



Better Skills  
Better Jobs  
Better Health

**Skills for Health**

**Sector Qualification Strategy  
Action Plan 2009 – 2011  
for  
Northern Ireland**

***Final Version***

## **PART A**

### **1. Scope**

This Action Plan refers specifically to the health sector in Northern Ireland; it follows on from, and therefore is not intended to replicate, the Skills for Health UK wide Sector Qualifications Strategy (SQS) and the 2008 Action Plan. It is one of a suite of Action Plans which has been developed, one for each of the four UK countries.

The Action Plan aligns with the Skills for Health Operational Plan for Northern Ireland, the Sector Skills Agreement for Northern Ireland.

It is inclusive of all parts of the health sector in Northern Ireland as described in section 2.1 of the SQS and therefore includes services provided by the National Health Service, the independent sector and the voluntary sector. Broadly speaking the scope of the action plan is:

- Primary care, including General Practitioner services, dental care, opticians and pharmacies
- Secondary care, including physical and mental health services and specialist provision through hospitals
- Other community-based services for example, drug and alcohol services
- Complementary health care
- Health and Social Care Trusts and NHS organisations

Since completion of the SQS in 2007 there have been some additions to the health sector footprint and this Action Plan therefore also includes:

- Therapeutic counselling (from ENTO)
- Optical manufacturing (from SEMTA)
- Optical retailing (from SEMTA)

Skills for Health is mindful that many employees working in health services fall outside of our footprint but that the services provided by these staff are critical to the delivery of healthcare. Examples include estates and facilities staff and those providing catering, third sector management and IT services. Skills for Health remains committed to working in partnership with other sector skills councils and standards setting bodies to represent a voice of these staff groups in developing appropriate qualifications.

In 2007 the main focus of the SQS was those vocational and vocationally related qualifications delivered through further education, with consideration given to how these qualifications articulate with school based qualifications and higher education.

The SQS Action Plan for Northern Ireland set out the priorities, methods and outcomes which will be actioned in Northern Ireland from July 2009 until June 2011. All identified plans will be active for at least some part of this timeframe; longer term actions which demonstrate strategic importance to the sector may not be completed within this timescale but may be evident in this plan. It is also recognised that many of the plans cannot be completed in isolation but will form part of UK wide initiatives, thus this plan should be considered in the context of the full SQS and Action Plans for the three other countries.

#### ***Key Stakeholders***

Skills For Health welcomes the opportunity to work with a wide range of stakeholders as detailed in section 6.2 of the SQS. Those specifically applying in Northern Ireland are included in italics:

- Employers - *Health and Social Care Trusts, independent and voluntary sector*
- Education commissioners
- Funding bodies

- Government departments – *Department of Employment and Learning (DEL), Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)*
- Other sector skills bodies – *Skills for Care and Development, Skills for Justice, Council for Administration, Asset Skills, People 1<sup>st</sup>, Skills – Third Sector*
- Statutory Qualification Regulators - *Ofqual Northern Ireland and CCEA*
- Qualifications frameworks bodies
- Awarding bodies
- Unions and professional bodies
- Statutory professional regulators
- Learning providers

### **Key Policies and Drivers**

- *A Workforce Learning Strategy for the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Services 2009-2014, DHSSPS, April 2009*
- *Success Through Skills: The Skills Strategy for Northern Ireland, DELNI, 2006*
- *A Workforce Learning Strategy for the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Services 2009 – 2014, DHSSPS, April 2009*
- *FE Means Business - Policy Proposals, DELNI, November 2007*

## **2. Methodology**

This Action Plan has been developed at a time when there is whole scale change to the vocational qualifications landscape across the UK. The closure of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to vocational qualifications by December 2010 and its replacement with the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) offers both great opportunity and great challenge to be faced in the lifespan of this Action Plan. Skills for Health intends to utilise the characteristics of the QCF, particularly in relation to the flexibilities offered through the allocation of credit at unit level, to fully meet the aspirations of the health sector described in the SQS.

Whilst it is acknowledged that these changes to regulatory frameworks do not apply directly to Scotland, Skills for Health is mindful of the peripheral impact of such changes across borders; the principle of transferability must remain an uppermost priority.

