Chapter 2

THE MAIN DECISIONS

2.1 The objectives of reform will be met through a number of changes described in Chapters 7 to 9. This Chapter provides a brief summary of the main decisions. These are:

1. Standard Grade courses will remain in S3 and S4
2. In S5 and S6:
   - SEB and SCOTVEC courses, including gSVQ, will be brought into a unified curriculum and assessment system.
   - New, curriculum guidelines will be developed covering breadth, coherence, progression and core skills
   - Highers will remain; but
     . the courses will be modular
     . the recommended study time will be extended from 120 to 160 hours
     . there will be a mixture of internal and external assessment
     . for students who do not wish to undertake more advanced levels of study, there will be an externally assessed exit point at Higher
     . candidates continuing with more advanced levels of study will be encouraged to bypass the external examinations at Higher level, thus reducing the time spent on examinations
     . Advanced Higher courses will be developed, incorporating the current Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) content and building on Highers to provide coherent, challenging 2-year 320 hour courses; CSYS will disappear.
3. Courses will be designed in a framework of levels to allow students to make progress directly from their achievements at Standard Grade.
4. To ensure that the most able pupils have the opportunity and encouragement to achieve their full potential at age 16, Higher modules will be available and accredited in S4 for this group and the ‘stage restriction’ on taking Standard Grade will be relaxed to allow those very few pupils capable of taking Credit level examinations at the end of S3 to do so.
5. To provide progression for the most able pupils at the early stages of secondary education, a new Level F will be introduced into the 5-14 curriculum structure.

2.2 Arrangements for administering the awards will be developed by SOEB, SCOTVEC and SEB. Ministers will be examining options for the best relationship between SCOTVEC and SEB to perform this function, in consultation with the bodies themselves.
There are SQA qualifications for everyone — school and college students, trainees and apprentices, and adults — people who already have qualifications and those who don’t, people who are in employment and those who are outside the job market.

They cover a huge range of skills — from Languages, Mathematics, History, and Sciences, to Accounting, Agriculture, Manufacturing, and Computing.

There are qualifications at all levels of achievement. Almost all students gain SQA qualifications in the fourth year of secondary school, and the great majority obtain further qualifications in fifth or sixth year or in further education colleges. Increasingly, people also take them in the workplace, where there are qualifications from junior levels to professional and senior management levels.

August 1999 saw the start of a phased reform of the system of qualifications for over-16s. The 'Higher Still' reforms introduce a set of new National Qualifications which are designed to offer increased flexibility and to enable individuals to realise their true potential. Part of our job is to oversee the implementation of these reforms, and to provide the new qualifications whilst continuing to support the old ones until they are phased out completely.
Units

Most units are designed to take 40 hours to complete, and are achieved on the basis of internal assessment – course-work, testing, and other ways of assessing knowledge and skills, marked by the teacher, trainer, lecturer or supervisor, and checked by SQA.

**National Units**

National Units are taken at school or college. They cover a wide range of subjects, from Mathematics, Languages, History and the Sciences, to Engineering, Agriculture, and Care. They are available at five levels and can be built up into National Courses and Scottish Group Awards. The five levels are:

- Access
- Intermediate 1
- Intermediate 2
- Higher
- Advanced Higher

**HN Units**

Higher National Units are mainly taken at college. Higher National Units are the components of Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), though they are also qualifications in their own right. Higher National Units cover the knowledge and skills needed for training towards jobs at middle management or technician level.

Like National Units, Higher National Units are devised by SQA (often at the request of colleges, and with their involvement) and have to conform to rigorous, published, quality criteria.

**SVQ Units**

SVQ Units are based on standards of competence which are drawn up by employers. Each unit defines one aspect of a job or work-role, and says what it is to be competent in that aspect of the job. To gain a unit, candidates have to show that they are competent. These units can be built up into Scottish...
Courses

Standard Grades

Standard Grades are usually taken in the fourth year of secondary school. Certificates are awarded on the basis of performance in an externally-assessed exam and, in many subjects, an internally-assessed element involving coursework and projects.

Generally, people progress from Standard Grade to National Units and National Courses.

National Courses

Like National Units, National Courses are available at five levels. At all levels except Access, they are made up of three units (from a range specified by SQA) plus an external examination which covers the whole range of the units and asks candidates to show that they have understood the course content and can apply it to new situations. The examinations are marked and checked by professional examiners. There is no examination at Access level — the three-unit groupings at Access are called 'Clusters:

Candidates are graded at A-C, on the basis of the results of external assessment. Course-work can also be taken into account for those who perform less well in the examination, and there is a comprehensive system of appeals for those candidates who wish to use it.
Scottish Group Awards are coherent programmes of National Units and National Courses. Candidates can use them to follow a sustained programme of study that reflects their interests or furthers their intended career options.

