

Sector Qualification Strategy

Action Plan for Central Government



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Section One

Executive Summary

1.1 The Government Skills footprint

Government Skills, established in 2006, is the Sector Skills Council (SSC) responsible for approximately 800,000 employees across UK Central Government, including employer departments and their agencies and non-departmental public bodies, the Armed Forces and the Devolved Administrations. This includes 500,000 in the Great Britain Civil Service, 27,000¹ in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, 67,000 in Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and almost 200,000² in the armed forces. Civil Service employees work within one of 22 main employer groups, known within government as 'professions', led by a 'Head of Profession' within the Civil Service. For this reason references to employers within the Civil Service refer both to government departments and to 'professions' that operate across departments.

1.2 The context

The central government workforce is unusual for several reasons. Firstly, because it is a part of government, there is an expectation that employers will respond directly to government policies on skills and particularly to the agenda outlined within the Leitch Review of Skills. Each nation responded separately to the Leitch Review and accepted the broad nature of the challenge. Secondly, Central Government is particularly diverse in terms of the range of professions employed. And thirdly, much (though not all) of the workforce is already highly qualified, our focus therefore is on the skills needs development of the professions as well as qualifications. Government Skills will consider how the opportunities offered by the Qualifications and Credit Framework can be used, for example existing training and development offered in the workplace may be able to be recognised through accreditation.

1.3 The approach

Government Skills launched *Building Professional Skills for Government – a strategy for delivery*³ (known as the 'Skills Strategy') in April 2008. The strategy serves as the Sector Skills Agreement for the sector and sets the direction for this qualifications strategy.

Specifically, it addresses the complexity within the sector by putting professions centre stage in 'influencing professional career progression, supporting their members in professional development and aligning attainment of standards in the government sector to standards and qualifications recognised in the wider labour market.' In parallel, it focuses on areas where there are advantages in taking collective action such as an apprenticeship pathfinder (applicable in

¹ , NICS Personnel Report 2006 NOTE: This does not include Northern Ireland NDPBs.

² UK Defence Statistics 2006

³ See <http://www.government-skills.gov.uk/skills-strategy/index.asp>

England only). It also acknowledges the sophisticated training and qualification offer already provided by the armed forces to recruits and notes that there may be examples of good practice, particularly around HE/FE engagement, that would have currency across the rest of the sector.

Government Skills Sector Qualifications Strategy (SQS) sets the direction for qualifications in the Sector and this Action Plan provides detail and context as to the delivery of that strategy.

Our priorities

- Supporting central government professions in considering where to promote take up of qualifications – existing, customised or newly developed
- Influencing HE/FE provision
- Developing the 14 – 19 Diploma in Public Services (England)
- Coordinating an apprenticeship pathfinder (England)
- Supporting departments to increase level 2 attainment rates
- Supporting the armed forces to evaluate pre-entry qualifications

1.4 Moving forward

Since April 2008, we have focussed on establishing a robust infrastructure to support the priorities described above. This includes strengthening the professions and briefing them on the qualifications reform agenda, obtaining sign up from departments to the Skills Pledge, engaging providers to deliver high quality apprenticeships and scoping the focus of work with HE and FE. We are able to use this infrastructure to work in collaboration with professions and employer departments to identify where increased use of qualifications would add value to the sector.

Part A

Section Two

Scope of the SQS Action Plan

2.1 Overall scope of the SQS Action Plan

This plan is for the period of 1 July 2009 until 30 June 2011 and covers England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. It is for use with stakeholders that include central government employers and professions, Armed Forces, awarding organisations and cross sectoral SSCs.

In preparing this plan, the action plans of other SSC/B SQS that cross the footprint of Government Skills have been considered and this plan has been circulated to those relevant bodies. Where our employer groups (professions) are covered by other SSC/Bs in specialist areas, we would anticipate the standards and qualifications for the professional specialism being covered by the action plan of that SSC/B.

Where required Government Skills will work with our employers to facilitate this and where this is not possible or appropriate for partner bodies to meet this aim, we will look to work directly with our employers to meet their qualification needs.

2.1.1 The Central Government workforce

As mentioned in Section 1, Government Skills is responsible for approximately 800,000⁴ employees across central government and the Armed Forces and comprises 15 main and nine smaller employer departments. The five largest are the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Home Office (HO), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Between them these departments employ 80 per cent of the workforce.

Central Government workforce is representative of the large and diverse range of functions carried out within the sector. We have identified 22 main employer groups, known within the sector as 'professions' and summarised in the table below⁵. Approximately two thirds of employees work in operational delivery functions.

⁴ Public Sector Employment Statistics, Quarter 4, 2008

⁵ *Building Professional Skills for Government* identified 25 professions, however further discussions with departments around the provision of Labour Market Intelligence have led us to revise our earlier classification.

