

# Stakeholder Survey 2021

*A report on the results from SQA Accreditation's stakeholder survey*

Publication date: June 2022

Publication code: DE8578

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority SQA Accreditation

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<https://accreditation.sqa.org.uk>

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# Executive summary

This report details key findings from SQA Accreditation's Stakeholder Survey, which was conducted between September and November 2021.

In total, 28 responses were received from a range of Awarding Bodies (ABs), Standards Setting Organisations (SSOs) and other stakeholders.

The following key conclusions can be drawn from the survey:

- ◆ Stakeholders have considerable understanding of, and confidence in, SQA Accreditation.
- ◆ Stakeholders' experience of working with SQA Accreditation is largely positive.
- ◆ Stakeholders were supported well during the pandemic and services were able to run with adaptations.
- ◆ The services and support that SQA Accreditation provides are highly valued by stakeholders.

The key strengths of SQA Accreditation, as identified by stakeholders, are:

- ◆ Willingness of staff to go the extra mile to support stakeholders.
- ◆ Professional and knowledgeable staff.
- ◆ Having a dedicated member of staff.

Areas for improvement by SQA Accreditation were suggested:

- ◆ Close association with the SQA Awarding Body, leading to some confusion.
- ◆ Over-reliance on manual systems, sometimes leading to admin-heavy, and burdensome, tasks.
- ◆ Raise awareness of research and statistical reports.
- ◆ Certain aspects of the website are perceived as weak.
- ◆ Weaknesses in relation to information systems — primarily SharePoint
- ◆ SQA Accreditation could have offered guidance sooner regarding the pandemic so there wasn't a splintered response.

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# 1 Introduction

SQA Accreditation is dedicated to continually improving its levels of service and ensuring that stakeholders get the opportunity to share their opinions and influence the direction of change, as well as impact the focus and priorities of the unit. SQA Accreditation considers the feedback from stakeholder surveys together with views and comments gathered on an ongoing basis to identify potential areas for improvement and development.

This report details key findings from SQA Accreditation's stakeholder survey conducted between October and November 2021.

The purpose of the survey was to gather information on stakeholders' experiences of working with SQA Accreditation, and to identify key strengths which should be maintained and enhanced, and weaknesses with the view to inform further improvement.

The survey was open for responses from 11 October to 5 November 2021. SQA Accreditation's key stakeholders were invited by e-mail to respond to the survey. Responses were encouraged via reminder e-mails.

Where possible, comparisons are made with previous stakeholder survey results as a means to track improvements or to identify lack of improvements.

There were 28 responses in total, the breakdown by stakeholder type is shown in the table below.

Type of Stakeholder	Number of Responses	Percentage of Total responses
Awarding Body	21	75%
Sector Skills Council	4	14.3%
Standard Setting Organisation	2	7.2%
Training Provider	1	3.5%

The survey was sent to a total of 80 individual contacts, giving a response rate of 35%. Stakeholder organisations submitted one collated response per organisation rather than multiple individual responses.

This is an increase in percentage response rate compared to the 2018 survey, when 32% of recipients responded.

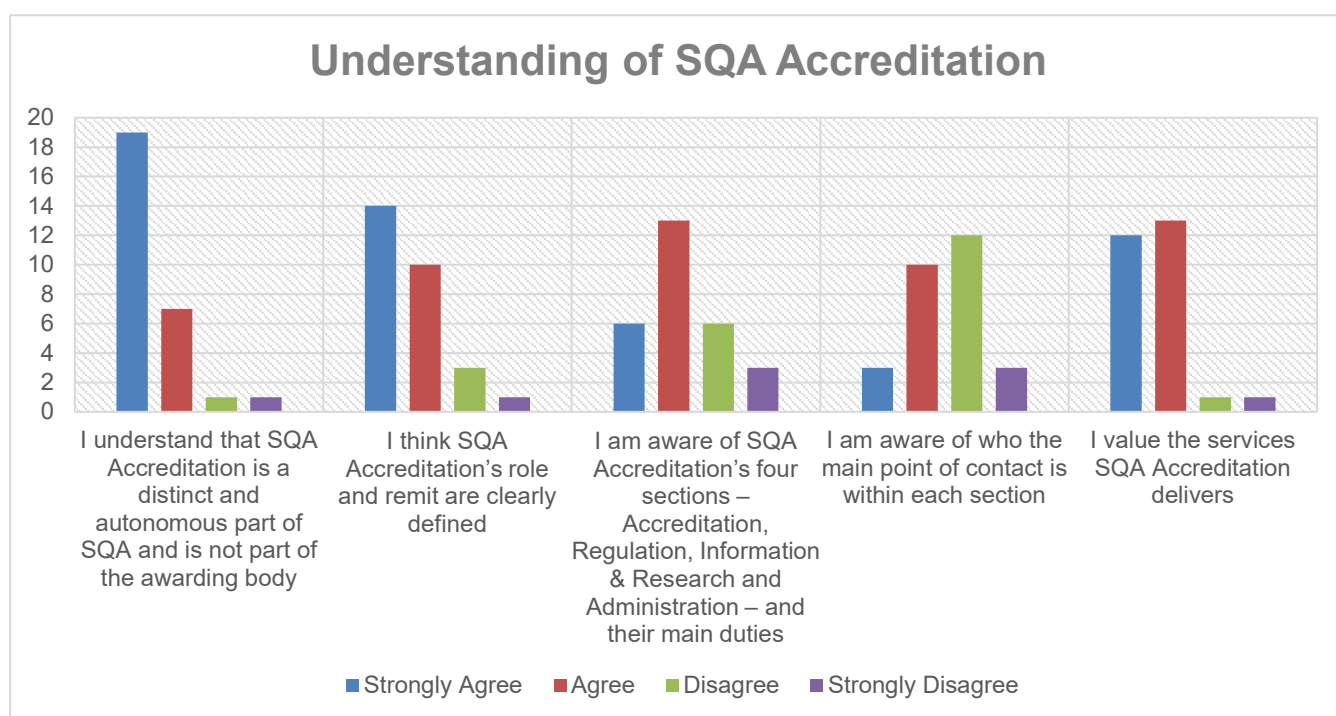
	Number of Responses	Percentage of responses
<b>2010</b>	30	29%
<b>2012–13</b>	43	31%
<b>2014–15</b>	44	22%
<b>2018</b>	46	32%
<b>2021</b>	28	35%

## 2 Interaction with SQA Accreditation

SQA Accreditation engages with stakeholders in a number of ways, and often with multiple contacts in the same organisation. Stakeholders are allocated a specific contact from SQA Accreditation, such as an Accreditation Manager and a Regulation Manager in the case of an Awarding Body (AB), and an Accreditation Manager for Standards Setting Organisations (SSOs). The Head of Accreditation is the key contact for some stakeholders, plus there is general contact from other teams, such as Administration and the Information and Research section.

Stakeholders were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding their understanding and opinion of SQA Accreditation's key roles and functions. Stakeholders were given four options, from 'Strongly Agree' through to 'Strongly Disagree'.

Figure 1: Understanding of SQA Accreditation



For four of the five statements most responses were positive; 92.8%, 85.7%, 67.9%, 46.4%, 89.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statements respectively. A small majority of respondents (53.6%) said that they were unaware of who the main point of contact is within each section. This information can be found on the [SQA Accreditation website](#).

These results demonstrate that most stakeholders understand:

- ◆ SQA Accreditation is distinct from the awarding body
- ◆ the role and remit of SQA Accreditation
- ◆ the four sections of SQA Accreditation and their main duties

And that they value the services on offer.

## 2.1 SQA Accreditation as distinct and autonomous

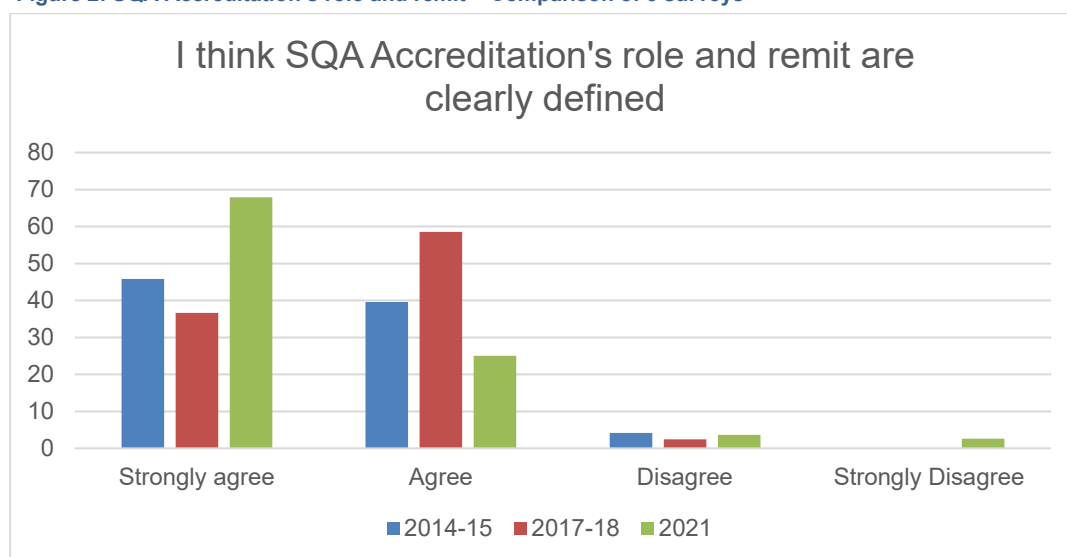
Previously there has been confusion between SQA Accreditation, SQA the awarding body, and corporate SQA. Various attempts have been made to resolve this issue, such as SQA Accreditation getting its own branding and a distinct website dedicated to SQA Accreditation.

The percentage of stakeholders who responded with 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' has decreased from 97.7% to 92.8%. However only two respondents chose 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree'. It is important that stakeholders understand SQA Accreditation's impartiality as an independent regulator, and its separation from SQA, the awarding body.

## 2.2 SQA Accreditation's role and remit

Several questions can be directly compared to previous results. As can be seen, the most recent survey demonstrates that there is clarity around the role and remit of SQA Accreditation with 67.7% strongly agreeing, this is in contrast with the 2017–18 survey, which had 36.6% strongly agree.

Figure 2: SQA Accreditation's role and remit – Comparison of 3 surveys



## 2.3 Awareness of the four sections

This statement, 'I am aware of SQA Accreditation's four sections – Accreditation, Regulation, Information & Research and Administration – and their main duties' has only been used since the 2017–18 survey so cannot be compared to the 2014–15 survey. In 2017–18 only 63.5% of respondents were aware of the four sections, compared to 67.9% in 2021 indicating a better understanding.

Comments added regarding this statement included:

- ♦ I wasn't previously aware of the Information & Research and Administration sections.

- ◆ All my working contact is with the Accreditation team, so it's neither surprising nor worrying that my awareness of the others is very limited.

Stakeholders may have not previously had a need to contact the Information and Research and Administration sections. However, it is important that they are aware of them in case any such need arises.

## 2.4 Awareness of the main point of contact

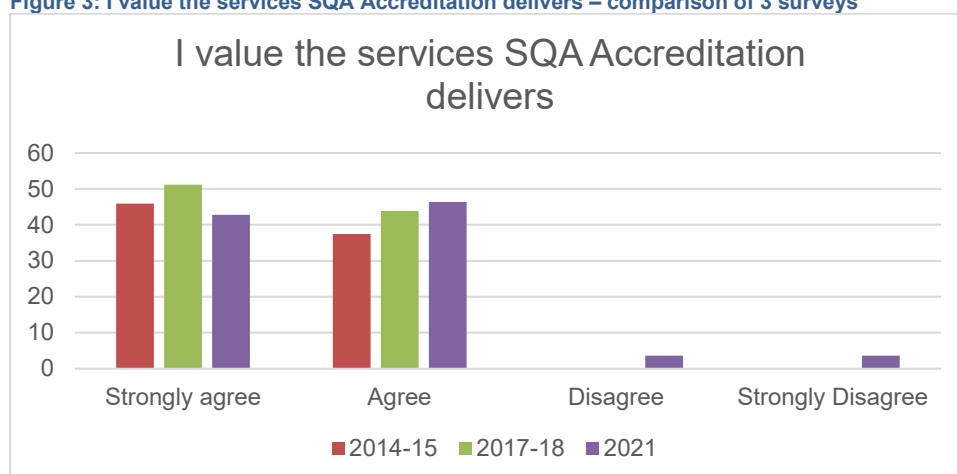
Over 50% of stakeholders said that they were not aware of who the main point of contact is within each section was. Comments included:

- ◆ I only have points of contact within the sections I have dealt with so far. This isn't to say I couldn't find out if I asked and be referred to the right person but I haven't had to engage with all four sections as outlined above as yet.
- ◆ I am new to SQA Accreditation, I have found them to be incredibly helpful, but I was not aware of their structure and our contact within each section.

## 2.5 I value the services SQA Accreditation delivers

To conclude this section, stakeholders were asked to comment on this statement: 'I value the services SQA Accreditation delivers'.

Figure 3: I value the services SQA Accreditation delivers – comparison of 3 surveys



89.3% of stakeholders said that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement – an overwhelmingly positive result. One respondent declined to make a selection, so only two respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.



