Audit Report

SFEDI Awards

24 June 2026

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1 Background

This was the fifth audit of SFEDI Awards since it was approved as an awarding body by Qualifications Scotland Accreditation in January 2013.

SFEDI Awards is the awarding body for Business Support and Enterprise. The organisation develops and delivers a range of qualifications as a means of enabling those who wish to start or grow their own business and the business support professionals who work with them.

SFEDI Awards' headquarters are in Darlington.

1.1 Scope

Qualifications Scotland Accreditation carries out quality assurance activity in line with its *Quality Assurance of Approved Awarding Bodies Policy*. This states the type and frequency of our quality assurance activities, describes our reporting procedures and indicates how the awarding body's Quality Enhancement Rating is calculated.

This was a scoped in-person audit of SFEDI Awards, principally focusing upon the specific regulatory requirements around the arrangements and resources required to manage and administer qualification delivery and assessment, and the systems and processes which ensure the effective quality assurance of accredited qualifications. Our quality assurance activities are conducted on a sampling basis and, consequently, not all aspects of the awarding body's systems, procedures and performance have been considered in this report to the same depth.

Qualifications Scotland Accreditation audit reports are written by exception focusing only on those areas where corrective action is required or recommended. Consequently, this approach to audit reporting does not detail areas where compliance or good practice was found.

The audit was designed to ensure that SFEDI Awards complies with Qualifications Scotland Accreditation's regulatory requirements namely:

- *Qualifications Scotland Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2021)*
- all *Regulatory Principle Directives*
- the awarding body's Accreditation Licence

Awarding body documentation considered for review by the Audit Team includes all documents banked on the SFEDI Awards SharePoint site at the time of audit and information supplied to support audit activity. Restricted or commercially sensitive information gathered during Qualifications Scotland Accreditation's quality assurance activities is treated in the strictest confidence.

1.2 Audit Report and Action Plan Timescales

SFEDI Awards audit date:	24 June 2026
Audit Report approved by Accreditation Co-ordination Group on:	12 August 2026
Audit Report to be signed by SFEDI Awards:	24 September 2026

The process will apply in relation to the timescales specified above:

- The awarding body will be sent a signed copy of the Audit Report by email.
- The awarding body must sign the copy of the Audit Report and return by email to Qualifications Scotland Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified above.
- The awarding body will also be emailed a copy of the Action Plan.
- The awarding body must complete and return the Action Plan in accordance with the timescale specified above and email this in Microsoft Word format to regulation@qualifications.gov.scot.
- Qualifications Scotland Accreditation will confirm when the Action Plan is appropriate to address the Issues and present it to Accreditation Co-ordination Group (ACG) for approval.
- Following approval by ACG, the awarding body will be sent a signed copy of the approved Action Plan by email.
- The awarding body must sign the copy of the Action Plan and return by email to Qualifications Scotland Accreditation.

The findings of this Audit Report and the associated Action Plan will be published on Qualifications Scotland Accreditation's website following signed agreement.

Qualifications Scotland Accreditation will continually monitor progress towards completion of the proposed actions identified in the Action Plan and update the awarding body's Quality Enhancement Rating as appropriate.

1.3 Summary of Audit Issues and Recommendations

An Issue has been recorded where evidence shows that the awarding body is not compliant with Qualifications Scotland Accreditation's regulatory requirements. The awarding body must address the Issues and specify corrective and preventative measures to address them through its Action Plan.

The Action Plan is emailed to SFEDI Awards as a separate document to the Audit Report and must be submitted to Qualifications Scotland Accreditation in accordance with the timescale specified in 1.2.

As a result of the audit and post-audit activities, no Issues have been recorded, and three Recommendations have been noted.

A Recommendation has been noted where Qualifications Scotland Accreditation considers there is potential for enhancement. The awarding body is advised to address any Recommendations in order to reinforce ongoing continuous improvement. However, measures to correct or prevent these are not mandatory and therefore do not form part of the Action Plan.

