

The Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland

October 2008

Introduction

The Federation of Small Businesses is Scotland's largest direct member business organisation, representing almost 20,000 members. The FSB campaigns for an economic and social environment that allows businesses to grow and prosper.

We welcome the opportunity to give our views to the Scottish Government on The Next Generation of National Qualifications in Scotland consultation and will only comment on the areas where we have a point of view, rather than each question in the consultation document.

Highers

The FSB welcomes the retention of National Qualifications at Access, Higher and advanced Higher level as the "gold standard" of the Scottish qualifications system. We have no objection to the updating of the content of NQs in order to reflect the values, purposes and principles of the Curriculum for Excellence. Small businesses in general are aware of the term "Higher" and know where it fits into the qualifications context.

Replacement of Standard Grades

The FSB does not object to a new qualification being created to replace the Standard Grade; however, small businesses need to be made aware of how the replacement qualification will fit into the qualifications framework. This can only be done if the promotion and awareness of SCQF is increased among the small business community.

Grades

The FSB does agree that grading qualifications as A, B, C etc, rather than "pass" or "fail" is more appropriate. Employers can then judge the aptitude of a particular candidate in each of the subject areas.

The FSB warmly welcomes the introduction of literacy and numeracy awards at a range of SCQF levels (3 – 5), as this is something that small businesses have been calling for, for a number of years. A Scottish Certificate for Literacy and a Scottish Certificate for Numeracy would help small employers assess these crucial basic skills in potential employees.

Internal v External Assessment

There is a place for internal assessment, but on balance, external assessment offers a potential employer the assurance that the relevant standard has been reached and this has been confirmed by a third party.

Timetable for Assessment

As this is an additional award, it would seem sensible to assess it during the S4 winter diet of examinations.

The FSB would support greater flexibility in the examination process. There could also be benefits for employers in terms of hiring new employees part way through the academic year.

Conclusion

The FSB welcomes this review of national qualifications in Scotland and is grateful for the opportunity to submit our comments to the consultation process.

For further information on any of the points raised in this submission, please contact Martyn McIntyre, Policy Officer, on: martyn.mcintyre@fsb.org.uk or 0141 221 0775.