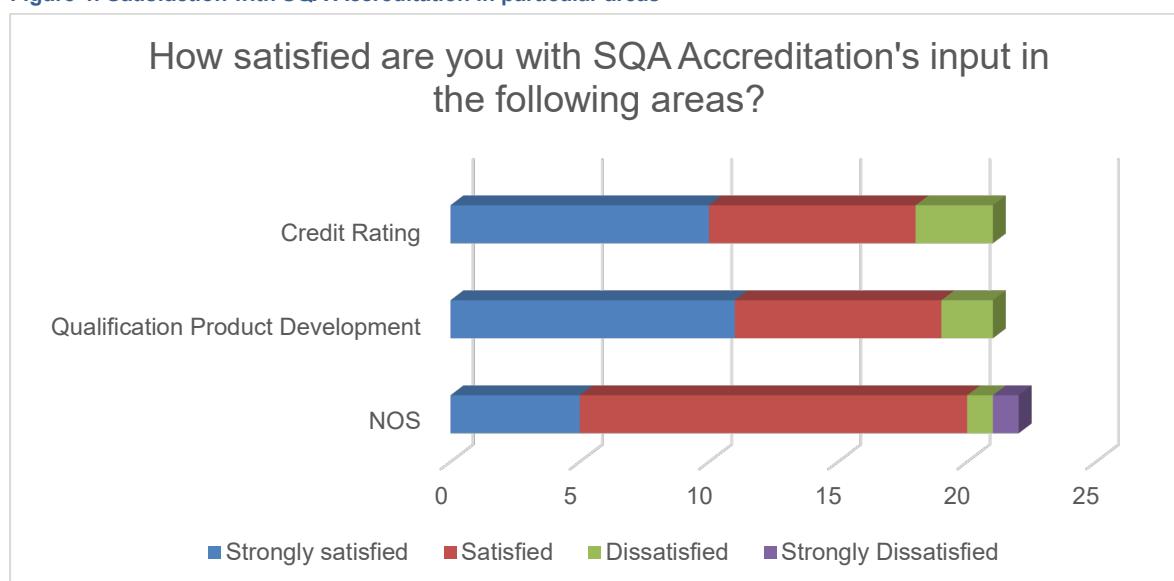
### 3 SQA Accreditation's performance

SQA Accreditation is striving for continual improvement and as such wishes to fully understand stakeholder's opinions and experiences regarding its various functions.

#### 3.1 SQA Accreditation's input

Stakeholders were asked 'How satisfied are you with SQA Accreditation's input in the following area?'

Figure 4: Satisfaction with SQA Accreditation in particular areas



Several respondents did not answer this question, or only answered for the categories that were relevant to them.

Of those who did respond the majority were 'Strongly satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with SQA Accreditation's input in the specified areas:

- ◆ Credit rating: 86.7%
- ◆ Qualification Product Development: 90.5%
- ◆ NOS: 90.9%

Stakeholders were given the opportunity to provide further comments:

- ◆ The team at SQA Accreditation have always been very supportive in this area when we are developing / reviewing qualifications.
- ◆ We've had limited contact with SQA Accreditation and would welcome a more fluid relationship where shared ambitions are identified and taken forwards together.
- ◆ The credit rating process is longwinded and frustrating — long meetings required prior to [Credit and Levelling] C&L.
- ◆ It would be useful to be able to credit rate ourselves as we do this anyway and it is an extra piece of heavy administrative work to do this.

With regards to the bullet point above, any organisation that is an owner of qualifications can seek approval from the SCQF Partnership to become a credit rating body in its own right. More information on how to become a credit rating body can be found [here](#). However, as the owner of the SVQ Brand, SQA Accreditation is the sole credit rating body for SVQs.

## 3.2 Improving service

As an extension to the above question stakeholders were asked: What improvements could SQA Accreditation make to provide a better service in the areas highlighted above [Credit rating, Qualification Product Development, NOS]? The following comments were made:

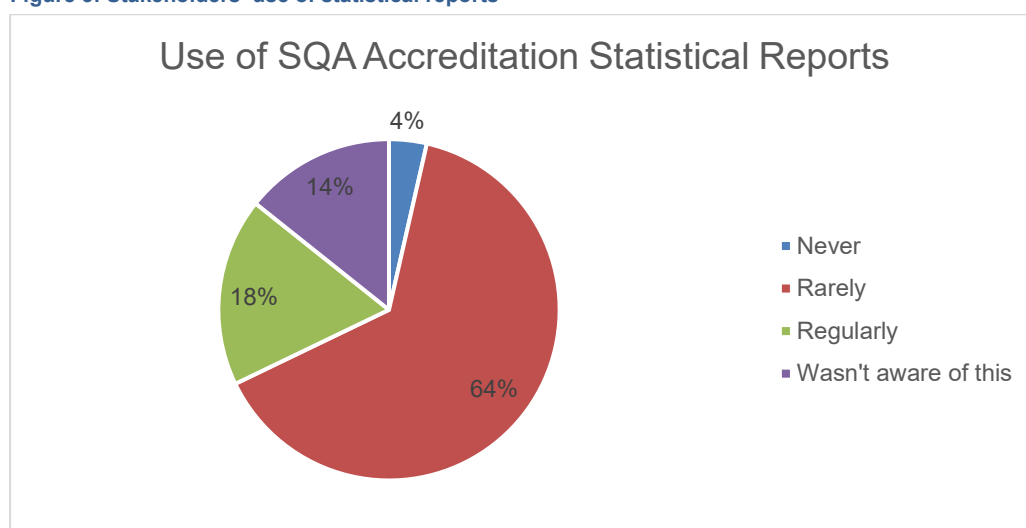
- ◆ We are satisfied with the level of support provided and have no areas of concern.
- ◆ None. [AB] is happy with the input and guidance received.
- ◆ I am not yet sure — maybe a guide for new Accountable Officers would be helpful as the structure and processes are very different from the other three UK regulators.
- ◆ Partnership working.

## 4 Statistical reports

To gather the opinions of stakeholders on the regular statistics reports published on SQA Accreditation's website, we asked the following question:

'We publish statistical reports on a quarterly and annual basis. How often do you use these reports?'

Figure 5: Stakeholders' use of statistical reports



These results show that only a few stakeholders use the statistical reports on a regular basis (17.9%), most rarely use them (64.3%), several were not aware that the statistical reports exist (14.3%), and one stated that their organisation never uses the reports (3.6%).

Compared to the previous survey, there is a 3% decrease in the number of stakeholders who said they were unaware of the statistical reports. However, there is a decrease (3%) in the percentage of those who regularly use the reports.

Stakeholders were given the opportunity to make further comments:

- ◆ I do keep an eye on the statistics to let me know what has been approved/withdrawn, who has been approved or withdrawn as an AB, etc. but I haven't seen wider statistics published as yet.
- ◆ I was appointed as Accountable Officer in March 2021 and was not aware of this, I will look out for these reports in the future.
- ◆ [AB] uses them to inform our market intelligence/research.
- ◆ We haven't used them in the past, but I have started in the past year to share the reports with Senior Management.
- ◆ Perhaps an occasional options or time related quarterly, 6 monthly or yearly.
- ◆ We don't use the statistical reports as they are not relevant to the management of [AB] recognition and credit rating.
- ◆ I use these reports when needed.
- ◆ As we are a small awarding body who only deliver 1 qualification through 1 centre we do not massively rely on statistics

- ◆ Our statistics team access and use statistical reports regularly in the course of their work. Generally, this is as part of ad hoc requests to look at uptake across different awarding bodies and/or sectors. Other teams will use as required.

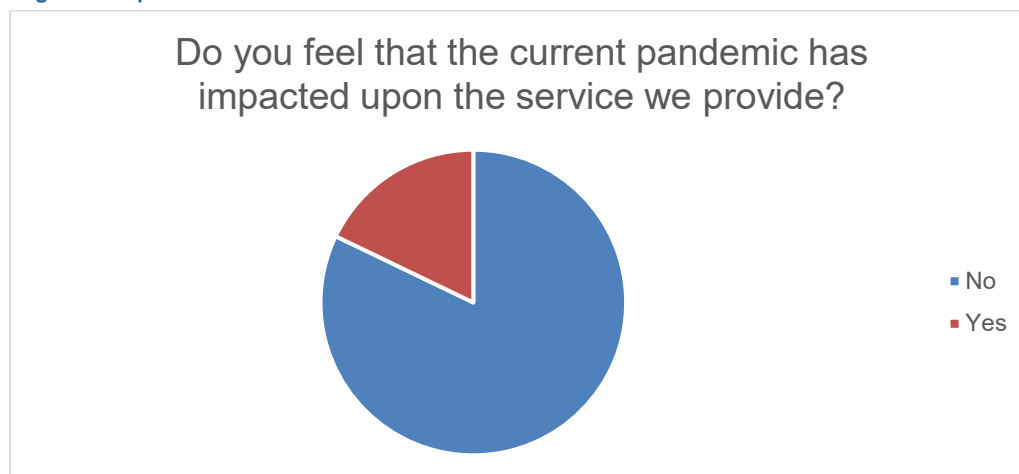
These comments show that the statistical reports are being used, as appropriate for the organisation. However, several seem unaware of where the statistical reports are on our website or feel the reports are not relevant to them. SQA Accreditation seeks to improve the efficacy of the statistical reports by understanding what stakeholders use them for, but it is important that stakeholders are first aware of these reports and can therefore engage with them to be able to offer feedback.

As an Official Statistics Provider, SQA Accreditation strives to adhere to the Code of Practice for Statistics, namely considering how we can achieve the three pillars; Trustworthiness, High Quality and Public Values. This stakeholder survey has offered some insight into where improvements can be made, but we welcome further feedback, particularly regarding stakeholders' needs. You can find further information on Official Statistics status on the SQA Accreditation website, in About Us then [Statistics](#).

## 5 Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic

SQA Accreditation took this opportunity to ask stakeholders how they regarded our handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact on SQA Accreditation services. The question asked was: Do you feel that the current pandemic has impacted upon the service that we provide?

Figure 6: Impact of covid-19 on SQA Accreditation services



Stakeholders indicated that they did not feel that the service SQA Accreditation provided was impacted by the pandemic, with 82.1% selecting No. This shows that SQA Accreditation was able to provide a full service as per usual.

### 5.1 Best practice during the pandemic

To gather a more accurate picture of what stakeholders thought about the provision of services, they were asked: Which services that we offer have served you best during the pandemic?

Only two comments were provided in answer to this question:

- ◆ [Regulation] and accreditation as we have been regulated [during the] early stages of this year. The team have been very supportive and responsive to all questions we have asked.
- ◆ There was an expectation, formed from initial communications, that SQA Accreditation would liaise with Standards Setting Organisations in order to define sector adaptations that were required through the pandemic. In reality we felt that this did not happen and ABs were required to hold these conversations with industry instead. This led to ABs taking separate approaches and a misalignment across the qualification market, especially where some ABs adopted arrangements that had already been agreed for English qualifications. It would have been useful for SQA Accreditation to have taken control earlier in order to ensure all organisations were working to a common / standard approach. Individual contact with relevant accreditation managers has been extremely helpful. The ability to extend qualifications outside of the normal process was very helpful, as was the communications to exchange data on approaches to individual qualifications because of the pandemic restrictions.

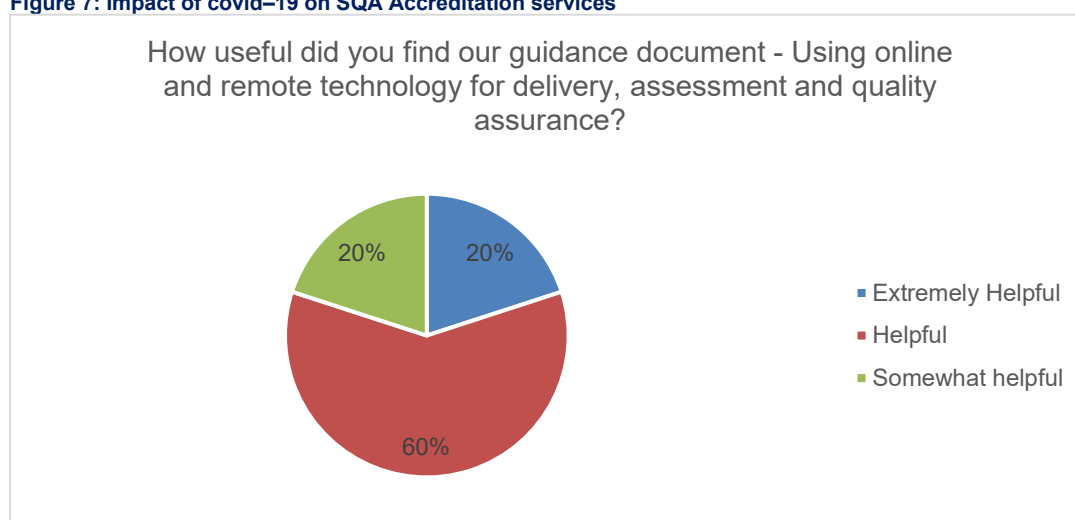
To see if there was anything additional that could have been provided during the pandemic SQA Accreditation asked: What services would you have liked to have seen us provide as additional services during the pandemic? Only one respondent answered this question, and said that they had only been working with SQA Accreditation since February 2021, so couldn't provide a meaningful answer.

Given the lack of response, it can be garnered that stakeholders felt there were no additional services that could usefully have been provided during the pandemic.