In preparation for the closure of the NQF, Skills for Health prepared and consulted on the approach to re-developing qualifications for the QCF for the health sector. This took place during 2008 and a working draft completed by the close of 2008, to include a timeline of activities based on groupings of qualifications by subsector.

The following description of the methodology to collect intelligence to inform the content of this Action Plan was done so with our approach to developing qualifications for the QCF and the associated timeline already in working draft.

The SQS is main stream business activity and Skills for Health undertakes dialogue with employers and other sector stakeholders on a continuous, inclusive and iterative basis. This Action Plan has therefore been developed following continuous consultation with sector stakeholders over an 18 month period since the development of the SQS and publication of the 2008 Action Plan.

Additional targeted and focused engagement activities were conducted in the period November 2008 to May 2009.

These activities include:

- Skills for Health Employer Forum Group consultation 2<sup>nd</sup> April where representatives from all Health and Social Care Boards in Northern Ireland attended with representation

from the voluntary sector. Additional feedback was sought from non attendees by email.

- Interviews and small focus groups with sector employers
- Harvesting intelligence from Skills for Health staff
- Dedicated agenda items were tabled at both the March 2009 and June 2009 Skills for Health Awarding Body Forum meetings. The Forum is held quarterly and is regularly attended by those Awarding Bodies with whom we work; actions arising from the SQS form a central theme to these meetings and we will continue to work closely with awarding bodies in achieving these plans. A full list of those awarding organisations can be obtained from [qualifications@skillsforhealth.org.uk](mailto:qualifications@skillsforhealth.org.uk).

Focused engagement activities afforded the opportunity to verify with stakeholders those qualifications strategy activities already underway. Questions were designed to:

- test whether or not stakeholders agree that the overall vision of the SQS still holds true
- identify any additional gaps in qualifications for the sector with potential drivers being local or national skills gaps or policy drivers
- contribute to development priorities for 2009-2011
- start to review the youth agenda for health employers in Northern Ireland

The process harvested a large amount of information which was analysed and compared to information from across the UK prior to drafting the Action Plan. This cross country comparison was an important step in identifying common themes and country specific needs to inform the approach which will be taken to many of the identified developments.

Draft Plans have been through a number of stakeholder reviews to assure the content.

### **3. Summary of outcomes**

Stakeholders were unanimously in agreement with the vision expressed in the Sector Qualifications Strategy for Health (2007). As such they re-affirmed the principles on which Skills for Health has been working to develop qualifications since the completion of the SQS and on which the outcomes listed below are based. These principles, known as the Learning Design Principles state that learning and qualifications should be:

- Developed using robust intelligence gathered in response to employer needs
- Transferable across the UK using National Occupational Standards as the currency
- Constructed of units and assembled into educational pathways to allow maximum flexibility
- Be responsive to accommodate the fast changing landscape in healthcare delivery, best practice and new roles

A full description of the Learning Design Principles can be found in Section 6.1 of the SQS.

#### ***Outcome 1: Qualifications for the Health Informatics Workforce***

A review of Health Informatics National Occupational Standards will be complete by March 2010. Concurrent to the review of the NOS, Skills for Health will scope current educational provision for the Health Informatics community and where gaps exist will seek to work collaboratively with partner SSCs, including e-Skills, and awarding bodies to develop units to populate the Health Informatics educational pathway. By March 2010 units will be assembled into new qualifications or incorporated into existing qualifications to best meet the needs of the Health Informatics workforce.

#### ***Outcome 2: Educational Pathway for Therapeutic Counselling***

The development of Psychological Therapies National Occupational Standards will be complete

by October 2009. These new NOS will then be used to inform the review and development of units which can be used to assemble counselling qualifications which will meet emerging regulatory frameworks. This development is likely to cross all levels of education to build into an educational pathway for therapeutic counselling.

***Outcome 3: Fit for Purpose Dental Nursing and Dental Technician Qualifications***

Skills for Health will respond to the outcomes of the review of educational curriculum for dental health professionals currently being undertaken by the General Dental Council (GDC). National Occupational Standards and corresponding vocational qualifications will be revised accordingly to ensure they remain fit for purpose in line with GDC registration requirements. Skills for Health will work with DHSSPS, training providers and awarding bodies to support the availability take up of accredited provision for dental nurses in Northern Ireland to meet GDC registration requirements.