Government professions

Communications	Planning
Economics	Policy
Finance	Procurement
Human Resources	Project and Programme Management
Information Technology	Psychology
Internal Audit	Schools Inspectorate
Knowledge and Information Management	Science and Engineering
Law	Social Research
Medicine	Statistics
Operational Delivery	Tax Profession
Operational Research	Veterinary Medicine

2.1.2 Range of provision and types of current qualifications

A range of qualifications are in use in the sector for example GCSEs, A levels, the Welsh Baccalaureate, National Qualifications in Scotland; SVQs and linked apprenticeships; vocationally-related qualifications; professional qualifications and higher education. Other learning and development includes courses offered by the National School of Government, the Centre for Applied Learning in Northern Ireland, Scottish Government Corporate Learning Services and Eliesha in Wales.

2.2 Priorities within the overall scope

2.2.1 Policy and operational delivery

Since April 2008, our approach to qualifications has a clear focus on the developing the Policy Delivery and Operational Delivery that are particular to Government. Policy-making is a core function within government across the UK and the ability to deliver world-class policy is viewed by Permanent Secretaries as strategically important for the Civil Service of the future. It is also a complex skill set, requiring the ability to analyse evidence, solve difficult problems, manage transition through legislation and oversee implementation.

Operational delivery is the largest profession within government and having a skilled operational delivery workforce is key to the government's ability to deliver public services effectively. The profession is also the most diverse in government and as a result requires focussed work to identify where skills needs are comparable and where they differ.

Research by Government Skills produced a maturity model in Autumn 2008 that supports the initial focus on both the Operational Delivery and Policy delivery professions and whilst our strategy involves working with all professions, we will provide particular support to policy and operational delivery during the period of this action plan. Sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 provide further detail.

2.2.2 Devolved administrations

The government policies that are relevant to this strategy are those relating to skills generally and the Leitch Review of Skills in particular. Each of the devolved administrations has issued its own strategic skills paper in the form of *Success through Skills* in Northern Ireland, *Skills for Scotland* and *Skills that Work for Wales*, some of which pre-date the *Leitch Review of Skills* and are under review. *Building Professional Skills* sets out an overarching strategy for the central government workforce within the wider skills policy context and each of the devolved administrations has indicated how they will take the strategy forward through their own action plans⁶. As an example, it is anticipated that the Scottish and Welsh Assembly Governments will put in place their own arrangements for managing the relationship with HE and FE that take account of their respective education systems.

⁶ See www.government-skills.gov.uk/research-and-publications/skills-strategy-action-plans/

Section Three

Methodology

3.1 Agreement of Priority Areas

There are key characteristics of the central government working environment that have a bearing on qualification use and take up and this action plan has been based on the priorities identified within those areas as set out below.

3.1.1 Responding to government policies

As a part of government, employers in the sector have a responsibility to respond to government policies. The Leitch Review of Skills made a compelling case for up skilling and focussed particularly on level 2 attainments and on engagement with the FE and HE sectors. For Leitch attainments at Levels 3 & 4, it has been agreed that the professions within the sector will decide the requirements in line with business need. Whilst the responses to the Leitch Review differ to some extent across the UK, each implementation plan accepts the broad challenge. Building Professional Skills was developed within that context and based on the premise that 'government, as an employer, should follow its own economic policies for the development of human capital'. Our action plan for our qualifications strategy builds on this.

3.2 Existing qualifications

Many of the qualifications used within the sector relate to disciplines and professions shared with other sectors and so fall within the remit of other SSC/Bs. Such qualifications are addressed in the qualifications strategies and action plans of those SSC/Bs.

The qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) that sit within Government Skills footprint are small in number, relate to the Armed Forces and are mainly pre-entry VRQs at pre - entry level and levels 1-3 for England, Northern Ireland and Wales and a level 2 NVQ. Our priority is to work with stakeholders to develop shared units for the Qualifications and Credit Framework that lead, through Rules of Combination, to new qualifications that meet the requirements of the sector.

In Scotland there is a level 2 SVQ, Uniformed and Emergency Services Skills for Work (SCQF level 4) and the National Certificate in Army Preparation (SCQF level 4). In England the level 2 NVQ is part of the Apprenticeship Framework.

From December 2008 to January 2009, we consulted with employer (armed forces) and awarding organisations to review the content and requirements for the sector against the existing qualifications. We also consulted with devolved administrations through our account managers and directly with the Scottish Qualification Authority. Details of those qualifications relating to England,

Northern Ireland and Wales (Annex A) and to Scotland (Annex B) are incorporated in the UK Commission for Employment and Skills Action Plan IT solution. The qualifications listed are those that continue to be relevant and in use. Those that have expired or are no longer required are appropriately indicated.

We worked with the Armed Forces on the content review during February – March 2009 and a consultation exercise in the sector identified common themes across qualification products in this sector.

At this stage, Government Skills is not intending to be a submitting body (although we will keep this under review) and we are committed to working with awarding organisations on the development of units, credit & levelling and rules of combination. In March 2009, we met with awarding organisations that currently offer products in our sector to discuss priorities for the sector. It is planned that this work will concentrate from March 2009 until December 2009, on the development of an occupational qualification for the QCF to replace the level 2 NVQ in Public Services. We also planned to refresh the level 2 SVQ in the SCQF by December 2009. Equally, from March 2009 through to August 2010, work is underway to develop shared units and rules of combination leading to qualifications that meet the VRQ requirements of the sector.