## 5.2 Online and remote technology guidance

During the pandemic it was important to be able to carry out all services in a remote capacity. As such, SQA Accreditation created a guidance document to assist stakeholders in these processes. To assess the usefulness of this document SQA Accreditation asked: How useful did you find our guidance document - Using online and remote technology for delivery, assessment and quality assurance?

Figure 7: Impact of covid-19 on SQA Accreditation services



Most respondents did not answer this question (82.1%), which shows it was not relevant to them. Of those who did respond, all considered that the document was helpful to some degree, 'Somewhat helpful' (20%), 'Helpful' (60%), 'Extremely Helpful' (20%).

One respondent provided further comment on this question:

- ♦ The guidance from SQA Accreditation on remote /digital and blended delivery and assessment was helpful to see and aligned with our own guidance; we believe it was useful to centres. [AB] continues to apply its consistent approach to a collaborative partnership with centres to support them in using technology appropriately to enable robust assessment of our qualifications to take place. This takes full account of the learning needs and learners' access to and skills in using technology. We are delighted to see that SQA Accreditation's advice and guidance is very much aligned and consistent with Ofqual's guidance in support of using technology for remote assessment. Having reviewed our current approach to advice and guidance and the ongoing work to ensure it

remains current and relevant, we have no concerns and our collaboration approach, although less prescriptive, still continues to deliver the robust processes that your guidance alludes to.

### **5.3 Remote auditing**

Several organisations experienced remote auditing due to the restrictions imposed in March 2020. To encourage continuous improvement SQA Accreditation seeks to understand whether remote auditing requires any changes or improvements.

Respondents were asked: If you have had a remote audit, what improvements would you like us to consider with regards to remote auditing?

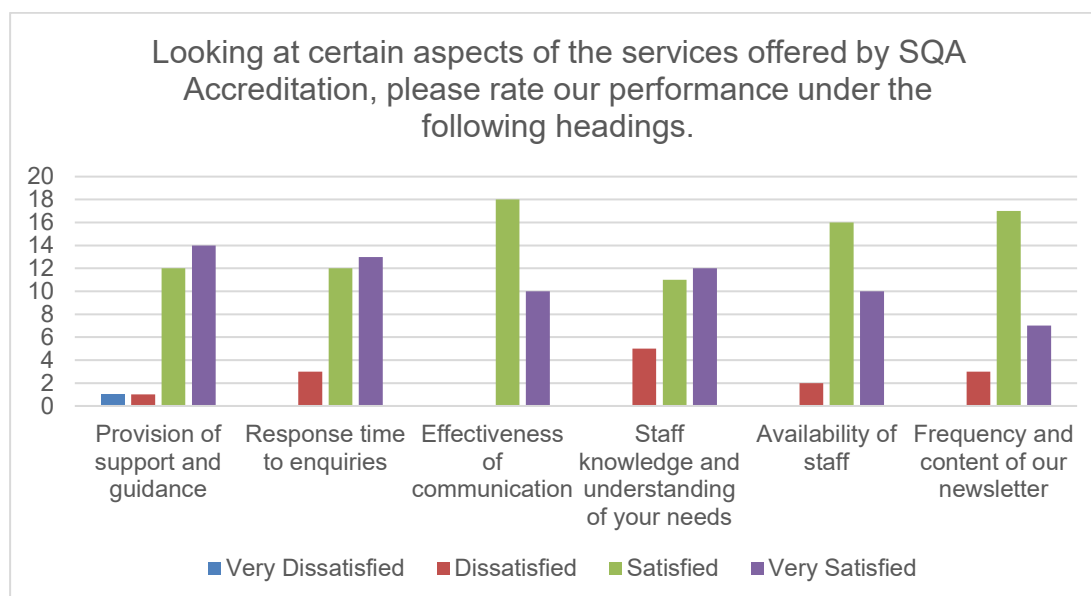
One respondent provided a comment:

- ◆ The March 2020 audit took place online, a few days into lockdown, and therefore was not planned to be remote. The experience was straightforward, and no specific issues emerged with this approach, and we welcomed being audited on schedule — the preparation we had undertaken was utilised in full. The report of the audit was also produced timeously, and the related discussions took place without issue online.

## 6 Services provided by SQA Accreditation

SQA Accreditation asked stakeholders to provide feedback regarding services offered. The questions asked look at specific aspects of services so SQA Accreditation can examine which areas may require improvement.

Figure 8: SQA Accreditation's performance



Responses were very positive: between 82% and 100% of respondents answered 'Satisfied' or 'Very satisfied' for each question. Only one respondent answered 'Very dissatisfied' for one of the headings (Provision of support and guidance) and unfortunately did not provide any further information in support of this answer.

All 'Dissatisfied' and 'Very dissatisfied' responses came from the same five organisations, indicating there are particular problems which need to be addressed with those organisations, rather than an overall problem with one of the areas in the headings above. Of the five who selected 'Dissatisfied' for 'Staff knowledge and understanding of your needs', three provided comments. The first comment suggests that a neutral response would have been more suitable, but as this option was unavailable they selected disagree:

- ◆ Our engagement with SQA Accreditation is limited and usually happens when we make a specific ask. When we have made direct asks, SQA Accreditation has been supportive and communicative.
- ◆ There are inconsistencies in time frames to respond to queries. No additional support is given if our accreditation manager is away. Lack of awareness of content in the newsletter.
- ◆ [PAGE] exams are still poorly understood.

Further detailed comments were provided by several respondents:



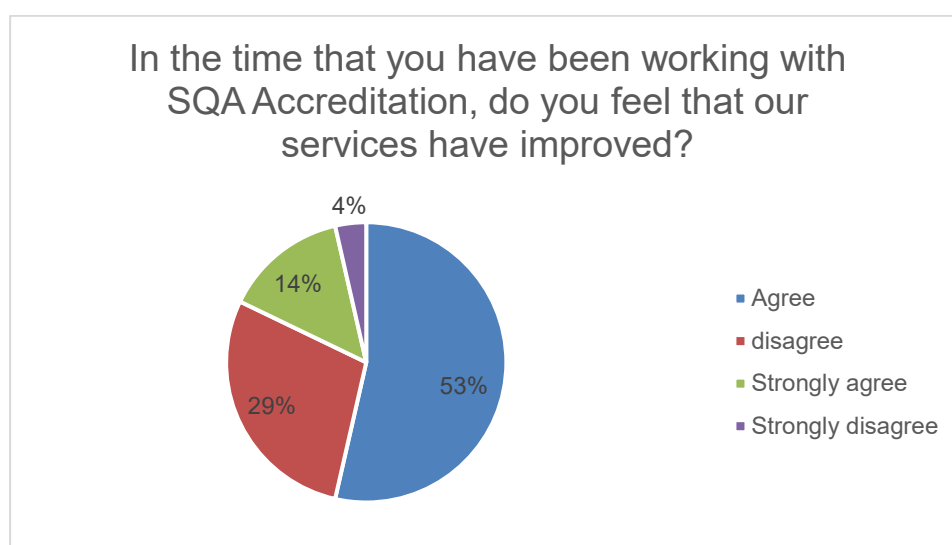
- ◆ All contacts have been quick and helpful when asking for support and information. There were some issues with the original setting up of the online account for [AB] which were caused by IT issues but the SQA Accreditation staff helped to address this
- ◆ We did experience a drop in response time when looking at credit rating a qualification, but we fully understood that this was as a result of circumstances beyond your control due to the pandemic.
- ◆ Accessibility via SharePoint is an ongoing issue. Out of all the portals we have to use for regulatory purposes this is the one that remains time consuming to access and less user friendly. Service during pandemic may have been reduced in some instances for other organisations however this did not impact on [AB] as we had no audits due at this time. All communication from SQA Accreditation was timely and efficient as per pre COVID times.
- ◆ The support from SQA Accreditation during the pandemic has been exceptional. We have thoroughly appreciated the way our Accreditation and Regulation Managers have helped guide us through the developments that have meant we could continue to offer assessments during lockdowns. Both Managers have also made themselves accessible to queries and our occasional video calls have always been constructive and worthwhile. We have also appreciated the speed that ACG have been able to respond to applications. When we have had occasional short delays in submitting statistics, due to remote working, the Information Assistant has been very understanding.
- ◆ We work with [SQA Accreditation staff member], who is very knowledgeable, well-informed about what we do, and fast in response to queries.
- ◆ It might be worthwhile reviewing the subscriber list for the Newsletter, and frequency of publication, as there have been reports of it appearing ad hoc or infrequently. This would be helpful if the Newsletter is to be the main vehicle for communication to Awarding Bodies. Generally satisfied with communications between SQA Accreditation and Awarding Bodies. The introduction of online AB forums is a welcome addition. With communications, there are always cases where these could be clearer, as we do often need to clarify some areas (e.g.: as we did with the recent changes to allowances of international provision).

The comments are generally very positive and supportive of the functions of SQA Accreditation.

## 6.1 Improving services

Stakeholders were asked 'In the time that you have been working with SQA Accreditation, do you feel that our services have improved?'. The respondents indicated that overall, services had improved, with 64.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement. This is an increase on the previous stakeholder survey, in which only 49% answered that services had improved or slightly improved.

Figure 9: Have SQA Accreditation's services improved



Respondents provided comments to support their selections. Those who selected 'Disagree', made comments that included:

- ◆ This needs to be set on the context that the services provided from SQA Accreditation have always been good, but there's no option to say they are about the same.
- ◆ I have not been working with SQA very long at all, so I have not yet had chance to see any improvement. I do, however, admire their commitment to improvement focused regulation.
- ◆ We can't comment as engagement has been inconsistent, so unable to judge.
- ◆ The service has remained consistent at a fairly high level.
- ◆ Service remains the same. A level of inconsistency.
- ◆ 'Disagree' simply because the service has always been excellent.
- ◆ We have always had support from SQA and the level of support and guidance has been good from the beginning.

These comments show that most respondents who selected 'Disagree' felt the service from SQA Accreditation was already good, or that the service has remained consistent. There is one who references an inconsistency in the service received — this is being queried with that respondent to ensure our services are of a consistently high standard.

The following comments were received from those who selected 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree':

- ◆ In general there is a better relationship with two way communication and support.
- ◆ [AB] agrees but it has always been a reasonably high-quality service provided.
- ◆ In the past 4 years [AB] requirements and strategy have been understood more with communication being much more clear, concise helpful and professional. During both regulation and accreditation activities despite contacts remaining authoritative we have been fully supported to identify our strengths and development areas in relation to audits, building and submission of qualifications, self-assessment activities and evidencing meeting the SQA accreditation principles. This helpful approach, in turn, has helped us shape our own internal process and procedures via SQA accreditation/regulation feedback.

- ◆ The service was already good, but I think decisions are being reached quicker. We definitely feel we have an excellent professional relationship with SQA Accreditation.
- ◆ As far as I'm concerned, SQA Accreditation has always had a strong service.
- ◆ SQA Accreditation's services have always been of a good standard, and we appreciated the move to virtual meetings during the pandemic.
- ◆ I have only been working with you myself since COVID so unfortunately I am unable to really answer this question to its best.
- ◆ Service from SQA Accreditation has consistently been good, but as with all organisations, there is always room for improvement, as suggested in our responses.

Similarly to those who selected Disagree, several selected agree because there was no neutral option to say service has remained consistent. Stakeholders recognise that SQA Accreditation seeks continual improvement and the specific examples highlighted demonstrates this.

## 6.2 Comparison to other UK regulators

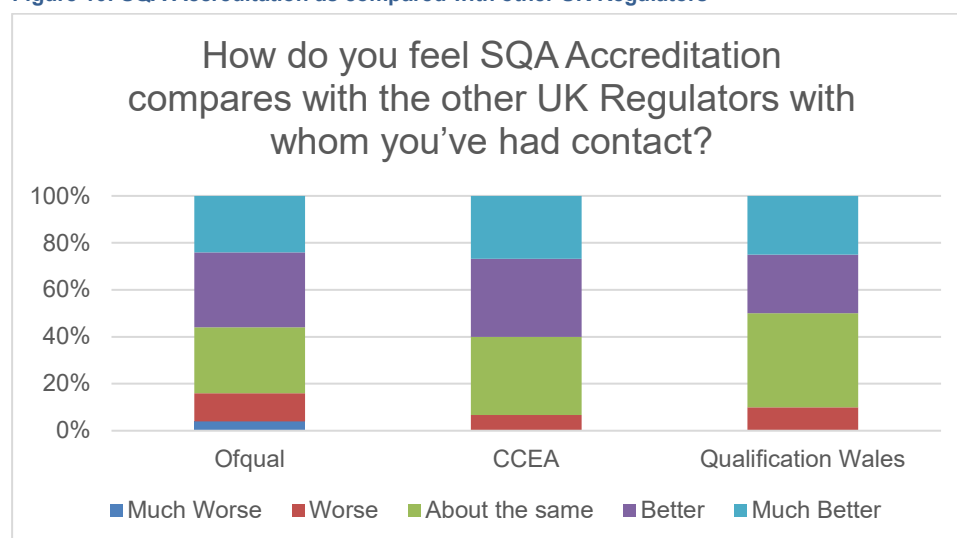
It is important to consider how SQA Accreditation is perceived in the context of the other regulators and how comparable services are. Not all respondents have had contact with other regulators:

- ◆ Ofqual: 89.3% of respondents
- ◆ CCEA: 53.6% of respondents
- ◆ Qualification Wales: 71.4% of respondents

Of those who have had contact, as detailed above, the majority selected that SQA Accreditation were 'About the same', 'Better' or 'Much better':

- ◆ Ofqual: 84%
- ◆ CCEA: 93.4%
- ◆ Qualification Wales: 90%

Figure 10: SQA Accreditation as compared with other UK Regulators



Only one respondent selected 'Much worse', which was in comparison to Ofqual, but they did not provide any further information about this selection.