***Outcome 4: Fit for Purpose Qualifications for the Optical Sector***

The National Occupational Standards for optical manufacturing and optical retail are newly transferred into the health sector footprint. Skills for Health will work with the Optical Sector Steering Group and the optical sector to redevelop existing NQF qualifications for the QCF.

***Outcome 5: Fit for Purpose Pharmacy Services Qualifications***

Based on new National Occupational Standards Skills for Health are working in partnership with Awarding Organisations, the professional regulatory bodies and employers to develop both competence based and underpinning knowledge qualifications for the QCF for pharmacy support staff including Pharmacy Technicians, Pharmacy Assistants and Dispensers including GP Dispensers by 2010.

***Outcome 6: Progression Routes for New and Emerging Roles eg Assistant Practitioners***

Skills for Health recognises that New and Emerging Roles eg Assistant Practitioners are of growing importance in the re-configuration of health care delivery across the UK. There is however, great variation in the scope of these roles and therefore it is not possible to identify a single curriculum.

Skills for Health will seek to work with all partners to develop unit level education from which qualifications can be assembled to reflect the educational needs of the diverse health care workforce and which will support progression into and through higher education. Assigning a credit value and level to the units will support New, Emerging and Transferable Roles in selecting those elements of learning which most closely match their role and will support progression routes from Support Worker to higher level roles across appropriate academic levels through development along an educational pathway. The higher level vocational routes will be supplemented by additional underpinning knowledge qualifications where applicable.

These examples are provided to illustrate this outcome:

**Maternity Roles:** In response to policy drivers across all four countries of the UK Skills for Health is reviewing the educational pathway for support worker roles in maternity services. There will be new underpinning knowledge units to complement units to assess competence in the workplace. Units will be packaged into qualifications and assigned a credit value and level for the QCF to show clearly where the units sit in the educational pathway for the maternity workforce.

**Allied Health Professions:** Skills for Health will work with stakeholders from across the UK to develop units which can be incorporated into qualifications to form progression routes for new and emerging roles within the Allied Health Professions sector and into professional education programmes in higher education.

Healthcare Science: Skills for Health will work with stakeholders from across the UK to develop units which can be incorporated into qualifications to form progression routes for new and emerging roles within Healthcare Sciences and into professional education programmes in higher education.

***Outcome 7: Transferable and Transparent Qualifications Routes in Health, Health and Social Care and Support Services***

Skills for Health will be working with awarding bodies to re-develop vocational qualifications in Health, Health and Social Care and Support Services for accreditation to the QCF by December 2010. Skills for Health remains committed to qualifications which attest to occupational competence and which have transferability and transparency across the UK through the use of National Occupational Standards on which these qualifications will be based. The Learning Design Principles will ensure that the resulting units and qualifications offer the workforce flexibility and progression opportunities which can match emerging career pathways and national transferable roles.

These examples are provided to illustrate this outcome:

Existing vocational qualifications in Health and in Support Services will be integrated into one Health and Support Services qualification thus giving greater flexibility and supporting transition between the clinical and non-clinical support workforce. There will be new higher level units/pathways available for non-clinical support services staff, particularly focussing on first line supervisory management and leadership skills. Where appropriate and in response to the emerging health workforce priorities there will be new units and pathways developed for the children and young person's health workforce and for the emergency care workforce.

A review of Intraoperative Cell Salvage NOS will be complete by March 2010. These NOS will be re-considered for development into units for inclusion into qualifications suitable for the continuing education of peri-operative care practitioners.

Skills for Health will work collaboratively with Skills for Care and Development in re-developing the vocational qualifications in Health and Social Care for the QCF. There is a commitment to continue to recognise the cross sector nature of these qualifications in supporting the growing number of services and roles which operate across the health and social care boundaries. The construction of these qualifications will reflect a 'core' of requirements identified for all workers in the health and social care sector (eg recognition of dignity for service users, communication, infection control) and changing models of service delivery. There will be new units focussing, for example, on self care, dementia care, mental health and children and adolescent mental health services, forming sets of units embedded within the new vocational qualifications.