In May 2009, we consulted with other SSCs to ensure that the armed forces qualifications that fall outside of our footprint are included in respective action plans. We will continue to liaise with the other SSC/Bs to ensure that central government's needs are taken into account, rather than duplicate effort by including provision for the same occupations in its own qualifications strategy.

Where suitable QCF units exist that meet the needs of our sector, they will be used within our rules of combination for qualifications in our sector to avoid duplication and provide for transferability for learners.

3.3 New qualifications

In line with our Skills Strategy and the Sector Qualification Strategy, this action plan will concentrate on:

- The development of new qualifications in the Operational Delivery and Policy professions, where there is a demand from employers
- Disciplines that are unique to Government

The Operational Delivery and Policy Professions are the two largest professions and are strategically significant. The Policy profession in particular is unique to Government.

We will also work with the Armed Forces in the development of qualifications for disciplines unique to that sector.

Since April 2008, both Operational Delivery and Policy Profession support teams have been located in Government Skills. These two teams work directly to the head of these professions and specifically support the development of these professions and the development of standards and qualifications where there is a demand.

3.3.1 Operational Delivery Profession

National Occupational Standards (NOS) for parts of the Operational Delivery profession were approved in January 2009; the development had been the subject of consultation with both UK wide employers and awarding organisations. NOS will form the basis of future qualifications in the operational delivery area and during the life of this action plan.

During March – December 2009, it is intended to create a new pathway in the QCF from the development of additional shared units combined with those referred to in 3.2 above. It is expected that this will lead to level 2 Diploma in Operational Delivery for England, NI and Wales for the QCF and a level 2 SVQ for the SCQF. This pathway will provide a qualification for 10,000 people working in Debt Management & Banking. New national occupational standards have been developed for this purpose and consultation has taken place with employers, awarding organisations and SQA.

In January 2009, we produced an occupational map that clearly defines the professional boundaries of operational delivery. This map has also identified 3 main strands for which we plan to develop national occupational standards (NOS): contact centres, processing and face to face.

The development of NOS for contact centres (public services) and processing strands are due for completion in Spring 2010. We will then consider qualification development, where there is a demand. We are collaborating closely with ICS to ensure that work is not duplicated and to consider whether products are suitable for our sector. If there is a demand, we expect to consider development of the face to face strand during 2010/11.

3.3.2 Policy Profession

The profession is an emerging one. NOS were approved in January 2009 and work to develop an occupational map to further inform the profession is planned from June to December 2009.

Following the outcomes of this study NOS for further strands will be considered. A pilot qualification (QCF level 7 Certificate) has been developed to meet the capability and capacity needs of the Northern Ireland Civil Service policy profession. An interim evaluation of this pilot will be completed in September 2009 and the full evaluation will be completed in April 2010.

The outcome of this pilot and the evaluation will inform the qualification offer. If demand is evidenced, it is expected that the programme can be amended to include a module tailored to each UK nation and the relevant qualification framework i.e. how the programme can be scaled up to larger numbers across the UK and how a programme at level 5 can be developed for more junior Policy staff.

Representatives from each of the UK nations have been included in the pilot programme (Scottish Government, Welsh Assembly Government). If this is to be offered UK wide, for Scotland we would need to consider working with HE sector for accreditation due to the level of the qualification.

3.4 Consultation

Consultation with stakeholders in these employer groups has continued since the development of the Skills Strategy in April 2008. This had included reporting back and feeding in by professions and employers through Permanent Secretaries Management Group (PSMG), Heads of Profession groups (subject leads for the employer groups) HR Practitioners Forum (employer representative group) and Government Skills online discussion media ('Huddle').

A desk exercise to collect labour market information (LMI Phase 1) from employers was completed in March 2009. We are looking at ways of building on this to obtain a better understanding of training and qualifications on offer within our employer departments. In November 2008, Government Skills HR Practitioners forum was used as a consultation exercise for this work.

Government Skills has derived information on current qualifications and other learning provision from research conducted for the Skills Strategy for Government (the Sector Skills Agreement), from the Employers' and Employees' Surveys conducted in 2007, and by means of enquiries to individual departments, awarding organisations and providers. A second Skills Survey commenced in Spring 2009 and is expected to conclude in July 2009. We expect this to provide useful data to evaluate progress and inform future planning.

Since April 2008, the Operational Delivery and Policy professions Support Teams within Government Skills have hosted specific consultation meetings for professions to decide the way forward for qualifications development. During January to May 2009, more specific consultation has taken place with HMRC and DWP on the new Debt Management & Banking occupational qualification for the operational delivery profession mentioned earlier. Employer experts will be used on panels to quality assure emerging products.

The Operational Delivery Profession Support Team has set up a Forum, which consists of representatives from HR and the business in the five biggest delivery departments (HMRC, DWP, HO, DfT, MOJ), nominated by their Heads of Profession. Going forwards, this will be the principle working level group, with each department taking a lead (and acting as SRO) for one of the five

projects that will deliver the Profession's workplan. A similar Forum is also in place for the Policy Profession.