Of those who selected 'Worse' only one made any further comment; this organisation has had contact with all the other three UK regulators and selected 'Worse' for all:

- ◆ The prescriptive and autocratic approach by SQA Accreditation lacks flexibility and contextualisation to niche providers. For example, requests for information that threaten non-compliance with the regulatory principles and are not specifically stated in them.

Some respondents also left positive comments, which included:

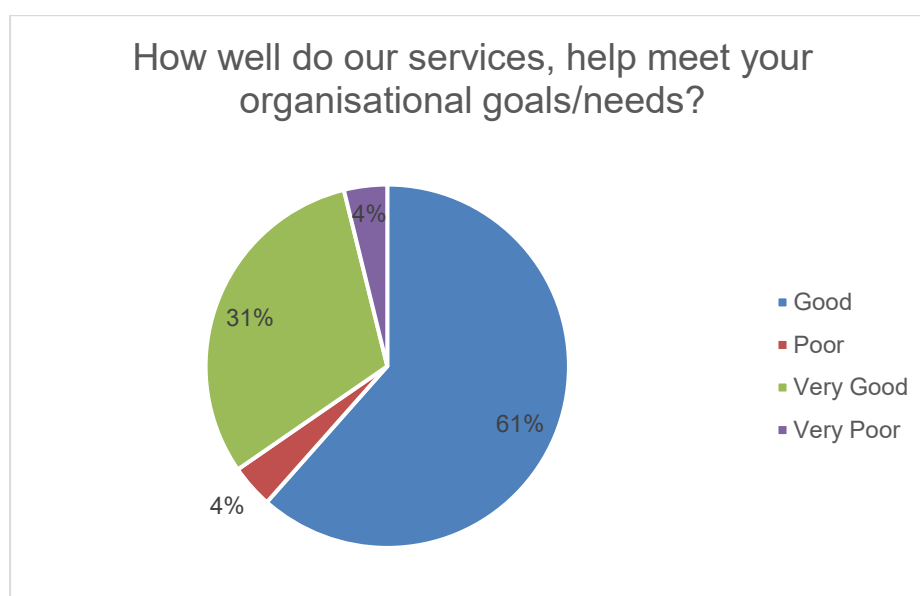
- ◆ We actually have real people that we can approach and talk to at SQA, who appear knowledgeable about their subject matter. The other regulators can be a bit more distant and difficult to engage with when seeking a response to a query.
- ◆ So much more supportive, quick to respond and generally helpful.
- ◆ Because I have a personal contact in SQA Accreditation and don't with Ofqual.

These comments highlight the support provided by individuals within SQA Accreditation.

## 6.3 Meeting stakeholders needs

To assess whether SQA Accreditation is currently helping stakeholders meet their organisational needs, the following question was asked: How well do our services, help meet your organisational goals/needs?

Figure 11: How SQA Accreditation helps meet your organisational goals



Of those who responded to this question, 92.3% answered 'Good' or 'Very good'. The comments made included:

- ◆ When we needed approval to launch remote invigilation during the initial pandemic, both the accreditation manager and the regulation manager engaged with us quickly and efficiently to support us to get the right information submitted to the ACG in order that we could launch our remotely invigilated exams on time as required by our market.
- ◆ The accreditation and regulation teams' knowledge and willingness to maintain an open dialogue supports us in ensuring that we remain compliant with regulatory requirements and that our regulated qualifications are maintained appropriately.

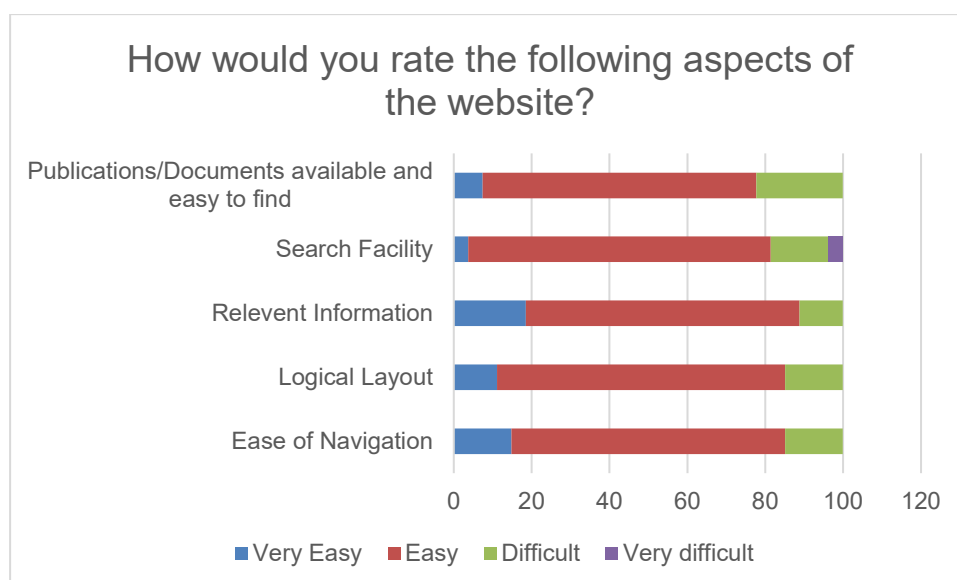
Of those who responded 'Poor' or 'Very Poor', only one offered further comment:

- ◆ The process for qualification approval is unnecessarily lengthy. Audit reports focus on areas for development only and do not report on aspects that are done well. It would be useful to know these in order to enhance further, rather than just focusing on the negative.

## 7 Website

SQA Accreditation aims to provide up to date accurate information on its website, which meets the needs of stakeholders. As this is where information and data regarding SQA Accreditation is held, as well as relevant forms, it is important that it is accessible and user friendly.

Figure 12: Rating areas of the SQA Accreditation website



For four of the areas: Search Facility, Relevant Information, Logical Layout, and Ease of Navigation, over 80% of respondents agreed that they were 'Easy' or 'Very Easy'. The only area that was lower than 80% was 'Publications/Documents available and easy to find' with 77.7%. SQA Accreditation reviews its website regularly and these ratings assist in making improvements.

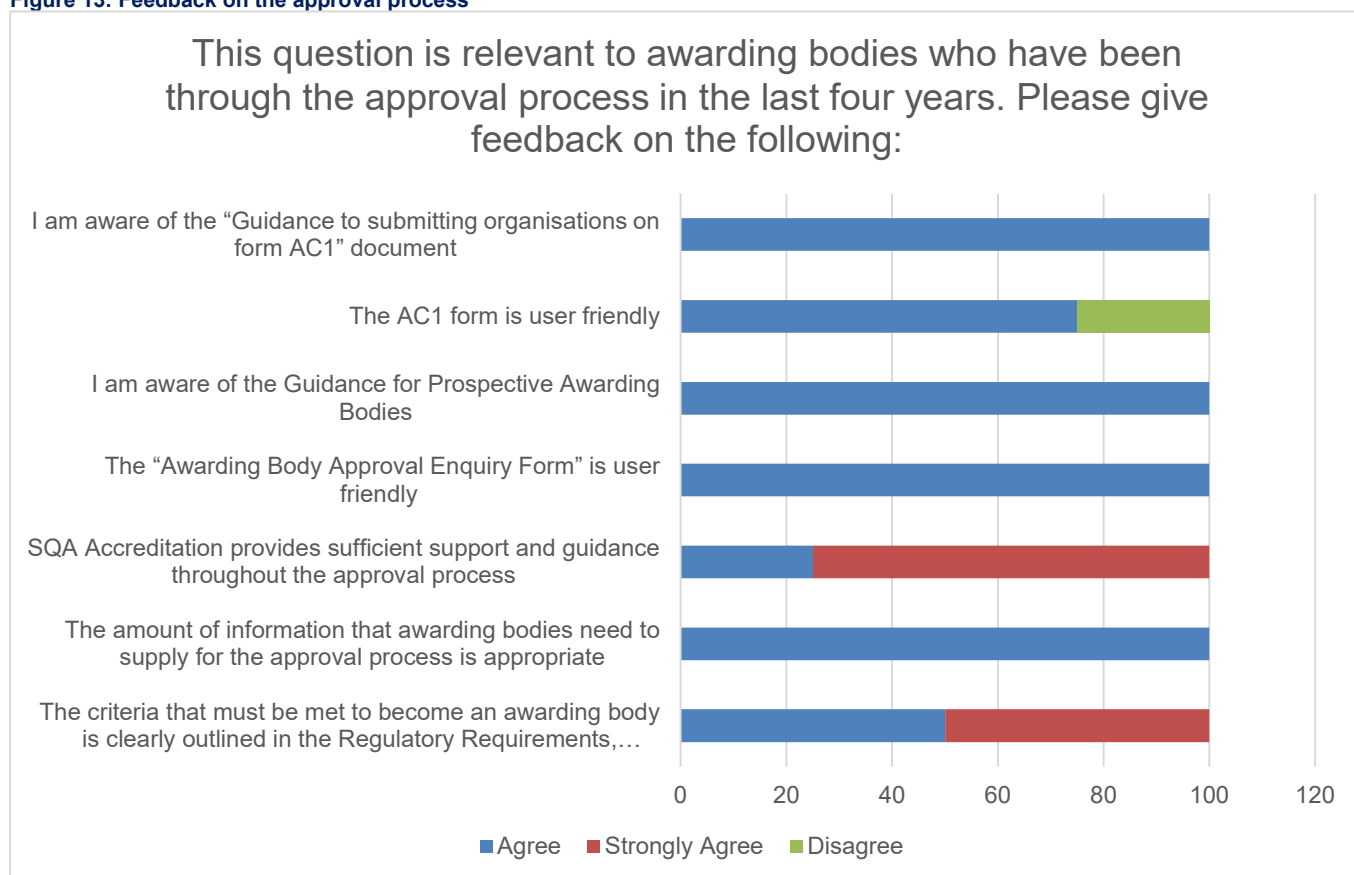
The 'Search Facility' was the only area where a respondent selected 'Very difficult'. From the comments provided it appears that respondents find this facility difficult to navigate:

- ◆ A few documents I have searched for have not been so easy to search as others, however these are only a few specific examples on minimal occasions. On the whole I find the website itself very user-friendly.
- ◆ The website is slow and the [search] facility is cumbersome.
- ◆ Rarely use the website. Search function could be better.
- ◆ It is clumsy and out of date with current website design. It's not difficult to use the website neither is it easy — our response would be midway between the two — it's alright...
- ◆ Can be very slow at times. QER scoring/ weighting is not visible on the web site. This information should be visible as it is key in identifying the overall QER on an on-going basis.
- ◆ When we are searching for specific information we have always been able to source this on the website and experienced no difficulties.

## 8 Approval process and accreditation

These questions address the accreditation and approval process. The first question is directed towards awarding bodies who have been through the approval process within the last four years, so this was only answered by four awarding bodies.

Figure 13: Feedback on the approval process



As shown in the graph, 100% of those who responded 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' with all the statements, with the exception of 'The AC1 form is user friendly'. The following comment was provided:

- ◆ I would prefer to see SQA Accreditation moving towards an online system both for ease of use but also to avoid formatting issues within the AC1 and AC2 and also ease of submission rather than relying on office documentation which can lead to duplication of work from documents that the AB may already have in place.

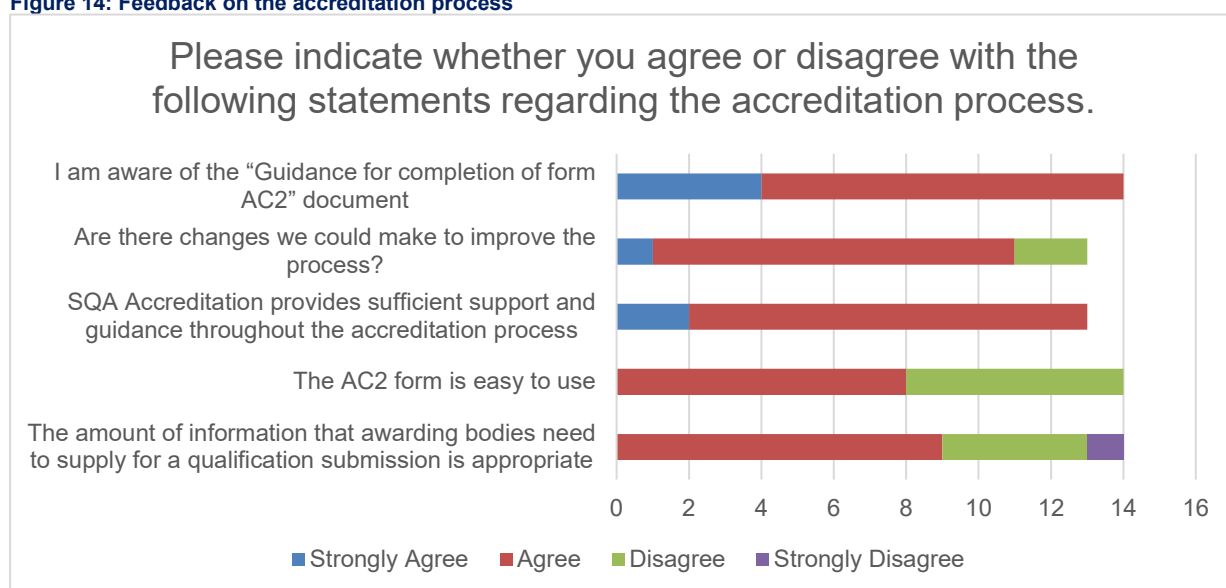
SQA Accreditation is currently looking to get an application to move most of its processes online.