Recommendation	Detail of Recommendation noted
1. Principle 13.	A review of SFEDI Awards Qualification Assurance Overview, Version 2.2, September 2025, noted that the Process Overview contained a clear instruction that 'assessment must not be carried out prior to learner registration or centre approval being completed'. As SFEDI Awards had previously identified examples of such occurrences at an approved provider, it may wish to consider adding potential consequences to such instances, such as an increased centre risk rating or potential loss of direct claim status (DCS).
2. Principle 13.	Whilst continuing to stress that returning unsigned evidence remains unacceptable in normal circumstances, SFEDI Awards may wish to consider an alternative approach, that allows both the Internal Quality Assurer (IQA) and the External Quality Assurer (EQA) to annotate evidence confirming its association with a specific candidate in unusual circumstances.
3. Principles 13 and 15.	A range of SFEDI Awards documentation notes that direct claims status is awarded to centres on a qualification-by-qualification basis only. The awarding body may wish to make information on the qualifications that are eligible for DCS available to external stakeholders.

1.4 Risk Rating of Issues

Qualifications Scotland Accreditation assigns a rating to each Issue recorded, depending on the impact on or risk to the awarding body's operations, its Qualifications Scotland accredited qualifications and/or the learner.

Issues recorded during the audit will count towards SFEDI Awards' Quality Enhancement Rating which will, in turn, contribute towards future quality assurance activity. Further detail on how the Quality Enhancement Rating is calculated can be found on the Qualifications Scotland Accreditation website.

2 Detail of Audit Issues and Recommendations

The following sections detail Issues recorded and Recommendations noted against Qualifications Scotland Accreditation's regulatory requirements.

2.1 Issues

No Issues were raised as part of this audit.

2.2 Recommendations

Regulatory Principle 13. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have systems and processes which ensure the effective quality assurance of accredited qualifications.

A review of SFEDI Awards *Qualification Assurance Overview, Version 2.2, September 2025,* noted that the Process Overview contained a clear instruction that 'assessment must not be carried out prior to learner registration or centre approval being completed'.

As SFEDI Awards had previously identified examples of such occurrences at an approved provider, it may wish to consider adding potential consequences to such instances, such as an increased centre risk rating or potential loss of direct claim status (DCS).

This has been noted as **Recommendation 1**.

The audit team were impressed by the approach taken by SFEDI Awards as it sought to resolve a significant loss of candidate evidence, as well as assessment and internal quality assurance records, due to a cyber-attack at an approved centre, with the aim of maximising the opportunity for affected candidates to gain appropriate certification.

In particular, the audit team were impressed by the additional recording of quality assurance activity on an individual candidate basis to supplement the normal EQA processes, as well as convening additional Board meetings, when necessary, to review and endorse decisions around candidate achievement. All of this was available for review by the audit team during the audit.

For example, a sample overview of evidence, completed on 20 February 2026, was found to be thorough in outlining and recording assessment and IQA activity, providing

areas for improvement in centre practice. A number of points were identified independently by the audit team across the sample reviewed on the day, and it was extremely encouraging to note that they had all been clearly identified by the appointed EQA.

An example noted in the overview related to the inclusion of evidence 'where the work has no name' other than 'the naming convention of the file itself'. The EQA stated that the 'centre must ensure that learner evidence is appropriately labelled on the documentation and learners sign and date all work prior to submission'.

In general terms, the audit team fully agrees with the EQA's statement. However, given the unusual circumstances surrounding the submission of this retrospective tranche of evidence, which includes the likelihood that the candidates are no longer available, SFEDI Awards may wish to consider an alternative approach which, whilst continuing to stress that returning unsigned evidence remains unacceptable in normal circumstances, allows both the IQA and EQA to annotate evidence confirming its association with a specific candidate in situations beyond the norm.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 2**.

Regulatory Principle 13. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have systems and processes which ensure the effective quality assurance of accredited qualifications.

and

Regulatory Principle 15. The awarding body must have effective, reliable and secure systems for the registration and certification of learners.

A range of SFEDI Awards documentation, such as the *Diploma in Business and Enterprise Support at SCQF Level 8, Qualification Specification, Version 2.0, January 2013*, the *Quality Assurance Policy*, V*ersion 2.2, September 2025*, as well as the *Direct Claims Status (DCS) Policy, Version 2.2, December 2025* itself, refer to DCS being awarded to centres on a qualification-by-qualification basis only.

Whilst the audit team fully supports the qualification-by-qualification approach, they were unable to note anything that provided a definitive list of qualifications eligible for

DCS. Awarding body representatives noted that such information is internally available to staff.

SFEDI Awards may wish to consider making such information more readily available to appropriate external stakeholders.

This has been noted as **Recommendation 3**.