Government Skills leads on a pan sector Public Sector SSC/SSB Heads of Standards group that enables all parties to exchange information and ensure that developments are not duplicated. These group meetings are held 2-3 times per year and the next meeting is planned for July 2009. The SSC/Bs members include Skills for Justice, Skills for Health, Skills for Care & Development, Lifelong Learning UK, SkillsPlus. This has more recently been widened to include SSBs e.g. MSC, CfA, ICS and E-Skills to ensure generic skills are covered.

Government Skills is working with other SSC/Bs on standards and qualification projects and has representatives on both steering committees of NOS refresh and a cross sector working group for credit and levelling projects e.g. MSC, LLUK, CfA and ICS. We are also liaising with CfA on development of products in their sector to ensure that QCF units are suitable are imported into our qualifications. We expect this to be concluded in June 2009. We will continue to liaise on NOS development throughout 2009/10.

This action plan has been circulated to HR practitioners as employer representatives and a consultation channel for departments and heads of professions. It has also been circulated directly to the Armed Forces. SSCs/SSBs that cross our footprint have also been encouraged to comment on this action plan. Consultations with employer departments and professions have been through Government Skills account managers for professions.

Awarding organisations have been consulted on the qualifications shown in Annex A and Annex B (see section 3.2) and reflect the position of those qualifications that fall within the sector footprint and will be taken forward for review and development of units and qualifications for the QCF and where appropriate the SCQF.

From July – December 2009, we will explore other qualifications in use in our sector either through our account managers or working with the relevant qualification authorities and systems e.g. Learn Direct in Scotland. For example, Government Skills were approached in June 2009 approached to explore a new qualification in Scotland based on our Operational Delivery NOS.

Further details of consultation in the wider context are provided in Section 5.

Section Four

Summary of outcomes

4.1 The Skills Strategy

Building Professional Skills puts UK wide professions centre stage in 'influencing professional career progression, supporting their members in professional development and aligning attainment of standards in the government sector to standards and qualifications recognised in the wider labour market'.

Each profession completed a self - assessment in October 2008 against a maturity model that covers workforce planning, standards and qualifications and engagement with government departments.

For qualifications, the maturity model enabled professions to review the related national qualification offer, consider the extent to which this meets their needs and determine where there is a need to customise existing or develop new qualifications.

Following the outcome of LMI stage 1 (see 3.4), during 2009/10 Government Skills will work with colleagues from the Cabinet Office and other partners to launch a debate with professions and Departments on a joint strategy for Civil Service workforce data gathering, storage and dissemination by the centre of Government. This seeks to balance the diverse data demands of different professions and the centre with the ability of departments to supply information. The strategy will determine our approach to gathering departmental data about qualifications and to future staff surveys.

4.2 Supporting departments to increase level 2 attainment rates

In April 2007 leaders from central government departments, representing over 475,000 people, signed the Skills Pledge. In response to the skills challenge highlighted by Lord Leitch, they made a commitment to encourage all staff to achieve at least a first full level 2 qualification⁷. The commitment was widely publicised within and outside the Civil Service and Government Skills continues to work with employers in the sector to help them develop their plans and to review annually their progress and commitment. As stated previously, it was decided that the professions within the sector would provide the requirements for level 3 & 4 attainment in line with business need.

⁷ The three devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have developed their own implementation plans in response to the Leitch Review. Similarly, the Northern Ireland Office did not sign because it is intended that many of its functions will, in time, be devolved.

As mentioned in Section 3.3.1, the Operational Delivery profession is a key focus and following the development of an occupational map completed in January 2009, we have scoped the need to import and develop national occupational standards, and if required, support the development of QCF units for segments of the profession that can be accredited towards qualifications.

4.3 Apprenticeship Provision

In response to the commitment in “*World Class Apprenticeships*” to increase the number of apprenticeships offered within the public sector, Government Skills ran an apprenticeship pathfinder across 16 government departments and agencies in 2008/09 in England and Wales and, up to June 2009, 1400 places have been taken up. Government Skills has supported departments to put in place suitable apprenticeship provision and encourage uptake amongst both new and existing members of staff. The highest take up has been in the five largest operational delivery departments and their associated agencies. Most of the apprenticeships undertaken in the pathfinder have used frameworks in Business and Administration, Customer Service and Management/Team Leading. The majority of these have been taken at level 3. The proportion of apprenticeships taken at level 3 has been higher than in the wider economy.

Government Skills inherited the Public Service temporary apprentice framework from the Royal Marines SSB and has worked during 2009 to move this to a permanent framework; this was achieved in July 2009. This framework produces in the region of 1600 apprenticeships per annum and with the introduction of new Public Service NOS in January 2009, will be opened up to a far wider central government audience.