### 8.1 Accreditation process

SQA Accreditation want to hear from awarding bodies to ensure the accreditation process is as straightforward as possible and accept any suggestions to streamline the process.

Awarding bodies were asked: Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the accreditation process.

Figure 14: Feedback on the accreditation process



Only 14 respondents gave responses to three of these statements; only 13 provided responses to 'Are there changes we could make to improve the process' and 'SQA Accreditation provides sufficient support and guidance throughout the accreditation process'. This statement 'Are there changes we could make to improve the process' may be ambiguous as to whether respondents were answering positively — disagreeing with the statement it suggests no improvements are required.

All respondents 'Agreed' or 'Strongly agreed' with 'I am aware of the 'Guidance for completion of form AC2' document' and 'SQA Accreditation provides sufficient support and guidance throughout the accreditation process'.

Respondents were divided as to whether the AC2 form was easy to use, with 42.8% disagreeing. The following comments were provided:

- ◆ I would prefer to see SQA Accreditation moving towards an online system both for ease of use but also to avoid formatting issues within the AC1 and AC2 and also ease of submission rather than relying on office documentation which can lead to duplication of work from documents that the AB may already have in place.
- ◆ The AC2 form is difficult to use for new members of staff. Currently an AB has to submit a lot of documents for qualification accreditation — is there any way that this could be slimmed down to essential qualification structure and assessment documents only?

As outlined previously, SQA Accreditation is seeking to move to an online application. However, the timescale in which this will happen is unclear.

One respondent provided the following statement, which suggests a specific issue which will be addressed with them directly.



- ◆ We have an issue with the information requested that we believe is commercially sensitive

Respondents more generally provided the following comments:

- ◆ It's difficult to answer the 4th point using this format. The process is straightforward; however, if we're also completing the credit and level documentation there is duplication of information that we provide.
- ◆ The 'blanket' extension offered during the pandemic suggests that it might be helpful if SQA Accreditation could review their process to identify whether the AC2 extension submission is required in the future.

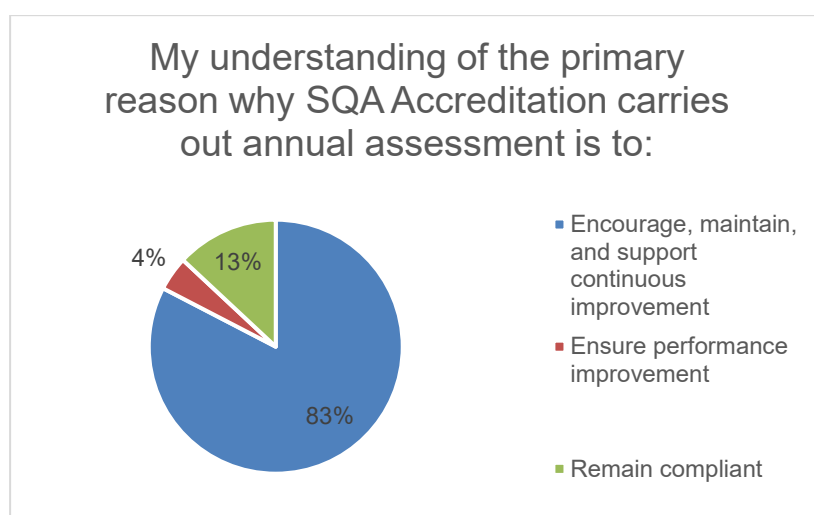
## 9 Self-assessment

SQA Accreditation requires awarding bodies to demonstrate that they have systems in place that facilitate continual improvement and show evidence of regular ongoing review and evaluation of their key business activities. As such an annual self-assessment is carried out.

### 9.1 Understanding of self-assessment

There are a series of questions that relate to self-assessments. The first is 'My understanding of the primary reason why SQA Accreditation carries out annual self-assessments is to'.

Figure 15: Why SQA Accreditation carries out annual assessments



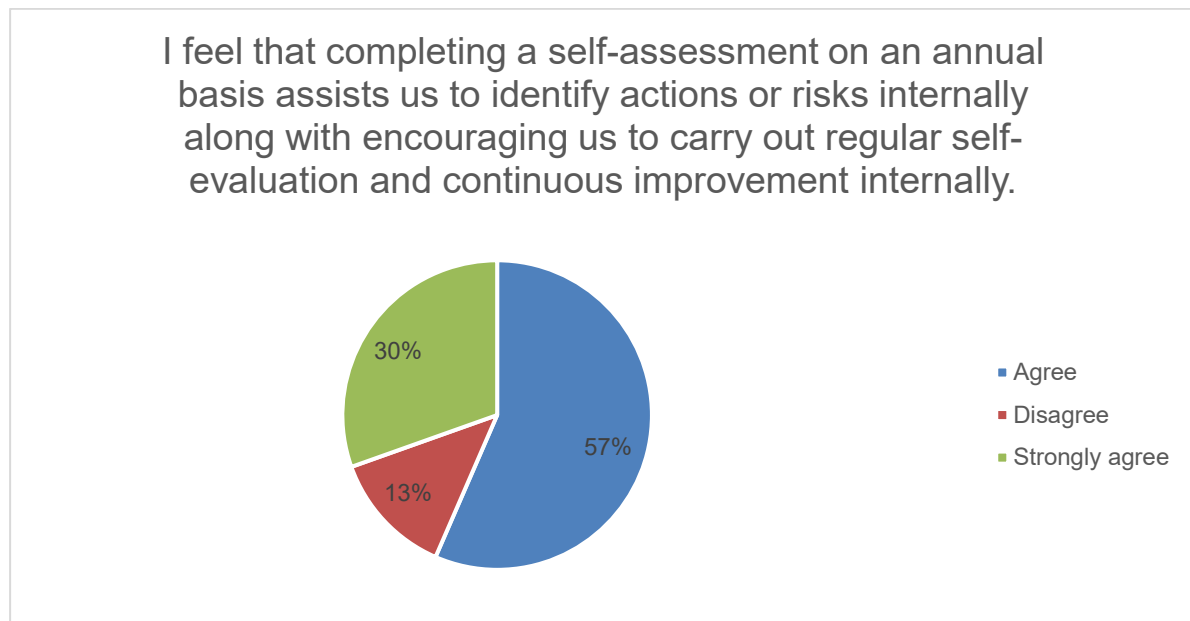
Not all respondents answered this question — 17.9% declined to provide a response. Of those who did respond, 82.6% felt the reason to carry out the self-assessment was to 'Encourage, maintain and support continuous improvement', 4.3% felt it was to 'Ensure performance improvement', and 13% felt it was to 'Remain compliant'.

As explained on the website, the primary reason is not only for awarding bodies to remain compliant but also that they are continuing to improve the way they in which they develop, design and deliver qualifications to help contribute to the Scottish economy.

### 9.2 Continual improvement

Following on from the above question, SQA Accreditation asked whether respondents agreed with this statement: 'I feel that completing a self-assessment on an annual basis assists us to identify actions or risks internally along with encouraging us to carry out regular self-evaluation and continuous improvement internally'. 87% of respondents 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' with this statement, as shown below.

**Figure 16: How self-assessment benefits the organisation**

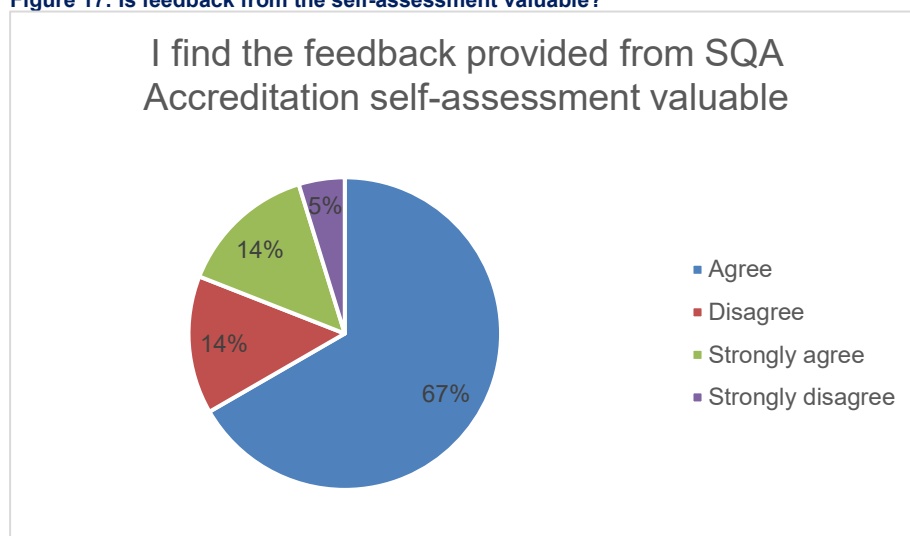


Of those who disagreed no comments were made regarding this question, but it can be assumed that they do not find the self-assessment useful for identifying actions or risk for their particular organisation.

### 9.3 Value of self-assessment feedback

SQA Accreditation asked respondents their opinion on this statement: 'I find the feedback provided from SQA Accreditation self-assessment valuable'. 81% 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' with this statement suggesting it is a worthwhile exercise for their organisation.

**Figure 17: Is feedback from the self-assessment valuable?**



Comments made by those who 'Agreed' or 'Strongly Agreed' include:

- ◆ We have always received detailed feedback with information on areas of improvement, this has always been provided via email from our accreditation manager which has been easy to understand.
- ◆ Constructive feedback to be broad brush rather than detail. It would be more use to know if there are common themes across all ABs that have been identified by SQA Accreditation.
- ◆ The report we receive is short, but gives us confidence that the self-assessment has been reviewed and that we are on the right track, especially between planned audit activities.
- ◆ I've found the feedback extremely helpful and supportive.
- ◆ Where the feedback has noted areas that could be improved upon, it would be useful for this to be given verbally so that the feedback can be discussed to ensure there is full understanding of a particular issue and how this can be addressed for future submissions.

The comments demonstrate that stakeholders are supportive of the current process but do suggest areas for improvement, such as ensuring feedback is discussed to guarantee full understanding.

The 19% who 'Disagreed' or 'Strongly disagreed' made the following comments:

- ◆ Feedback would be useful if it was structured around the principles.
- ◆ Often the SAR includes aspects which are not relevant to our quals in SQA. Feedback has been appropriate.

## 9.4 What works well and suggestions for improvement

To gather a comprehensive picture of the self-assessment process SQA Accreditation asked: 'Please tell us what works well within the full Self-Assessment process, what doesn't work so well and any suggestions for us to take forward into the Self-Assessment process'. Of the 28 respondents, 19 commented on this question. Some of these comments were:

- ◆ The process does work well in terms of encouraging a period of self-reflection on our activities, both business and regulatory. There are some templates available to support in how to complete one but it may be beneficial to have some other formats available as the two that are provided are very similar in style and may not be appropriate/applicable to the style used by a particular AB.
- ◆ I personally like the fact that the self-assessment is not a laborious benchmarking exercise of the principles alone but built around the AO's internal SWOT and business plans. I think this helps maintain focus and give a true indication of how the AO needs to develop to meet its own internal business objectives/strategy whilst continually improving. This action, in turn helps identify areas of development/evidencing the meeting of principles. In honesty this approach was not understood fully by myself for the first self-assessment, this understanding came as a result of clear communication and constructive feedback from [SQA Accreditation staff member].
- ◆ I think it is a really robust process, with clear and concise measures. I wish that other regulators would follow SQA Accreditation's example!

- ◆ Having to complete a specific self-assessment for SQA Accreditation is an administrative burden. The approach taken by the other regulators is much more effective and supportive to us as an awarding body.
- ◆ The process is relatively straightforward and the ability for ABs to agree a date suitable for them is useful. It would be helpful if other ABs could share the template that they use to report their self- assessment, so that ABs could perhaps learn good practice from each other.

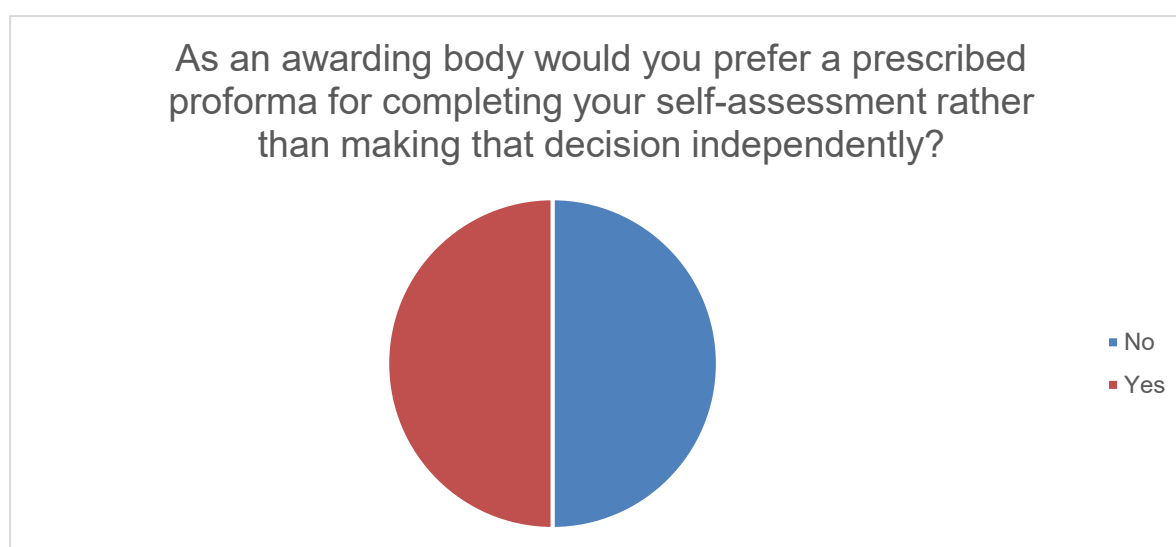
Several organisations are supportive of the current process and welcome the feedback. However, it has been suggested that improvements can be made, particularly with the format and making it accessible and understandable for all awarding bodies.