***Outcome 8: Clear progression routes from schools' curriculum into the health sector.***

Skills for Health will continue to review and develop qualifications for young people within full time education which will facilitate entry into the health sector and encourage progression within the sector.

Skills for Health will undertake this work in a way which takes account of developing national Government policies and initiatives and, in so doing, will work collaboratively with partner Sector Skills Councils and other stakeholders where appropriate to ensure that the needs of the health sector are met. Skills for Health will continue to work with DEL and the emerging qualification and educational policies for young people in Northern Ireland.

Qualifications for young people will be developed in a way which takes account of the wider vision for health sector qualifications and the Learning Design Principles. In addition, qualifications for young people will be developed so that their learning can be recognised when

they progress into the health sector, thereby avoiding duplication of learning.

The importance of high quality Information Advice and Guidance is recognised and Skills for Health will work with stakeholders to ensure that clear, accurate and consistent information is easily accessible to young people and their advisors so that informed choices about qualification and progression routes can be made.

### **Outcome 9: Fit for Purpose Apprenticeship Frameworks**

Skills for Health will continue to review current Apprenticeship Frameworks in line with amendments to qualifications which comprise the framework.

Where there are national changes to a framework template, Skills for Health will respond accordingly.

Where there is evidence that new Apprenticeship Frameworks are required Skills for Health will work with sector representatives to ensure that new Apprenticeship Frameworks are developed. Where these requirements sit outside of Skills for Health remit we will work collaboratively with other Sector Skills Councils to influence the contents of Apprenticeship Frameworks to ensure they meet the requirements of the health sector.

Skills For Health welcomes the statement by DHSSPS in the *A Workforce Learning Strategy for the Northern Ireland Health and Social Care Services 2009-2014* that they wish to seek opportunities through Sector Skills Councils in partnership with the DEL and education providers to explore the contribution to be made by relevant advanced modern apprenticeships which apply to 16-24 year olds, and foundation modern apprenticeships for 16-18 year olds in addition to all age apprenticeships to assist skills development in the sector.

These examples are provided to illustrate this outcome:

Skills for Health will seek to work with e-Skills to ensure that the qualifications outputs arising from the population of the educational pathway for Health Informatics/Information Technology staff may be incorporated into the e-Skills Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks.

Based on sector need Skills for Health will continue to work with DEL, DHSSPS Awarding Bodies and employers to implement an Advanced Modern Apprenticeship Framework for Dental Nurses in Northern Ireland which meets GDC regulation requirements and comprises of accredited qualifications.

Skills for Health will develop guidance materials and tools to support employers in accessing Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks developed by other Sector Skills Councils.

## **4. Partner engagement and working arrangements**

In implementing this Action Plan, Skills for Health will continue to engage with partners through a number of existing groups and established working arrangements. Many of these forums are not specifically convened for the purposes of implementing the SQS but rather the SQS will underpin and influence these forums with the Action Plan becoming embedded as core business.

### **1. Skills for Health Awarding Body Forum**

These meetings are convened quarterly and form a central forum for discussion with all awarding bodies operating within the health sector footprint. Should it become necessary, an awarding body may also request a one to one meeting to address a specific item. Thus Skills for Health maintains a good working relationship with awarding bodies.

### **2. Skills for Health Northern Ireland Employer Forum**

This group convened by Skills for Health meets monthly or bimonthly dependent on need to discuss sector related issues. It is a representation of employers from Health and Social

Care Trusts, and the independent and voluntary sector. This group is the main communication vehicle with the health sector and enables a two way dialogue on numerous issues including the implementation of the SQS and other items such as the youth agenda. It links with individual Trust Learning and Development Groups.