The Scottish Government has its own arrangements for offering Modern Apprenticeships. However, further research was concluded in May 2009 to consider the needs of UK provision and the needs of Scotland. Government Skills has worked with the Scottish Government (as employer) and other Government Departments with substantial workforce in Scotland to explore opportunities. It is proposed to consider a pilot that will support up to 288 modern apprenticeships working with those departments mentioned above.

The Northern Ireland Civil Service has not traditionally offered apprenticeships and is not part of this pathfinder but is reviewing its policies in this area.

The Welsh Assembly Government developed a pilot programme of 10 apprenticeships which successfully concluded in March 2009.

In 2009/10 and beyond Government Skills plans to work with employers to increase apprenticeship numbers further. There will be a focus on increased collaboration between employers on apprenticeships on a regional basis and there will be further exploration of the potential to increase the numbers of apprenticeships being offered to new recruits.

We will respond to changes in the apprenticeships approval system and formulate a strategy to ensure that this is synergised with migrated QCF qualifications and the new apprenticeships blueprint. We will scope requirement for any new frameworks required by our sector.

Government Skills commissioned an evaluation of the pathfinder that took place during March 2009 and the findings will be presented in July 09. It is expected that one of the outcomes will be the development of a support programme for line managers so that in turn they are better equipped to support apprentices.

4.4 Supporting the armed forces to evaluate pre-entry qualifications

We will work with the armed forces to evaluate the extent to which and how the pre-entry qualifications assist students during their initial military training. The Royal Marines began a 12 month study in May 2008 that will follow new recruits in England as they progress through their training. The outcome of this study concluded at the end of June 2009, the initial findings were considered in July 2009 and this will be followed by a detailed review through October to November 2009. We will work collaboratively with appropriate awarding organisations to address any findings that have implications for the qualifications as they are redeveloped for the QCF and the SCQF.

A new occupational qualification is being considered for the infantry that may lead to an apprenticeship. This would be a further pathway developed from the Public Service QCF units mentioned in Section 3.2. Initial discussion with employers took place in April 2009,

4.5 Influencing HE/FE provision

An HE/FE work stream was established in June 2009 in response to the call for a step change in the relationship between government (the civil service, devolved administrations and the armed forces) and higher and further education institutions. As a significant employer, government needs greater value from HE and FE qualifications and more systematic influence over the development of course content and greater coherence between pre- and post-entry education provision to support our commitment as an employer to life-long learning, as part of successful career development. Pilot projects will explore how to influence HE/FE effectively. Through consultation with a cross-government group of professions and central departments, we have identified two initial pilots that focus on efficiencies in the procurement of MBAs and MPAs by government and meeting an identified need for specialist language training. The pilots will conclude in April 2010.

We have influenced the content of the Foundation Degree in Government to ensure that 'Professional Skills for Government' is reflected within the content. This was achieved in collaboration with university providers and the National School of Government.

Government Skills met with QCA June 2009 to discuss the Employer Recognition Programme and will further explore this offer considering cross sector opportunities that may link with Government Skills public sector SSC/B network. This will also be explored for HE provision with Foundation Degree Forward and their EBTA scheme during June/July 2009.

4.6 The Tax Profession

As the lead employer for the Tax profession across government, HMRC has appointed The Association of Accounting Technicians to take forward scoping on whether an HE/FE product is required to accredit the Tax profession training.

4.7 Developing the 14 – 19 Diploma in Public Services

Government Skills is a member of the Diploma Development Partnership (DDP), led by Skills for Justice, for the 14 – 19 Diploma in Public Services in England and due for launch in September 2010. Government Skills is represented at 3 levels: the project team, the employer group and the steering group and is active at each level.

During 2009/10 Government Skills will work with the DDP on the next phase of work on employer engagement and intends to use this structure to raise awareness of the Diploma among government employers, including HR Practitioners in departments and Heads of Profession. See also section 5.2.3.

We will continue to consult with our employers who wish to influence the nature of the component qualifications. As specified within the Line of Learning Statement and criteria these qualifications will address topics such as 'Government and Legislation', 'Paying for Public Services', and 'Developing Skills to Work in the Public Services'. As a stakeholder and partner, Government Skills will continue to feed into the additional and specialist learning element of the Diploma through the Diploma Development Partnership.

4.8 QCF and SCQF Frameworks

From November 2008 to June 2009, Government Skills collaborated with 'Creditworks' (the consultancy commissioned by LSC), awarding organisations, employers to develop a project plan for implementing QCF (England, Wales and Northern Ireland). This considers the short, medium and long term actions or development required to maximise the benefits and flexibility of the new framework. Government Skills also commissioned a unit writing workshop to increase the capability and knowledge of our workforce.

We will continue to develop our wider knowledge of education systems for the devolved administrations. We attended an event hosted by SCQF in March 2009 that provided information on becoming a credit rating body and the Northern Ireland VQ Reform Conference in June 2009. A workshop run by SQA is planned for July 2009 to increase our understanding of the Scottish qualification and funding systems. This will be followed contact with the regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland in September 2009.