## 9.5 Format of self-assessment

The question was asked: 'As an awarding body would you prefer a prescribed proforma for completing your self-assessment rather than making that decision independently?'

As can be seen, respondents are split down the middle regarding this question, half would like a prescribed proforma, half would not.

**Figure 18: Having a prescribed proforma or not for self-assessment**



The comments reflect this division, with some finding the current format and guidance sufficient, whereas others would like to see a more prescriptive format depending on the needs of their organisation

The comments for 'Yes' include:

- ◆ Although it is good to see SQA Accreditation allowing an organisation to use its own 'style', it is sometimes a matter of 'send it in and get feedback' before knowing if it is in the format required and with sufficient or relevant information contained. This could lead to actions being set where a pro forma may have assisted the AB to provide the evidence

in the first instance where it does exist, just not demonstrated in the way that may be easiest to identify when reviewed by SQA Accreditation staff.

- ◆ I do think this would be beneficial to ensure all areas are reviewed during the annual self-assessment process to maintain compliance and identify areas of weakness.
- ◆ Yes, but then I also appreciate that this might become too prescriptive.
- ◆ However, we would prefer not to complete a specific self-assessment for SQA Accreditation.

The comments for 'No' include:

- ◆ We have our own self-assessment method which we use for all of the regulators so would prefer if this was not prescribed by SQA.
- ◆ Templates are available and feel this is sufficient guidance.
- ◆ We feel that the format we're currently using works for us. However, if SQA Accreditation supply a prescribe proforma, we'd comply with the request.
- ◆ We are happy to continue using our pro-forma but we understand if it helps other bodies to have a prescribed pro-forma.

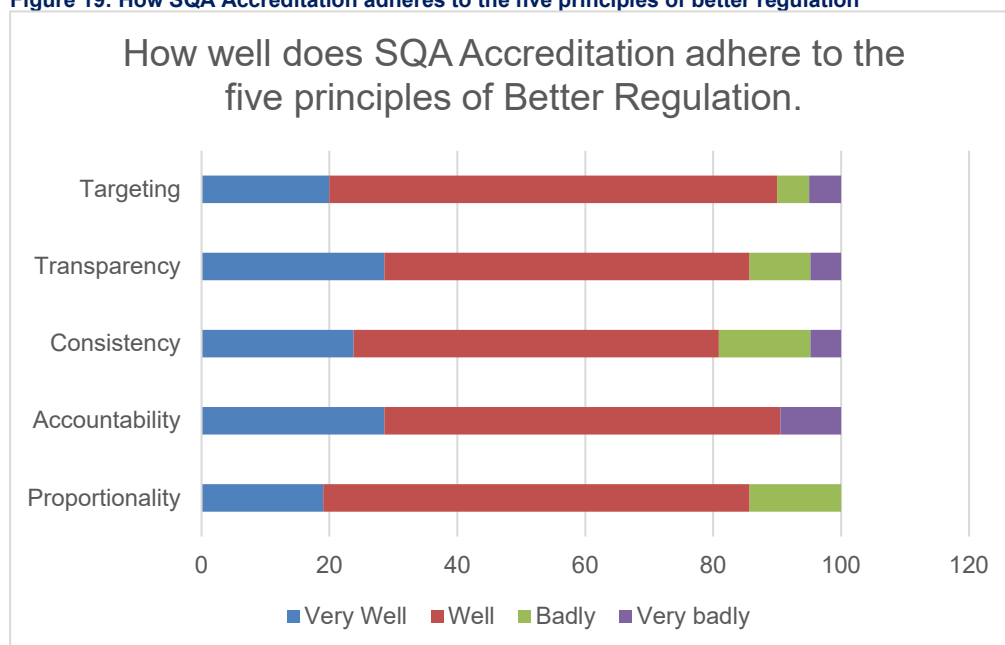
Generally, the comments suggest respondents do not feel particularly strongly about the format of self-assessments, though for some it would be much easier to have a less prescriptive option as it is more convenient — especially if they use other regulators. Others think a more prescriptive format would ensure that particular areas are covered.

It should be noted that there is a self-assessment project group who helped to formulate the questions relating to self-assessment. They are already reviewing the process and are taking into account the responses received here.

## 10 Regulatory activities

SQA Accreditation regulates approved awarding bodies to safeguard the interests of its stakeholders. SQA Accreditation asked ‘How well does SQA Accreditation adhere to the five principles of better regulation?’

Figure 19: How SQA Accreditation adheres to the five principles of better regulation



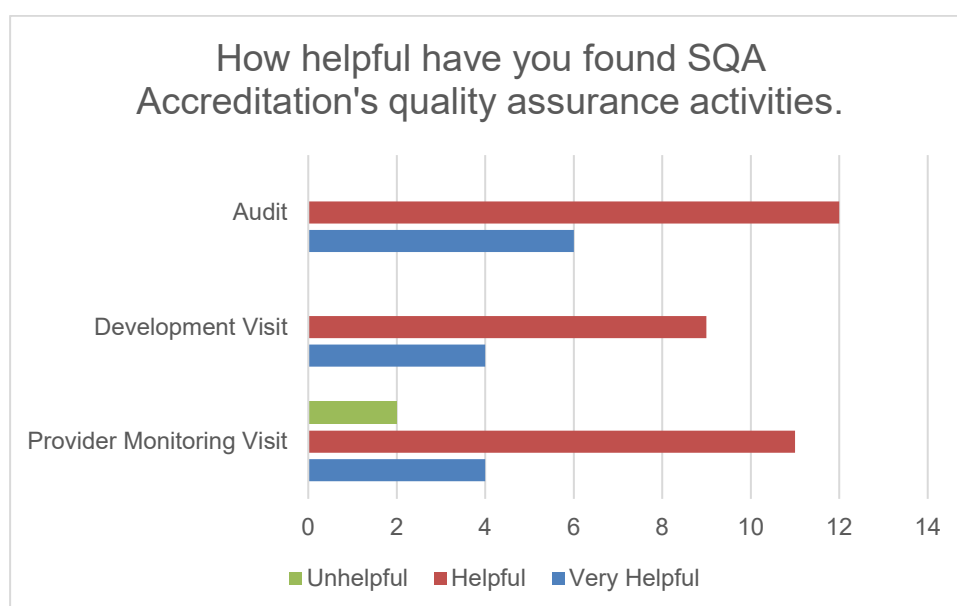
Of those who responded to this question, the majority feel that SQA Accreditation are achieving the five principles of better regulation, answering ‘Very well’ or ‘Well’:

- ◆ Targeting (90%)
- ◆ Transparency (86.7%)
- ◆ Consistency (80.9%)
- ◆ Accountability (90.5%)
- ◆ Proportionality (85.7%)

### 10.1 Quality assurance activities

SQA Accreditation carries out Provider Monitoring Visits (PMV), Development Visits and Audits to make sure Awarding Bodies are adhering to the regulatory principles. Stakeholders were asked: ‘How helpful have you found SQA Accreditation’s quality assurance activities’.

Figure 20: How helpful respondents found SQA Accreditation's quality assurance activities



A varying number of respondents answered for each of these activities as they may have only had, for example, a PMV and haven't yet experienced a development visit or an audit. For the Audit and Development Visit, 100% of respondents said that they found them 'Helpful' or 'Very Helpful'.

For Provider Monitoring Visit, 11.76% of respondents found the visit unhelpful. The following further comments were provided:

- ◆ In relation to the provider monitoring visits, we are aware of confidentiality but we believe that if an area of concern is identified during this process it would be most beneficial to the awarding body if we were told who the training provider is so we can deal with any areas of concern / non-compliance and/or provide them with additional support to improve their operations.
- ◆ The PMVs are not helpful overall as, on the last two occasions, it has been a Provider specific issue which has been raised. However with no knowledge of the identity of the Provider, it is difficult to remedy the situation without engaging in large scale actions which impact upon Providers that were already low risk and meeting [AB] QA requirements/demands. This has led to [AB] utilising resources which could have been better used to grow the business within Scotland.
- ◆ [AB] SQA AB has discussed with SQA Accreditation previously the imbalance of taking action across all centres when one out of many has shown a non-compliance during a PMV and the identity of the one centre is not disclosed. We find this is disproportionate to the issue found. The number of centres sampled in PMV can inflate the significance of one centre's non-compliance or even misunderstanding to a much bigger issue than is warranted.

These comments suggest that larger awarding bodies with several centres do find the provider monitoring visits helpful, but as the actions required can be costly and time-consuming because, as the identity of the centre is not disclosed, the action must be carried out across all centres. However, SQA Accreditation has found that if there is an issue at one

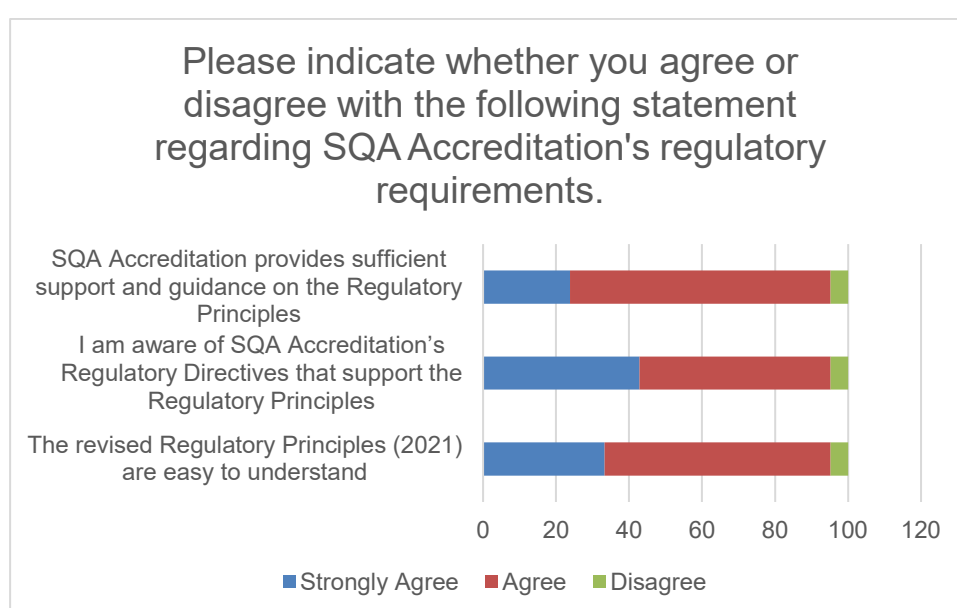


centre, it is often the case that there are issues across the centres which will be picked up at another PMV. Therefore, it is worthwhile implementing changes across all centres to ensure consistency and maintain high standards.

## 10.2 Regulatory requirements

SQA Accreditation is interested in stakeholders opinions of how they carry out regulation using the Regulatory Principles. This question asked: 'Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements.'

**Figure 21: SQA Accreditation's regulatory requirements**



Further comments were provided:

- ◆ The new regulatory principles are very clear and easy to understand and fit better with current operations.
- ◆ We are in the early stages of changing over to the 2021 RPs. The guidance document has been useful, and we know that if we have any queries, our Regulation Manager will be able to support us.
- ◆ The Regulatory Principles (although better) are ambiguous and lack specific guidance. They are easily open to interpretation. Our opinion may differ for yours and this can impact on our status.
- ◆ Clearer guidance would be helpful — with a consideration of the different types of provision.
- ◆ We believe we understand and are compliant with the Principles, but it is difficult to gauge if the guidance for the new Principles is sufficient until there is an audit. The new Principles will require some settling-in time. Hopefully there will be a review of some sort in the next year or two to gauge how ABs feel after full implementation/audit. The document 'We asked, You said, We listened' was appreciated in that it provided the

reasoning behind the acceptance and rejection of feedback — perhaps as above, a future review can take the same format.