### **3. Skills for Health Learning, Innovation and Development Group**

The purpose of this group is to offer guidance and potentially Skills for Health support in educational developments within the sector. Submissions are considered which may be at any academic level and for use in any part of the education system within the health sector footprint. Its broad remit means that it is a mechanism which allows Skills for Health to influence the nature of educational developments on behalf of the sector and is a route by which the principles of the SQS can be embedded into developments. It is also a route by which Skills for Health can collect emerging priorities. Core membership comprises of Skills for Health staff, however additional stakeholders and other partners are frequently asked to join panels to provide guidance and opinion according to their status.

In addition to these existing working arrangements, Skills for Health has put in place specific arrangements which will be more focussed in delivering the SQS Action Plans:

The Skills for Health Internal SQS Steering Group will play a key role in operationalising the Action Plans within the organisation. It will explore, identify and prioritise Skills for Health work streams arising from the Action Plan, facilitate feedback into the wider corporate agenda and internally monitor progress against the Action Plan. The group will receive intelligence and make decisions relating to new priorities as they emerge.

Skills for Health will convene project groups to deliver on specific outcomes detailed in the Action Plan. These groups will have responsibilities and accountability mechanisms appropriate to the work undertaken and will report to the Internal SQS Steering Group and other internal Executive Groups. Skills for Health will ensure that the membership of project groups will include relevant partners and stakeholders.

## **5. Risks and assumptions**

### **Assumptions**

Skills for Health footprint remains constant

Skills for Health is re-licensed as an SSC

Resources are available to complete projects

### ***Risks & contingencies***

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Likelihood (H, M, L)</b>	<b>Impact (H,M,L)</b>	<b>Contingency</b>
Insufficient internal capacity to deliver	Skills for Health currently employs a team of 10 staff with varying responsibilities dedicated to supporting the development of qualifications and associated agenda, including the requirements to meet our SSC license. Staff	L	H	SfH operates a matrix working structure and will draw on the input and expertise from across the organisation. Succession planning and talent management are central to maintaining internal capacity. Skills for Health would consider utilisation of external contractors/consultants where appropriate. Skills for Health will ensure

	turnover and competing priorities would compromise delivery of the Action Plan.			Executive sign off and monitoring of SQS Action Plans to balance competing priorities.
Failure to engage partners	Skills for Health cannot deliver the SQS Action Plans without successful engagement of partners and stakeholders.	M	H	Maintain open dialogue with all stakeholders and partners using wide variety of engagement mechanisms. Review membership and terms of reference of all groups regularly. Early escalation of first signs of partners disengaging
Insufficient capacity within partner organisations to deliver	Skills for Health is sensitive to capacity issues and competing priorities currently facing partner organisations, particularly awarding organisations	M	H	Maintain open dialogue with all stakeholders and partners to remain cognisant of these challenges. Remain open to amendments in timescales to align with business requirements of partner organisations
Qualifications not receiving public funding	Skills for Health is aware that access to funding qualifications is an issue which impacts on take up and completion	M	H	Maintain open dialogue with all stakeholders and partners using wide variety of engagement mechanisms.

## **6. Monitoring arrangements**

Skills for Health will monitor progress against the 2009-2011 Action Plans on a regular and continuous basis, ensuring that the plans remain fit for purpose and aligned with the changing landscape in which they will be delivered.

Formal monitoring will take place quarterly as part of the core business of the Skills for Health Internal SQS Steering Group. The group will identify appropriate performance measures and will access reporting mechanisms from projects and programmes of work put in place to deliver these plans. Group membership will continuously feed information into the Action Plan in order that it will reflect any changes or emerging priorities.

Other stakeholders and partners will be included in monitoring progress through a number of mechanisms already described, including:

- The Skills for Health Awarding Body Forum
- UK Commission for Employment and Skills liaison meetings
- Project groups convened to deliver specific outcomes eg revision or development of a particular qualification
- Skills for Health Northern Ireland Employer Forum

## SQS ANNUAL ACTION PLAN TEMPLATE

### PART B

<b>1. Provision of information to funding bodies</b>
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Skills for Health will respond to requests from Northern Ireland funding bodies as these arise.
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<b>2. List of non-qualification outcomes.</b>
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<i>These have been completed in the separate web-based tool.</i>
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<b>3. Qualification Actions and Planned Outcomes</b>
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<i>These have been completed in the separate web-based tool.</i>
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