

scqf[®]

scottish credit and
qualifications framework

THE SCQF: A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS



INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) provides a national vocabulary for describing learning programmes and qualifications so making the relationships between them clearer. One aim of the SCQF is to enable employers to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to one another and how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce. In particular the SCQF can be used as a tool to help employers to:

- increase the effectiveness of recruitment;
- improve workforce development.



THE SCQF LEVELS AND RECRUITMENT

The SCQF has 12 levels reflecting the current Scottish system of education and training. Levels indicate how demanding a qualification or learning programme is. Level 1 is the least demanding while level 12 relates to outcomes associated with doctoral level studies. Scotland has many types of qualifications with specific purposes and content to meet the variety of needs. Most of this rich variety of mainstream qualifications in Scotland has been subject to valid, reliable and quality assured assessment and has a known level within the SCQF. The SCQF provides a common language for describing and understanding different types of qualifications and learning programmes, whether primarily knowledge based or concerned with the development of occupational competence or any combination in between. Qualifications within the SCQF are described in terms of their level and by their size, or volume, in numbers of ‘credit points’.

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Here’s an example: Highers are at level 6 in the SCQF. So also are SVQ3s. They both sit at level 6 in the SCQF because, although they differ in their purpose, content and style of assessment, they make a broadly comparable level of demand of the learners. Being at the same SCQF level means that while the qualifications might differ in subject content and the amount of learning (credits) required, they are dealing with broadly the same overall ‘level’ of skills,

abilities and knowledge. Full details of the range of Scottish qualifications can be found on the SQA website www.sqa.org.uk

When recruiting staff, how you specify the level of skill or competence that you need applicants to have is important. Depending on how you put it, you can decrease or increase the pool of potential talent from which to select.

SO HOW DOES THIS WORK IN PRACTICE FOR EMPLOYERS?

Suppose you want to recruit someone for an office job. You might need someone who will be able to pick the work up fairly quickly and be competent over a range of general activities from reception type work to filing, maybe even producing some simple reports. In the distant past you may have accepted a school leaver with 'O' grades. More recently, perhaps you would have taken on a candidate with Standard Grades at Credit level or with Intermediate 2, or maybe a more experienced person with SVQ2 in an administration or customer

service area. Standard Grades at Credit level, Intermediate 2 and SVQ2 sit at SCQF level 5. So do other qualifications. For example, there are National Certificates and National Progression Awards in relevant topics that also sit at SCQF level 5. A job advert that only asks for Standard Grades or an SVQ2 will attract fewer applications than one that calls for qualifications, skills or experience at SCQF level 5. And having more applicants offers you a wider choice from which to find the ideal candidate.

WHAT ABOUT HIGHER LEVEL JOBS?

In many cases you may be seeking someone with a specific type of qualification. Equally, you may feel that what the job needs is someone who is broadly of graduate calibre but not necessarily holding a degree. Bachelors and Honours degrees sit at levels 9 and 10 in the SCQF. If your advert states simply that you need someone with a degree, you immediately narrow the field to university graduates only. If your advert states that you expect to recruit someone qualified to SCQF level 9 or 10, however, you immediately broaden the pool. Now people who have undergone other learning that is recognised at SCQF levels 9 and

10, such as SVQ4, Professional Development Awards or other Higher Education programmes may be attracted, giving you a greater selection from which to pick the best candidates. Of course the subject matter and the breadth of the learning are often important and will need to be taken into account: a short course at Level 9 is not the same as a two or three year programme. An understanding of the meaning of the SCQF levels, however, can now help you tell whether applicants with different awards in the same subject area have undertaken learning at comparable levels of difficulty or not.

USING THE SCQF TO DEMONSTRATE PRIOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Whilst the SCQF can help an employer to understand the various qualifications and how they relate to one another, the Level Descriptors can also be used as a guide in judging a person’s prior learning experiences. By reflecting on their own knowledge and skills, and mapping these against the SCQF Level Descriptors, individuals can begin to explore, and perhaps demonstrate, how their learning from experience can be seen as ‘comparable to’ a particular level on the Framework. Similarly, employers can use the Level Descriptors in the recruitment process, helping them to assess if the knowledge and skills that an individual has gained from informal learning is the ‘equivalent’ they are seeking.

WHAT ABOUT APPLICANTS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES?

Although the SCQF is only for Scottish qualifications at this time, it will soon relate to U.K. and European frameworks via the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), helping you to decide if, for example, an English, Welsh, Polish or Norwegian applicant’s qualifications are at the right level for the job.

This can be important in some sectors such as construction, the oil and gas industries, or travel and tourism. A summary table of qualification types and their location in the SCQF is shown overleaf. More details can be found on the SCQF website, www.scqf.org.uk.