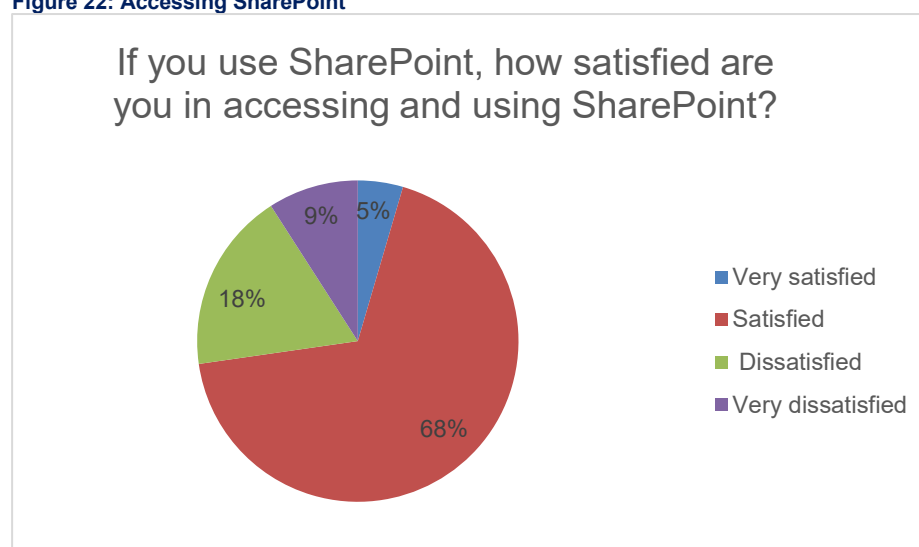
There are several different methods of regulation — SQA Accreditation uses regulatory principles rather than a more defined criteria approach. This has benefits such as not being rigid, but can also mean that the principles are open to interpretation. This method has been deemed to be the most beneficial for SQA Accreditation and its stakeholders. Regarding the final comment provided, SQA Accreditation intends to carry out a review in financial year 2023–24.

## 10.3 Accessing SharePoint

SharePoint is used to share documents and files — stakeholders can submit documents to SQA Accreditation this way.

The question was asked: 'If you use SharePoint, how satisfied are you in accessing and using SharePoint?'

Figure 22: Accessing SharePoint



Overall, 73% of respondents were 'Very Satisfied' or 'Satisfied' with SharePoint.

The comments made included:

- ◆ Still find that the limitations from Microsoft around the use of multiple SharePoints is frustrating, ie: not being able to be logged in to multiple platforms at the same time and having to use different browsers — although noted this is not SQA's issue.
- ◆ It is always a bit of a faff having to log in in incognito mode.
- ◆ [AB]staff struggle to log in. Once this was resolved, staff were then not able to access the AB documents for [AB]. The whole system is not particularly intuitive and seems to suffer from a lot of down time. Sorry but this is our recent experience.
- ◆ I have noted already that the accessibility of this appears to be duplicative and time-consuming. Additionally not being able to change passwords ourselves makes the accessibility more difficult.

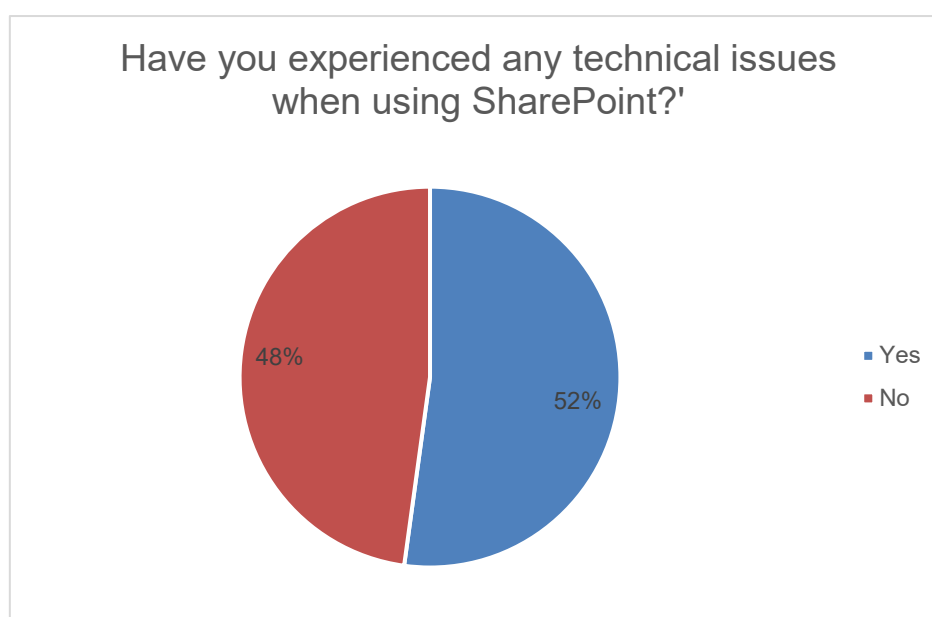
- ◆ I have found it to be difficult to use and access. Also, it would be helpful to have instructions — not just for logging in, but for what to do once we are logged in.
- ◆ This response is based on the 'old' SharePoint. That version was very clunky and time-consuming. Delays in items loading resulted in duplication at times, and on occasion, documents could not be moved or deleted. At the time of responding we have just transitioned to the new SharePoint site. There is high expectation that the new version will be an improvement and more user-friendly. A more informed view of the new site will develop as we work with the new format.

SQA Accreditation is aware of the various issues with SharePoint and continues to work with Business Systems to find resolutions.

## 10.4 Technical issues around SharePoint

Stakeholders were asked: 'Have you experienced any technical issues when using SharePoint?'

**Figure 23: Technical issues when using SharePoint**



As shown in the graph, there is almost an even split between those who have experienced issues and those who have not.

Further comments were:

- ◆ There were technical errors when the original account was set up which provided access to areas that shouldn't have been shared, but these were addressed once we highlighted them to SQA Accreditation.
- ◆ All of us have experienced issues with log ins over time, but we seem to have resolved these issues now.
- ◆ I had issues with the logging in process. However, guidance was provided very quickly to resolve this matter.

- ◆ These have mostly been related to logging in.
- ◆ No, but it is difficult to log in and out, I am not a fan of it.
- ◆ Initially we couldn't upload documents to the relevant principals but this has been resolved now.
- ◆ With reference to the old site, deletion of some items can be difficult. It was often difficult to access documents.
- ◆ I have not been able to access the new SharePoint yet because it tells me access is denied. However I have not had any issues using or accessing the old SharePoint site, so I think this will be fine once access is rectified.

Several comments refer to problems with the login procedure and a few refer to problems accessing or managing documents on SharePoint.

## 11 Evaluation of SQA Accreditation

The brand of SQA Accreditation has previously had a reputation of being dependable and of high quality. This image is reassuring for stakeholders so it is important to ensure it is maintained. As such we must consider what stakeholders consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of SQA Accreditation to uphold this identity.

### 11.1 Strengths of SQA Accreditation

SQA Accreditation asked: 'Please outline what you consider to be the main strengths of SQA Accreditation?'

Comments include:

- ◆ We have always found SQA [Accreditation] to be very pragmatic in its approach to regulation, and staff always approachable. Whilst there [must always be] compliance with the principles there is always understanding and support provided as opposed to simply being told there is an issue.
- ◆ Approachable and supportive and willing to provide targeted guidance when required.
- ◆ Approachable, fair, knowledgeable.
- ◆ Committed, long-serving staff with corporate memory definitely helps with new work.
- ◆ We believe SQA Accreditation are always willing to offer additional support as and when needed.
- ◆ Supportive, flexible approach with dedicated officers to be able to talk to.
- ◆ Supporting and knowledgeable contacts, clear objectives, transparency, improvement of website.
- ◆ Highly knowledgeable in regulation, accreditation and quality assurance.
- ◆ Working with accredited Awarding Organisations to achieve high-quality, valid and relevant products for Scotland and the UK to ensure they're recognised in the UK and overseas, quality assurance activities are fair, proportionate and effective, approachable: willing to listen and support.
- ◆ The staff are helpful and by having a 'third' party audit it gives confidence in our systems and procedures.
- ◆ Staff — our current Regulatory Manager is excellent. Flexible, where appropriate, encouraging but knows the regulatory principles and the context in which these work in an AO. The regulatory principles, and the support ethos around continual regulatory compliance and improvement.
- ◆ It's assumed all round, but the core is that you're working for the public good. Clear rules, and a well-informed, helpful, contact.
- ◆ An understanding of the education system in Scotland.
- ◆ Ease of access to staff and help with issues/queries, and established relationships at all levels across both organisations that support efficient working. Transparency; providing good support to awarding bodies throughout the accreditation process; clear procedures and guidance.

These comments demonstrate that stakeholders see the value of SQA Accreditation staff and being able to work closely with individuals. It also demonstrates that staff are highly knowledgeable and aware of the education landscape in Scotland.

## 11.2 Weaknesses of SQA Accreditation

To gather a balanced view SQA Accreditation asked 'Please outline what you consider to be the main weaknesses of SQA Accreditation?'

The comments provided include:

- ◆ Our issues centre around wanting to grow provision and not being able to demonstrate support for quals. We understand that there is no desire to accredit quals for which there isn't proven demand, but by the same token many providers are reluctant to commit to changing provision until it is accredited, so in some instances we are stuck in a chicken and egg scenario (L2 Pesticides being the case in point).
- ◆ IT infrastructure being reliant on office documentation where an online system may increase user experience.
- ◆ SharePoint not user friendly as other portals.
- ◆ Not currently able to offer accreditation to overseas learners whose Learning Partners/Providers are situated outside the UK. Without this, we are unable to take SQA Accreditation up on the offer of overseas regulation for UK-only providers as this would disadvantage our Learning Partners outside the UK who are quality assured by us in the same way.
- ◆ Clear rules, but gosh there are a lot of them! And processes are VERY elaborate and time-consuming. That's fine for well-resourced bodies, but quite a burden when we operate with less than one FTE.
- ◆ We are not always given appropriate time to respond to an activity required by SQA Accreditation, given the size of our organisation and sometimes the number of colleagues needed to review an activity as well as approval governance for agreeing a response. Whilst our requests for extensions are rarely refused, it would be more productive not to have to ask for them.

The comments by stakeholders suggest there is a high level of bureaucracy and that the systems currently in place to deal with the administration are not always user-friendly. The comments also refer to a couple of particular issues, such as not being able to accredit qualifications for learners whose providers are outside of the UK.

## 11.3 Use of digital technology

SQA Accreditation is looking to the future and how it can improve and progress its systems. As such the following question was asked: 'How could we use digital technology to further enable and support your activities?'

Comments included:

- ◆ I would prefer to see an integrated online system/portal rather than some being online and some being 'offline' through email submissions.
- ◆ Enjoyed the recent forums using Teams.
- ◆ If SharePoint worked, it would be about right.
- ◆ It would be useful to be able to access our live QER, Licence and other documents online so we would be confident that we always had the correct version. Licences would be

better in a non-editable format to ensure SQA Accreditation had the definitive version — Awarding Organisations could mark up using Adobe if an error is identified and return to SQA Accreditation.

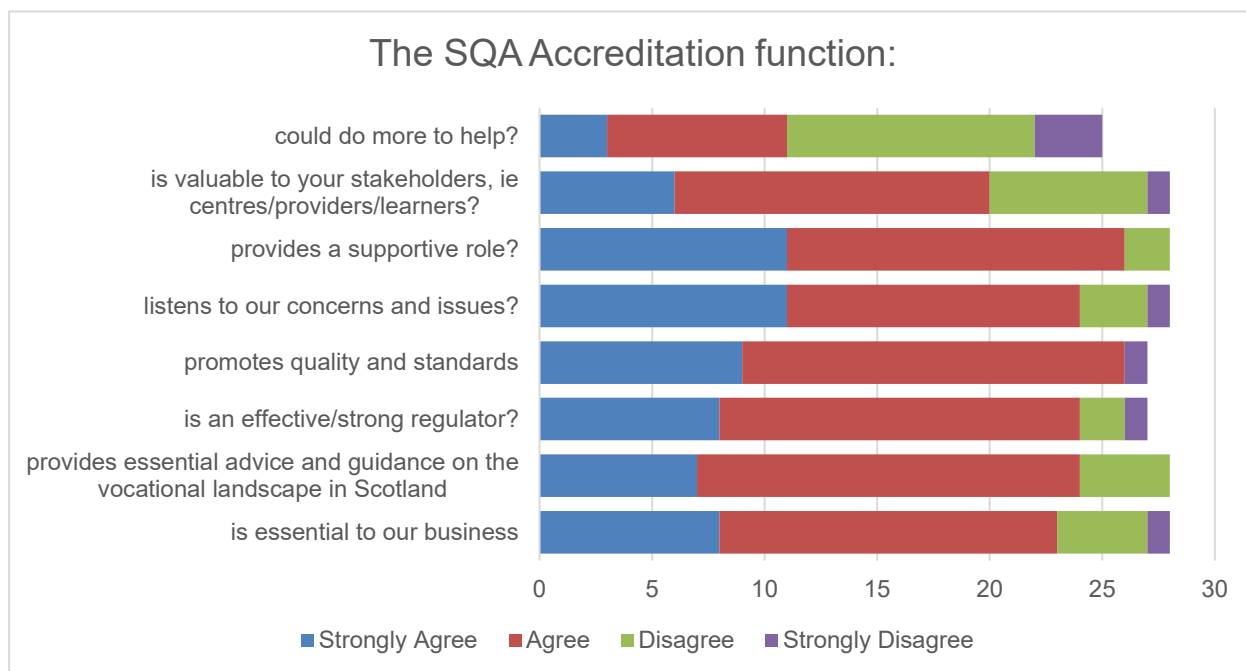
- ◆ The use of online assessments and proctoring due to COVID.
- ◆ Sharing of data and good practice, increasing the communications through online Teams and Zoom platforms.
- ◆ C&L done digitally. Reports online. Most activities could be done online. Email is an old-fashioned way of corresponding.
- ◆ We've found engagement via MS Teams useful during the pandemic and would welcome this approach becoming a standard way of working beyond the pandemic.
- ◆ Provide additional training sessions around SQA activities and requirements.
- ◆ Consideration should be given to the use of a communications portal for managing regulatory communications. Whilst these do have to be monitored constantly by the AB, it does ensure all regulatory communications are stored in one place and key personnel only can access these.
- ◆ It might be useful, especially in the sharing of sensitive documentation (eg, Notifications of malpractice investigations / commercially-sensitive AB information) if there was a secure platform to share these, instead of relying on e-mail.