**HNCs and HNDs**

Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas are mainly taken in colleges. They are made up of Higher National Units, and cover a huge range of occupations. Holding an HND may allow a candidate advanced entry into a degree course. They cover the knowledge and skills needed for training towards jobs at middle management or technician level.

**SVQs**

Scottish Vocational Qualifications are based on the idea of job competence, and recognise the skills and knowledge people need in employment. There are SVQs in most occupations, and they are available for all types and levels of jobs, including operatives, craft-workers, technicians and managers.

**PDAs**

Professional Development Awards are qualifications for people already in a career who wish to develop an aspect of their existing skills, learn new skills, or change direction.

Qualifications bring phased out or replaced:
- Short Courses are being replaced by National Units
- National Certificate Modules are, for the most part, being re-badged as National Units, though some will be replaced by new National Units
- GSVQs are being phased out and will not be available after September 2004 — they are being replaced by Scottish Group Awards
- Certificate of Sixth Year Studies will be entirely replaced by Advanced Higher National Courses in 2001
Core Skills are an essential element of many SQA qualifications.
Core Skills are a set of five skills which everybody needs, no matter what their walk of life: Communication, Numeracy, Problem Solving, Information Technology, Working with Others.

From 1999/2000 onwards every candidate's Scottish Qualifications Certificate will feature a detailed Core Skills profile.

A defined level of Core Skills profile is required to qualify for a Scottish Group Award (depending on the requirements of the SGA). Most Core Skills for National Qualifications are embedded in National Units — a matching exercise in which unit content is analysed for Core Skills content is part of the development process. This means that, for the most part, there is no need for Core Skills to be taught separately — they can be achieved in the course of the achievement of units, courses, and group awards. There are also dedicated Core Skills Units which can be taken to make up for any shortfall in Core Skills achievement.

Core Skills are also a component of some SVQs, particularly where the SVQs are used as part of a government-sponsored skills scheme such as Modern Apprenticeships.

SQA is also reforming the system of Higher National Qualifications. From 2001, a defined level of Core Skills achievement will be one of the conditions for achievement of a Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma.
SQA issues two types of certificate:

- the Scottish Qualifications Certificate which lists all the candidate's achievements in education and training up to the date of issue
- a commemorative certificate for any group award achieved
Core Skills are an essential element of many SQA qualifications. Core Skills are a set of five skills which everybody needs, no matter what their walk of life: **Communication, Numeracy, Problem Solving, Information Technology, Working with Others.**

From 1999/2000 onwards every candidate's Scottish Qualifications Certificate will feature a detailed Core Skills profile.

A defined level of Core Skills profile is required to qualify for a Scottish Group Award (depending on the requirements of the SQA). Most Core Skills for National Qualifications are embedded in National Units — a matching exercise in which unit content is analysed for Core Skills content is part of the development process. This means that, for the most part, there is no need for Core Skills to be taught separately — they can be achieved in the course of the achievement of units, courses, and group awards. There are also dedicated Care Skills Units which can be taken to make up for any shortfall in Core Skills achievement.

Core Skills are also a component of some SVQs, particularly where the SVQs are used as part of a government-sponsored skills scheme such as Modern Apprenticeships.

SQA is also reforming the system of Higher National Qualifications. From 2001, a defined level of Core Skills achievement will be one of the conditions for achievement of a Higher National Certificate or Higher National Diploma.
Other services

SQA provides a range of services which derive from its expertise in developing and maintaining a comprehensive system of qualifications.

Customised Awards
Though SVQs, PDAs and the other qualifications in our portfolio will meet the needs of the majority of organisations, we can also offer specially-designed qualifications to meet an organisation's requirements.

Training and Development
SQA runs workshops and seminars on qualifications and on training and development in general. We regularly publish an Open Programme giving full details of the forthcoming events. We can also visit organisations to advise on training and development, and to provide seminars on-site. Education Authorities and others also buy in subject-specific in-service training.

Advice on delivering qualifications
We give advice on setting up and administering qualifications systems both in the UK and internationally.

Testing Services
SQA conducts examinations for a number of Scottish, UK, and overseas bodies.