As mentioned earlier in this plan, we have reviewed the qualifications in use in the sector and outside of those listed in Annex A and Annex B to seek reassurance that the data is complete and that qualifications across the devolved administrations are accounted for and that all provision is covered. Government Skills have achieved this through consultation with awarding organisations and employers from January to June 2009 and the outcomes are reflected in this plan. Further work will be undertaken during June to December 2009 and we will seek guidance from the relevant authorities UK wide where appropriate.

Section Five

Partner engagement and working arrangements

5.1 Past and future dialogues

This section provides an overview of the engagement activities that Government Skills has undertaken and indicates how we will approach this in future.

In 2008 – 09, the Skills Strategy has already generated a more collaborative culture in the delivery of learning and development, establishing the professions as an important new focus for skills issues. In 2009, it will start to deliver real savings on learning and development solutions through common procurement. The professions will begin to transform the development framework for the great majority of civil servants. The first elements of a core learning programme for key civil service skills will be rolled out and we will begin to build a new relationship with universities and colleges to support the needs of our current and future workforce.

Details of specific engagement are set out below:

5.1.1 Employers

Employers in the sector comprise both professions, operating across departments, and the employer departments themselves. To develop the SQS, we took account of the evidence and views obtained from departments through employer and employee surveys and a training provider analysis carried out in 2007. We also met with senior staff in most government departments, including the devolved administrations, as part of the development of *Building Professional Skills for Government*.

Details of our ongoing engagement that has informed this plan are set out earlier in this document specifically in sections 2.1.1, 3.2, 3.4 and 4.1.1.

During 2008 - 2009, consultation has continued with the Armed Forces on QCF implementation and with DWP and HMRC to consider development of future level 2 qualifications to support the operational delivery profession. Ongoing engagement with professions and, by extension, departments and the Armed Forces will take place throughout the duration of this action plan.

NDPBs make up in the region of 8% of our footprint in terms of staff numbers. Some of those NDPBs have confirmed that they wish to be represented at a practical level by other SSCs (e.g. museums and art galleries). As a small organisation, we need to target our engagement and since early 2007 we have generally relied on departments to cascade relevant information to their agencies and to the English NDPBs with whom they are linked, e.g. making information about our products available to them.

However, in Spring 2009, we reviewed how we engage with NDPBs. For the future, in England, we will focus our efforts on the five largest NDPB employers (approx 37,000 employees). We are also exploring the possibility of adding the Research Councils as a single group to the list above. (All of them are NDPBs of DBIS). They may choose, however, to be represented by other SSCs.

Arrangements in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will continue as before, i.e. we will engage with strategically significant NDPBs. The Account Plans that are being developed during Summer 2009 as part of the new approach to engagement will specifically cover the position of NDPBs for each of the DAs.

5.1.2 Awarding Organisations

As mentioned in the SQS, we held an open meeting for awarding organisations in December 2007 to share work in train around the development of *Building Professional Skills* and to invite expressions of interest in working with Government Skills in the longer term. We also held more specific discussions with awarding organisations around arrangements for awarding the pilot Northern Ireland Civil Service policy skills programme, and around initial plans for redevelopment of the NVQ and SVQ in Public Services in consultation with SQA and specific awarding organisations along with the vocationally-related qualifications used by the armed forces.

In January 2009, we commenced 1:1 discussions with awarding organisations that operate within the sector followed by joint forums in March and April 2009. This was to initiate collaboratively working to implement the QCF in the sector. More specific project meetings will be arranged to support the technical aspects of this work stream. It is our intention to continue these forums on a quarterly basis in a broader context supported by regular 1:1 contact with awarding organisations. This will provide an opportunity for early dialogue on product development. We will also work with awarding organisations, based on our identification of priorities, to tailor existing or develop new qualifications in collaboration with professions. Awarding Organisations have been consulted on their qualification products for the Action Plan database.

5.1.3 Devolved administrations

From Summer 2008 to June 2009, our engagement with the devolved administrations in formulating both the SQS and this action plan has been through Government Skills account managers based respectively within the Northern Ireland Civil Service, Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government, although direct engagement has also taken place with the Scottish Qualification Authority. The account managers play the dual role of implementing Government Skills strategies in ways that are consistent with the policies of their own administrations and feeding the views of the devolved administrations into ongoing Government Skills policy development. As explained in Section 2.2.2, each of the devolved administrations agreed an action plan that outlines how they will implement *Building Professional Skills*. This action plan has been circulated to the gatekeepers for the four nations as specified by UKCES.

5.1.4 Funding agencies and providers

Our engagement with funding agencies and providers has been primarily in relation to the apprenticeship pathfinder that is mentioned in more detail in Part B 1.1. Central government employees are not currently eligible for public funding through streams such as Train to Gain, however following discussions with the Learning and Skills Council, we were able to negotiate funding for the pathfinder in England and parallel arrangements in Wales. We worked with departments to identify suitable providers, particularly in London where we identified a single provider for departments offering apprenticeships in the Greater London area.

During Spring 2009, Government Skills has met with the four university umbrella organisations and one of the FE umbrella organisations. We plan to use the pilot projects mentioned in 4.1.5 to strengthen these relationships and ensure providers better understand the needs of the civil service and armed forces.

