NextGen: HN Employer Engagement Research: summary

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has proposed a number of adaptations to current Higher National (HN) qualifications to help prepare our learners for 21st century work and society. As part of the evaluation of the Next Generation HN (NextGen: HN) qualification proposals, we researched the views of employers in sectors related to NextGen: HN qualifications which are being piloted.

Methodology

This research explored the views of 14 employers from various sectors across Scotland in semi-structured interviews that took place in September 2023. Data were coded and analysed using NVivo.

Findings

Overall, employers felt positive about the adaptations being proposed for NextGen: HN and said the adapted qualifications would help upskill the future workforce. Employers were asked their opinions on five proposed adaptations to HN qualifications:

♦ decoupling HNC and HND qualifications
♦ teaching meta-skills
♦ embedding digital learning
♦ incorporating learning for sustainability (LfS)
♦ introducing a new grading model

Employers were supportive of the decoupling of HNC and HND, and felt it would save learners time, was more flexible, and would allow learners to upskill later in their career. They asked that SQA provide employers with more information about the decoupling to aid their understanding.

Including meta-skills was seen positively by employers. They felt this would make learners better able to discuss and use soft skills, which would benefit younger people who were more likely to change job often. It was also noted that these advantages may be lost on employers who are unfamiliar with the concept and terminology of meta-skills.

Employers were concerned that more digital learning would increase inequalities among learners. They felt that there online learning involved less engagement than face-to-face. Digital learning was also felt to cause problems with security and privacy. However, employers said that young people lacked basic IT skills and needed to upskill.

Employers were supportive of sustainability being embedded in the qualifications, but some felt that the sustainability content did not go far enough in the proposals.

The move to continued assessment was welcomed by employers, who felt that this approach allowed the focus to be on learning rather than assessment and thus would reflect the abilities of candidates better.