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## **Why do we need the policy?**

This policy gives clear criteria for when we should retain qualifications and when we should remove qualifications from SQA's portfolio.

## **What does it apply to?**

This policy applies to all SQA self-regulated qualifications, and SQA qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation, Ofqual and Qualifications Wales.

The policy covers qualifications studied in and outside Scotland. References to Scotland's needs indicate the Scottish Government's involvement in the development, review and withdrawal of National Courses. To date, there has been no involvement by governments from other countries in the qualifications SQA provides for international markets, including RoUK.

## **Who is it for?**

This policy applies to all SQA staff.

## **What support is available?**

The Policy, Research and Standards Team can give guidance on this policy.

The Qualifications Portfolio Management Team provides qualifications managers and regional managers with details about awards that require qualification reviews, and arranges for the withdrawal of qualifications, as required.

Regional managers gather feedback from centres on the use and uptake of qualifications, and gaps in provision.

# 1 Policy statement

All SQA self-regulated qualifications, and SQA qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation, Ofqual and Qualifications Wales, must adhere to the criteria laid out for the lifespan of a qualification.

To ensure we continue to maintain a balanced portfolio of qualifications, all existing qualifications must be reviewed periodically for currency and relevance. Qualifications must be inclusive; address progression needs; and reflect Scotland's economic, social, political, cultural and environmental requirements.

A qualification review can be one or more of the following:

- Uptake analysis review (UAR) — to establish whether candidate entries are as expected, and whether centres intend to keep delivering the qualification.
- Qualification review — to consider what action, if any, is required for a particular qualification and its supporting documentation.
- Formal review (scoping) — to establish whether the purpose and content of an SQA-developed qualification and its supporting documentation is meeting current and future needs.
- Sector portfolio review — a review of all qualifications within an identified sector, to establish whether they are meeting current and future needs.

We are committed to equality of opportunity, and to a culture that respects difference. As an employer and public body, we believe we can play a leading part in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion by making them an integral part of our decision making. This policy had an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) completed on it at the development stage, to assess what impact the policy could have on equality groups. We have reflected the EqIA findings in this policy.

## 2 Policy relationship to SQA's Governing Principles

SQA's Governing Principles govern how SQA meets its statutory duties and self-regulates activities. This policy supports the following Governing Principles:

**Governing Principle 2:** SQA will ensure that there is a clear rationale for the development and review of its qualifications, based on educational, vocational or business needs.

**Governing Principle 3:** SQA will work in partnership with centres, stakeholders and independent experts to develop and review qualifications.

## 3 Responsibilities

It is SQA's responsibility to ensure our portfolio of qualifications continues to meet the needs of candidates, delivering centres and the Scottish economy. We review all our qualifications regularly to ensure they remain current and fit for purpose.

We must communicate any subsequent changes to centres at the earliest opportunity; for example, when a qualification is being extended, re-accredited or withdrawn.

## 4 Currency

When a qualification is current:

- it appears in the relevant catalogue
- details about the qualification and supporting documentation on delivery and assessment are available on SQA's website
- centres can be approved to offer the qualification
- candidates can be entered and certificated for the qualification

# 5 Uptake analysis review

We review qualifications annually to determine their performance against agreed thresholds. We withdraw those qualifications that fall below these thresholds from our portfolio, unless they are protected by Scottish Government policy or meet the retention criteria set out in section 5.2.

SQA manages low uptake according to the following principles:

- SQA strives to maintain a balanced portfolio of qualifications that is inclusive, addresses progression needs and reflects Scotland’s economic, social, political and cultural needs.
- Qualifications should, wherever possible, generate sufficient revenue to recover development costs and meet ongoing delivery costs.
- Qualifications that do not generate sufficient income to cover development and delivery costs must be justified on alternative grounds.
- New qualifications should be given a period of time in which to reach target numbers and establish an uptake trend.

## 5.1 Low uptake thresholds

We should consider removing qualifications from the catalogue according to the following criteria.

- Higher National Qualifications (HNC and HND) and Advanced Certificates and Diplomas:
  - zero entries in the previous three academic years of entries
  - 50 or fewer total entries across the previous five academic years of entries

- Group awards (Awards, National Progression Awards, National Certificates, Professional Development Awards and National Workplace Awards):
  - zero entries in the previous two academic years of entries
  - 50 or fewer total entries across the previous five academic years of entries
- Qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation, Ofqual or Qualifications Wales:
  - zero entries in the previous two calendar years of entries
  - 50 or fewer total entries across the previous five calendar years of entries
- National Courses (graded):
  - Advanced Higher — 50 or fewer entries annually across five academic years
  - National Courses levels 1 through to 6 — 100 or fewer entries annually across five academic years
- National Courses (ungraded) (Skills for Work):
  - zero entries in the previous two academic years of entries
  - 50 or fewer total entries across the previous five academic years of entries

There are, however, exceptions to this, and we should not remove qualifications from the catalogue if:

- the qualification has been developed to meet government strategies (such as Gaelic, Care and Heritage sectors), in which case we should remove it from the UAR process and subject it to a periodic formal review
- the business case indicates low uptake, in which case we should remove from the UAR process
- less than two years have passed since the qualification was validated, and it is therefore not eligible for the UAR process
- a sector review has taken place or is planned within a 12-month period

## 5.2 Retention criteria

The UAR process determines the currency of qualifications. If a qualification does not meet the uptake figures, we should withdraw it, unless there is:

- a strong rationale for retaining the course based on educational, cultural, social, economic or political need, supported by proposals for ways of reducing costs or financial sponsors to maintain the course
- evidence of specific and justifiable reasons influencing initial low uptake of the course, and of this situation now having changed and increased uptake anticipated
- evidence of the added value of offering graded external assessment over and above a coherent group of units
- evidence that the course is needed to enable progression
- evidence of increasing uptake over a period of five years
- evidence of a sufficient number of centres delivering the course (a minimum of five) and providing experienced staff to deliver and maintain the course, for example by providing appointees for moderation and external assessment

We should withdraw qualifications that do not meet the retention criteria.

## 5.3 Withdrawal of qualifications

Withdrawal of qualifications is subject to SQA's Business Case Group. In addition, withdrawal of National Courses (graded and ungraded) is subject to approval from the Qualifications Committee.

SQA should inform centres of all withdrawals through normal business channels.

## **5.4 Finish dates**

### **Units**

Regulated units cease to be current when they are no longer part of any current group award.

Non-regulated units can be freestanding. They therefore cease to be current when they are five years old and have had no entries for a minimum of two consecutive years.

## **6 Portfolio review**

Qualification teams are responsible for regularly reviewing all the qualifications in their portfolio. In their reviews, they should identify maintenance, support or promotional activity requirements to maximise their qualifications' performance.

## **7 Formal review (scoping)**

Qualification teams should carry out a formal review of courses and group awards every five years to ensure currency and relevance. This should include supporting documentation and operational quality assurance, where appropriate. They should do this earlier where there are external factors that directly impact a qualification, such as legislation, working practices and National Occupational Standards.

## **8 Additional information**

### **8.1 Regulated qualifications**

To avoid any potential gaps in provision, qualification managers (QMs) are notified of any SQA-accredited qualifications due to lapse within the next 12 months. Details are



added to the qualification development management information system (QDMIS) on a six-month rolling cycle (October and April). This provides QMs with sufficient time to engage with the Sector Skills Council to determine the appropriate course of action, such as re-accreditation, extension or withdrawal.