5.1.5 Trade Union Side

The Trade Union Side (TUS) is part of Government Skills Strategy Delivery Board that meets quarterly. Additionally meetings take place with the TUS 4 -6 weekly to review progress against the Skills Strategy. We met with the TUS in December to hold discussions on the emerging qualifications strategy and consultation has taken place on specific work streams for example the Skills Survey and Apprenticeship Pathfinder. Following initial discussion in May 2009, consultation on employer engagement in relation to the 14 – 19 Diploma in Public Services is planned to commence during June/July 2009.

5.2 Practical help

5.2.1 Support government professions

We reviewed each profession's self-assessment in **October 2008** against the qualifications aspects of the maturity model and outcomes have been used to identify priority areas for tailoring or developing qualifications. This will lead to further actions around engagement with awarding organisations, higher education institutions and Sector Skills Councils. As mentioned earlier in this plan, our primary focus should continue with Operational Delivery and Policy Delivery.

5.2.2 Collaborate on National Occupational Standards (NOS) and Qualifications

Government Skills is leading a joint project to consider the pan sector need for Commissioning NOS within the Public Sector footprint. Initial work was undertaken by Skills for Justice in the early part of 2009 and this is now being taken forward with Skills for Justice, Skills for Care & Development, Skills for Health and SkillsPlus. The review of the functional map will be completed by end of June 2009. This project is expected to conclude by Spring 2010.

5.2.3 Diploma in Public Services

Government Skills works collaboratively with the Diploma Development Partnership (DDP) and jointly attended central government conferences in March/July 2009 to engage employer support and promote the Diploma in the sector. A stakeholder analysis has been collaboratively developed and an engagement programme is planned through Government Skills account managers from July 2009. Government Skills is working collaboratively with the DDP on the types of Diploma component qualifications that would be most useful to our employers so that we can inform the development of these qualifications. Employer consultation has been directly with armed forces and through the Operational Delivery profession who are the relevant employers groups.

The Diploma is not offered in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Wales is considering how some content can fit into its own Diploma structure.

5.2.4 Establish an employers forum

An employers' forum was established in Autumn 2008 comprising representatives from the big five departments and the Heads of Profession for policy and operational delivery. The forum facilitated discussions about the types of interventions, including qualifications and other forms of learning and development that would address particular skills needs. The first step was a scoping meeting with the employer forum members described above in September 2008.

From June/July 2009, it is envisaged that this group will act as a collective voice across professions and departments to identify the key needs from higher education provision. We will also establish expert panels to facilitate our qualifications approvals process expected to be available by September 2009 (see Section 7).

5.2.5 Evaluate the Northern Ireland policy skills pilot

As explained in Section 3.3.2, we are managing the evaluation of the Northern Ireland Civil Service policy skills programme. The evaluation will cover the fitness for purpose of the content and assessment methodology for the component modules as well as providing a longer term view of value added. This evaluation included consultation with learners that has included control groups to assess the impact of the programme on their skills development. We will use the interim findings to begin to inform discussions with the policy Head of Profession about whether to develop the programme into a qualification offer suitable for accreditation to the Qualifications and Credit Framework across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the SCQF in Scotland the interim evaluation will be completed in September 2009, with the final evaluation completed in April 2010.

We will need to consider the need to engage with HE if this is to become a qualification in Scotland.

5.3 Future engagement

As specified in Government Skills 2009/10, business plan, we will focus on supporting the efforts of partners to implement the Skills Strategy, and measuring and reporting progress. Building on lessons learned during 2008, and the input which partners have made to the Government Skills business planning, we are reviewing our approach to engagement with them. To make sure that we have the closest possible understanding of their views and the issues affecting their work we are:

- working with our partners to ensure that we have the right relationship with each of them; using account plans to ensure that we shape our engagement approach to reflect each partner's needs across the UK; and increasing the priority given to the Armed Forces and NDPBs;
- ensuring that we make appropriate connections at all levels within employer Departments, including both senior business leaders and the HR community. As part of this we are seeking to work with a reference group of Departmental HR leaders, ideally in an existing forum;
- preparing a strategy for the engagement of learners in our work; and
- working to ensure that Government Skills, the Civil Service Capability Group of the Cabinet Office (CSCG) and the National School relate to our many mutual stakeholders in a consistent and coherent way.

Section Six

Risks and assumptions

See Annex C (these apply across the UK)

Section Seven

Monitoring arrangements

Monitoring of Qualification and Non Qualification outcomes is through Project Programme Management methodology used throughout Government Skills.

This is underpinned with specific project plans for both NOS and qualifications developments that tie into the UKCES funding cycle. The Operational Delivery and Policy Delivery Profession Support teams lead on developments in those areas and work with employer departments in determining what is required to meet their needs. Government Skills works collaboratively with the designated representatives of the Armed Forces to support their needs. Regular 1:1 meetings take place and both parties agreed to reintroduce more formal meetings on a quarterly basis from April 2009.

