

The SCQF: Scotland's framework for lifelong learning

A guide for learners, providers and employers



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The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is Scotland's national qualifications framework. Through this framework you can find out about qualifications in Scotland and plan your future learning. An increasing number of organisations, including employers and learning providers, are having their learning credit rated onto the SCQF, so it covers much more than simply mainstream qualifications.

Background

The SCQF supports lifelong learning and can:

- help people of all ages and circumstances get access to appropriate education and training so they can meet their full potential; and
- help employers, learners and the general public to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of learning, and how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

By using two measures – the level of a qualification and the number of credit points awarded for that qualification – the SCQF helps you understand and compare Scottish qualifications. The level of a qualification gives an idea of the level of difficulty. The number of credit points gives an idea of the length of time it takes to complete. One SCQF credit point represents an average of 10 notional hours of learning time.

(When we say 'notional' here, we mean the 'average' learner would take 10 hours to complete the learning which is equal to one credit. Some learners may take longer and others may take less time.)

The SCQF

- describes the courses and programmes that lead to qualifications;
- helps with the development of progression routes; and
- provides opportunities to transfer credit points between qualifications.

The SCQF also provides an extremely important way of recognising 'outcome-based learning' (learning that is related to things that you can do) and 'quality-assured learning' (learning that has been assessed and checked by someone else) in a wide range of settings (for example, learning in the workplace or in the community).

Benefits of the SCQF

The SCQF is at the heart of helping individual learners, learning providers, users of qualifications and policymakers to promote a culture of lifelong learning in Scotland. It:

- helps learners decide how to progress with their learning;
- helps individuals understand qualifications they are not familiar with;
- helps employers understand different types of qualifications and also supports effective development of the workforce;
- helps education and training providers of all kinds to identify the level that has been studied in a particular subject and make it easier to transfer credit points between different learning programmes; and
- recognises a very wide range of types of learning.

SCQF levels

The SCQF has 12 levels. The different levels show the level of difficulty of a particular qualification, with level 12 being the most demanding. SCQF levels are based on a single set of 'level descriptors'. These are the common reference points which provide a way of recognising learning that is outcome-based and quality-assured, no matter whether that learning is academic, vocational, non-formal or informal. The level descriptors outline the general outcomes of learning at SCQF levels under five broad headings known as characteristics.

- Knowledge and understanding (mainly subject-based)
- Practice (applied knowledge, skills and understanding)
- Generic cognitive skills (for example, evaluation, critical analysis)
- Communication, numeracy and IT skills
- Autonomy, accountability and working with others.

These descriptors allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning and allow learners, employers and the public to understand the range of skills and learning that should be achieved at each level. You can find more information on the characteristics by clicking on the level descriptors link on our website at www.scqf.org.uk/the-framework/scqf-levels/.

SCQF credit points

Credit points are a way of showing how much time it takes, on average, to complete a qualification or learning programme. Along with the level descriptors, they allow learners, learning providers and employers to compare different qualifications at the same or even different levels.

Like other credit systems in the UK and abroad, the SCQF works on the basis that one credit point represents the amount of learning achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning time. This includes everything a learner has to do to achieve the outcomes in a qualification, including the assessment procedures.

Credit transfer

In some instances it may be possible to transfer SCQF credit points to other learning programmes to make sure that a learner does not have to repeat any learning they have already completed. Universities and colleges, SQA and other awarding bodies decide how many of the credit points already received from previous learning can be transferred into their programmes. We can provide guidance on this process for awarding bodies evaluating a learner's request to transfer credit.

SCQF credit rating

Qualifications in the SCQF are allocated a level and credit points through a process called credit rating. To be eligible to be placed on the SCQF, qualifications and learning programmes must be based on learning outcomes and assessed in a valid, reliable and quality-assured way. Currently the Credit Rating Bodies are universities (also known as higher-education institutions), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Scotland's colleges and a small number of approved organisations. You can find out more about SCQF Credit Rating Bodies on our website at www.scqf.org.uk/credit-rating-bodies/.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

RPL means recognising learning which has been gained in the past. This could include learning gained through experience, or a more formal learning programme such as a course or qualification. RPL is a general term to describe the processes used to recognise learning from the past. We have developed an online resource called The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Guide to signpost users to a range of information relevant to their needs or interests in RPL. It highlights the different ways in which RPL can be used and tries to explain some of the jargon which is sometimes used. It is designed to support learners who may be interested in using RPL, but also providers of RPL such as colleges, universities, employers, sector skills bodies, awarding bodies or others involved in providing learning. The guide is available on our website at www.scqf.org.uk/more/rpl/.

SCQF tools

We have developed a number of tools to help those with an interest in the SCQF to use it in particular contexts and with specific audiences. The following are some examples.

SCQFfold for Learning – an online toolkit full of resources for school management teams and community learning and development (CLD) practitioners. The kit aims to help school management teams and learning communities understand how the SCQF supports the Curriculum for Excellence and how best to tell teachers, learners, parents and carers about the SCQF.

My Skills, My Future – a suite of resources aimed at supporting young people in identifying the skills they have gained outwith formal qualifications. The pack is aimed at young people who have left, or may be about to leave, school with few or no formal qualifications. However, it can also be used with young people who may have been made redundant from their first job, adult returners or the long-term unemployed.

How to... Employer Guides – a series of three guides to support employers in using the SCQF. The guides explain how the SCQF can help employers understand and describe the skills they need, and support them in understanding how:

- the right skills can support organisational aims;
- the SCQF can help them measure what skills their staff already have; and
- the SCQF can act as a guide to tackle gaps in people's skills.

Scottish and Qualifications Framework Partnership

The SCQF is managed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQF Partnership). Since the company was created in November 2006, it has aimed to:

- make sure that, where appropriate, all assessed learning and qualifications in Scotland are included within the SCQF and help organisations recognise more informal and non-formal learning;
- fully develop and promote SCQF as a lifelong learning tool; and
- develop relationships with other frameworks internationally.

(For definitions of formal, informal and non-formal learning see page 8 of the EQF Case Studies document at www.scqf.org.uk/resources_cats/europe-international/.)

Our members are:

- the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education;
- Colleges Scotland;
- the Scottish Qualifications Authority; and
- Universities Scotland.

The Scottish Government is also an 'observer' on the Board. The Board can also co-opt up to two directors.

SCQF diagram

We have produced this diagram to show the mainstream Scottish qualifications already credit rated by SQA and higher education institutions. However, there is a wide range of learning programmes on the SCQF, which we are not able to show here because of the way the diagram is formatted. For more information, please visit our website at www.scqf.org.uk to see the interactive version or search our database.