These comments again highlight the need for an online platform for all documents and communication. They also consider how useful MS Teams and Zoom have been throughout the pandemic in engaging with SQA Accreditation and express a desire for this to continue.

## 11.4 Functions of SQA Accreditation

Stakeholders were asked whether they agreed with particular statements regarding the functions of SQA Accreditation and whether it meets their expectations.

Figure 24: Statements regarding SQA Accreditation's functions



A varying number of respondents provided answers to each of the statements. For the statement 'The SQA Accreditation function could do more to help' 56% disagreed, indicating they feel SQA Accreditation is doing enough.

Over 80% of respondents agreed with all the remaining statements, with the exception of 'The SQA Accreditation function is valuable to your stakeholders, ie centres, providers, learners', with which 71.4% 'Strongly agreed' or 'Agreed'.

The following comments were received:

- ◆ We have identified that a number of our training providers in Scotland do not specifically select the qualifications accredited by SQA Accreditation and use the qualifications regulated by Ofqual. We are unsure if this is due to lack of awareness of SQA Accreditation? We are monitoring this and looking at how improvements can be made.
- ◆ [AB] centres are largely unaware of the intricacies of how the Regulator/Awarding Body relationship works, and are largely uninterested.
- ◆ The final point of doing more to help specifically relates to the SharePoint.
- ◆ People we have been in contact with at SQA Accreditation have been extremely helpful.
- ◆ In the past we have come up against issues that are inconsistent across the team. This causes problems in the approach to development and confusion.
- ◆ We have very little provision in Scotland so that is the only reason I have selected Disagree for two options above. I feel if we had more SVQ provision/demand for SVQs



within our industry then the different approach to regulation that SQA Accreditation has compared to Ofqual/QW/CCEA would be of more benefit to us. As it stands, we have one process for most of our provision which is Ofqual-regulated and then a separate process to follow for SQA Accreditation but given the very small number of SVQs we award, this can at times feel disproportionate.

- ◆ SQA is supportive of what we do, as we have limited centres in Scotland our interaction is limited.
- ◆ In regards doing more to help — it would be helpful if ABs were more aware of SQA Accreditation's role with other strategic groups/committees and relationship with Scottish Government etc and to have, where allowed, some feedback or reporting of the work being done and how SQA Accreditation is responding. Eg, SQA Accreditation sits on SAAB and AAG and there are new initiatives being presented and developed that would be useful to hear more about. This would also support the aspect of 'transparency' by the regulator.

The comments are largely positive, demonstrating that SQA Accreditation staff are usually helpful and able to assist with the varying needs of awarding bodies. Some of the comments make suggestions for improvement, such as ensuring consistency throughout the team, and raising awareness of SQA Accreditation and its functions as well as its input into groups such as SAAB (Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board).

## 11.5 Value of qualification regulation

SQA Accreditation asked the open-ended question: What do you see as the value of having your qualifications regulated? This can help SQA Accreditation enhance its brand and further demonstrates the value of SQA Accreditation.

Comments included:

- ◆ In some instances then our providers would not offer our quals if they were not regulated by SQA.
- ◆ Sign of quality, rigour and consistency to the marketplace. Also provides a solution to life safety sectors where this is important
- ◆ It provides assurance of quality, and kudos as the qualifications are recognised nationally. It provides currency to our learners as they can take the qualification to employers and its value will be recognised. It assures that the qualifications are comparable to other qualifications nationally.
- ◆ It shows they are quality qualifications and are fit for purpose.
- ◆ Guidance/updates of educational landscape in Scotland. Mostly importantly for us the guaranteed robustness of design, development and awarding of the qualifications we offer to candidates in Scotland via this regulation.
- ◆ For us, having our qualification regulated means that they are recognised by Learning Partners, learners and employers as being endorsed by a respected Regulator. A Regulator's logo on certificates and parchments can also be a requirement of professional memberships for our learners.
- ◆ To have a qualification that is not only recognised in Scotland, but it is a demonstration that the qualification meets the needs of employers and learners in Scotland.

- ◆ Schools value the SQA Accreditation regulated status of our qualifications, particularly where these assign UCAS points etc.
- ◆ To aid validity and parity.
- ◆ Reassurance to all involved that the qualifications are robust, and designed and managed for the public good, not private self-interest.
- ◆ For Scottish learners to have an SQA which maps to their SQA certificates — however there needs to be more offer of VTQ in Creative and Performing Arts and not a closed marketplace.
- ◆ The Extractives and Mineral Products Industry exists across all devolved nations and we see that being able to offer SVQs is a benefit to the industry. However, uptake has not been at the same levels as for Ofqual-regulated VQs.
- ◆ National standards are set and adhered to creating a level playing field across the country. The qualifications are trusted by employers as being fit for purpose.
- ◆ SQA Accreditation supports the development of quality National Occupational Standards and qualification products.
- ◆ To stakeholders, it shows a high level of quality has been met in the development and ongoing quality assurance of our qualifications.
- ◆ I feel that it gives people/centres the reassurance that there is quality control and they are actually delivering/achieving something of value.
- ◆ Consistency, standardisation of a national product, objectivity in maintaining the standard, equality of input from stakeholders, a brand that is recognisable and valued by users. Promotes a national standard; builds confidence in the validity and reliability of qualifications. Recognisable and transferable skills and standards.

Respondents highlighted that regulation by SQA Accreditation demonstrates an assurance of quality. It also means that the qualification is recognised by employers and educators. One comment references schools and highlights the confusion between SQA Awarding Body and SQA Accreditation.

## 11.6 Importance of Scottish regulator

Given the recent implications of the Ken Muir review, the following hypothetical question is particularly relevant: What impact on the vocational education and training system in Scotland would there be for you and your qualifications if there was no Scottish qualification regulator?

- ◆ With the move to proven competency within the fire sector, regulated qualifications are vital as some of the issues that are within the industry are due to the proliferation of training programmes that do not have a form of oversight leading to inconsistencies in the quality of provision and people carrying out roles within the sector who may believe they have received sufficient training and development when they may not have.
- ◆ We are a professional body and membership organisation as well as an awarding body — our aim is to have relevant products and services across the four nations that we represent. It is therefore very important to us to have a regulator in Scotland that represents the specific needs of learners in Scotland.
- ◆ [AB's] Providers would offer the equivalent qualifications in Scotland but regulated by Ofqual instead of SQA Accreditation.

- ◆ If guidance and support/knowledge was not available via regulators I believe there will be room for standards to fall, not intentionally but as a result of complacent and lack of challenge/QA checks.
- ◆ There will need to be a Regulator — not just for general education, but also for the qualifications we represent (vocational, professional, post-19). I can't imagine Scotland would want to move back to Ofqual, so an equivalent Scottish agency will be needed. Without having a Regulator, qualifications lack the absolute external quality assurance needed. Although we are voluntarily regulated, our stakeholders require evidence of regulatory backing for some of our core qualifications. We would need to seek another UK regulator.
- ◆ It's my view that there would be a de-stabilisation in confidence of qualifications in Scotland. We would use Ofqual regulation where appropriate, but I think there would be a major challenge with the UCAS points. I also believe that the regulation and support model used by SQA Accreditation more closely meets our needs as an organisation.
- ◆ There may be inherent risks in not having a vocational qualifications regulated system, however there are already products that sit within the Scotland vocational qualifications system that remain unregulated and the market determines in these circumstances whether quality is the determining factor for use.
- ◆ It would be speedier. There is no regulation for NVQ's.
- ◆ A free-for-all serves no one.
- ◆ Losing recognition. We can't imagine there would be no regulator, maybe a different process of regulation.
- ◆ I believe there should be a Scottish regulator but it should be separated completely from SQA Awarding Body.
- ◆ If there was no Scottish qualifications regulator, [AB] would market the use of Ofqual-regulated provision in Scotland. Given the relatively low uptake of SVQs within the industry, we feel having one system of qualifications would be more straightforward for our organisation. We have no unique SVQ provision, it mirrors the qualifications we have regulated by Ofqual, albeit using only the NOS. We feel we have more control over our VQ provision which while based on NOS, enables us more flexibility to amend and update as required.
- ◆ A potential lack of trust in the educational standard of our qualifications through the loss of impartial and expert scrutiny.
- ◆ No standard qualifications resulting in a dilution of the skills necessary to be a trades-person. A fragmentation of skills that are appropriate for a trade resulting in a less skilled and flexible workforce.
- ◆ No Quality Assurance process for National Occupational Standards and qualification products.
- ◆ Consideration of our stakeholders, specifically The Scottish Ambulance Service, SQA accreditation is needed, if there were no SQA Accreditation then our stakeholders would be impacted.
- ◆ Provided Scottish customers were still able to use, and access funding for qualifications which are not regulated in Scotland there are no obvious adverse impact for [AB] if there was no Scottish qualification regulator as it stands. Although we do deliver our qualifications and assessments in accordance with strict and clear quality assurance processes as required by ourselves and all other UK qualifications regulators, it is not immediately clear what the impact would be in terms of other regulatory bodies entering the market. As previously stated, [AB] greatly values the self-assessment process, which is not a driver of the other UK qualification regulators, but one that we use to complement our regulatory requirements. This would be missed.

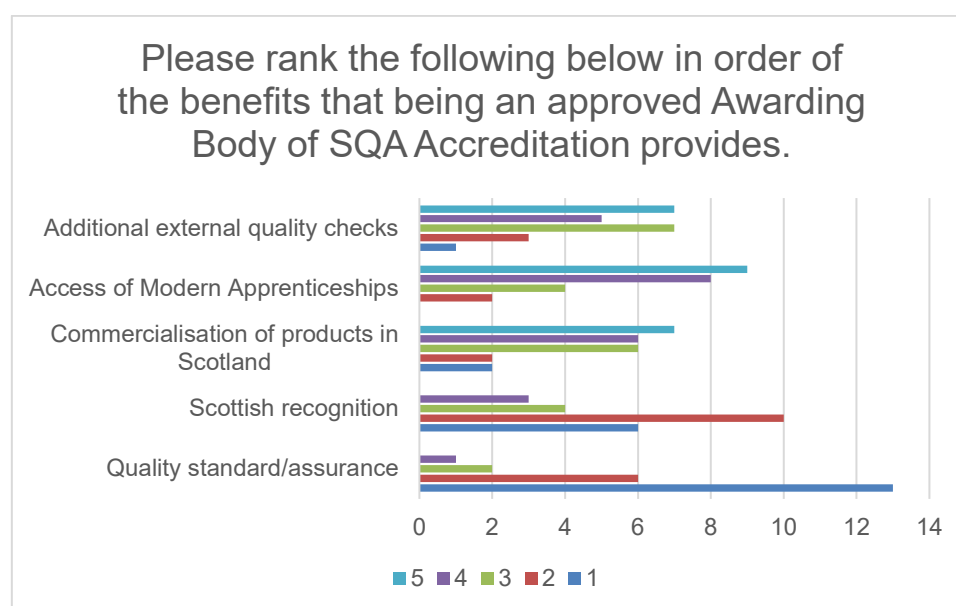
- ◆ Where there are multiple awarding bodies operating in the same space, it would be difficult without a regulator to ensure a national standard and objective consistency and accountability of delivery and requirements. There could be more ambiguity as to the qualification on offer and therefore less transparency for the end user. As a result, it is likely that the qualification landscape could become confusing and potentially risk niche sectors not being serviced adequately. UK-wide regulator would be ineffective in meeting the needs of the four countries as it could fail to recognise cultural and sectoral differences in practice and legislative requirements of certain sectors. Having SQA Accreditation provides a clear regulatory approach which is attuned to practice in Scotland, promotes standardisation and confidence. There could be a risk to the vocational education and training system in Scotland without a Scottish regulator, as an essential component of the Scottish education and training system is to allow all levels of learners access to transferable, quality and attainable learning and training best fitted to the Scottish educational landscape. There is also a risk to the system from unregulated provision, which could therefore be delivered with no accountability for quality assurance or for maintaining the integrity of the qualification.

The majority of respondents commented that they would not want to lose a Scottish regulator, stating that a UK wide regulator would not meet the needs of Scotland and that it would destabilise the qualification landscape in Scotland. Some respondents who also use Ofqual recognise that for their specific organisation it might be easier to only use Ofqual.

## 11.7 Benefits of being an SQA approved awarding body

Stakeholders were asked to 'Please rank the following below in order of the benefits that being an approved awarding body of SQA accreditation provides (Rank in order).' For clarity, 1 indicates something is the most beneficial, 5 is the least.

**Figure 25: Benefits of being an approved Awarding Body with SQA Accreditation**



Quality standard/assurance was the most consistently ranked at number 1, with 59.1% choosing this option. Access of modern apprenticeships was given the lowest overall ranking, with 39.1% choosing it last. This reflects the previous question, showing that stakeholders value the quality assurance offered by SQA Accreditation.