Monitoring takes place at 3 levels: Government Skills Leadership Team, Management Board and Skills Strategy Delivery Board. Government Skills is accountable to the Permanent Secretaries Management Group as the sponsors and funders of the delivery of the Skills Strategy within Government.

All projects within Government Skills have a specific project manager who monitors progress against objectives and actions. A programme manager monitors the overall programme. This includes the development of NOS and qualifications and a NOS/qualifications project steering committee meets monthly to monitor progress against milestones and the long term outputs and outcomes of each project. The UKCES monthly report form is utilised as a monitoring/reporting tool for internal reporting.

Progress of qualifications and non qualifications objectives of the Skills Strategy will be monitored and measured through both the 'Skills Survey' and collection of workforce data which serves as a bench mark for progress and usefulness of qualifications and non qualification exercises. A second skills survey is running through to July 2009 and will provide useful information to inform future plans.

Early intelligence suggests a good response from employees in the sector.

A Peer Review of employer departments is used to review delivery by departments against key indicators for the Skills Strategy for Government. In May 2009, a second review of 20 Whitehall Departments and 3 Devolved Administrations was concluded and the findings will be presented to the Permanent Secretaries Management Group in July 2009. This process is critical to the delivery of the Strategy by Government Skills; both galvanising action by departments and professions and overseeing the performance management of its employer partners.

This Action Plan will be reviewed monthly and the Action Plan IT solution updated on an ongoing basis. A work plan was finalised in April 2009 to ensure that shared units underpinning existing and future qualifications are available on the QCF framework and replace existing qualifications on the NQF as accreditation dates expire.

Government Skills prepared a set of High Level Principles during March 2009 to support this Action Plan and these have been circulated to awarding organisations for comment.

We are developing a formal approvals process that will provide a monitoring mechanism for qualifications and this is expected to be in place by September 2009 pending guidance from Ofqual and TASSC. Once guidance is available and we have a draft framework we will consult with awarding organisations operating within our footprint. This two stage approvals process will facilitate early dialogue with both employers and awarding organisations. In parallel, we are reviewing our quality assurance mechanism.

The risks and assumptions log specifically describes mitigation in relation to this plan.

PART B

Non qualification outcomes

1. Non Qualification Outcomes

This part of the Action Plan refers to non qualification outcomes contained in section 6 of the SQS and the outcomes referred to in Section 4 of this document. These are set out in the matrix in Annex D and is incorporated into the UKCES Action Plan IT solution.

2. Provision of information to funding bodies

Government Skills will ensure that funding streams from UKCES tie in to the revised funding cycles and will collaborate with UKCES to ensure that revised processes are used to meet Government Skills qualification and non qualification objectives. We will ensure that necessary action is taken to ensure that funding is available at required milestones.

Central Government employees are not currently eligible for public funding but see section 5.1.4 of this Action Plan that refers to arrangements with the Learning & Skills Council for the Apprenticeship Pathfinder that is mentioned in section 1.1 above.

3. Qualification Actions and Planned Outcomes

Government Skills has developed a set of high level principles that provide strategic direction for its approach to QCF implementation. The qualifications shown in Annex A and Annex B have been the subject of consultation with the awarding organisations, SQA, Government departments (HMRC and DWP) and the armed forces.

Annex A and Annex B are incorporated into the UKCES Action Plan IT solution and provide the up to date position of current Government Skills qualifications. As such although they form part of this Action Plan, they are not incorporated within this document.

Annex A (QCF) and Annex B (SQCF) and Annex D Matrix of Non Qualification Outcomes are for restricted access on UKCES Action Plan database

tool and are not incorporated in this document.

Annex C Risks and assumptions

RISK	Probability assessment	Impact Assessment	Potential Impact	Control
Change in Government priorities as a consequence of current global economic downturn	M	H	Only eligible for Training to Gain funding through our Armed Forces provision, our central funding for qualifications comes from employers who may have to reduce/ divert this into other areas. Current indications are continued investment in skills development	Plan for higher profile and demand on skills/ qualifications development. Target development and investment to priority areas.
Change in UKCES funding systems	M	H	Ability to deliver on Skills Strategy impacted	Development of partnerships with SSCs to build joint products to reduce cost and increase footprint. Seek employer funding through professions.
Stakeholders do not fulfil agreements and/or contract requirements	M	M	May impact on specific project or project milestones and delay funding or delivery.	Ensure that individual project management and milestones are tracked through PPM systems. Plan and develop contingency and agree with contractors. Develop GS expertise.

Capacity of awarding organisations to meet Government Skills migration priorities to the QCF/SCQF alongside competing priorities	M	H	May affect migration of existing qualifications to the QCF by 2010 deadline	Develop collaborative approach to migration by 2010 within the sector footprint.
Resource implications of effective interaction with QCF	M	M	Not realising the full benefits of the QCF	Utilise support available through LSC/QCA to develop expertise
Loss of internal resource/consultants	M	M	Loss of expertise and resource in relation to systems and projects	Develop continuity plan and knowledge share systems. Develop expertise to limit impact.



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