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK



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SCQF Levels	SQA Qualifications	Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12		DOCTORAL DEGREE	
11		INTEGRATED MASTERS DEGREE / MASTERS DEGREE POST GRADUATE DIPLOMA POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	SVQ5
10		HONOURS DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	
9		BACHELORS / ORDINARY DEGREE GRADUATE DIPLOMA GRADUATE CERTIFICATE	
8	HIGHER NATIONAL DIPLOMA	PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AWARD	SVQ4
7	ADVANCED HIGHER SCOTTISH BACCALAUREATE	CERTIFICATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION	SVQ3
6	HIGHER		
5	INTERMEDIATE 2 CREDIT STANDARD GRADE		SVQ2
4	INTERMEDIATE 1 GENERAL STANDARD GRADE	NATIONAL CERTIFICATE NATIONAL PROGRESSION AWARD	SVQ1
3	ACCESS 3 FOUNDATION STANDARD GRADE		
2	ACCESS 2		
1	ACCESS 1		

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Having a workforce that is trained to the right level can not only boost productivity but can also improve job satisfaction and the retention of skilled staff. Employers who understand the SCQF can also use it to develop in-house career pathways that support these goals.

Example:

Many organisations describe employee roles in terms of the skills, knowledge, performance qualities and attributes needed. To be really effective, there needs to be learning and development to help individuals move up or across the rungs of these 'competence frameworks' and to provide recognition of achievement as an individual progresses. By mapping the learning requirements of given roles against the SCQF levels, you can produce a career pathway described in SCQF levels. For example, in a professional business services office, a pathway might look something like this:

- Customer Service Manager (SCQF level 7)
- Professional Assistant (SCQF level 9)
- Professional Service Manager (SCQF level 10)
- Senior Partner (SCQF level 12)

Using the SCQF levels as a guide, it is then possible to select qualifications and learning programmes that will help individuals to develop their competence and understanding as they progress from one level to the next. It is to be stressed that the above job titles and allocated SCQF levels are a guideline only and these may vary depending on the individual requirements of an employer.

It is generally acknowledged that the recognition of employees' achievements can support the retention of skilled staff. Use of the SCQF Level Descriptors to identify and engage employees in relevant learning that is aligned with your systems can support this process.

Knowing the SCQF level that new recruits have already reached through previous learning means you can build from that baseline to either extend their learning and competence at the same level or help them progress to the next. So, for example, the next step for catering staff who already hold the SVQ2 in Food Preparation and Cooking at SCQF level 5 might be to progress onto a Scottish Group Award in Hospitality: Professional Cookery at SCQF level 6.

Using the SCQF to plot a learning and career progression route from new entrant all the way up to senior manager or specialist now means using a simple vocabulary to describe the journey.

TABLE 1: RELATING SCQF LEVELS TO THE TERMS AND EXPRESSIONS FOUND WITHIN JOB DESCRIPTIONS AND PERSON-SPECIFICATIONS

This table gives indications of the sorts of language used within job descriptions and person specifications for roles requiring learning to a given level of the SCQF. The table only sets out to give a flavour of the relationships between SCQF levels of learning and jobs. It is not exact but should help employers clarify which levels of learning match up to which sorts of jobs. The full SCQF Level Descriptors are available from the SCQF Partnership.

SCQF Level	Jobs that require qualifications or learning at this level might use the following terms and expressions within job descriptions and person specifications		
1	Access 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very few basic skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out very few basic tasks with a high level of support
2	Access 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few, very simple skills Knowledge of simple facts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out familiar, routine tasks Work under frequent and directive supervision and guidance and ideas
3	Foundation Standard Grade, Access 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic, routine skills Basic knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out familiar, routine and pre-planned tasks Work under frequent supervision
4	Intermediate 1, General Standard Grade, SVQ1, National Certificate, National Progression Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A few, straightforward skills Basic, mainly factual knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out straightforward tasks Work under guidance
5	Intermediate 2, Credit Standard Grade, SVQ2, National Certificate, National Progression Award	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A range of routine skills Basic, mainly factual knowledge with some theoretical component 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carry out routine and non-routine/new tasks Work with minimum supervision Take on leadership responsibility for some tasks

SCQF Level	Jobs that require qualifications or learning at this level might use the following terms and expressions within job descriptions and person specifications		
10	Honours Degree, Professional Development Award, Graduate Diploma/ Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A few specialised, advanced skills, practices and/or materials ■ Knowledge that covers and/or integrates most of the principal area, features, boundaries and terminology and conventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Deal with a range of professional level contexts, which include a degree of unpredictability and/or specialism ■ Provide professional level insights, interpretations, and solutions to issues ■ Show originality and creativity in dealing with professional level issues ■ Work with others to bring about change, development and/or new thinking ■ Deal with complex ethical and professional issues
11	Masters Degree, Integrated Masters Degree, SVQ5, Post Graduate Diploma/Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A range of specialised skills, techniques, practices, and/or materials ■ Extensive, detailed and critical knowledge and understanding of specialised theories, principles, and concepts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Demonstrate an original and creative response to problems and issues ■ Show substantial autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities ■ Take on significant responsibility, leadership and/or initiative ■ Make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data and/or on issues not addressed by current ethical and/ or professional codes of practice
12	Doctoral Degree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices, and/or materials ■ A range of complex skills, techniques, practices and materials at the forefront of one or more specialisms ■ A critical overview of a subject ■ The ability to undertake critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, information and issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Deal with very complex and/or new issues, problems and circumstances ■ Demonstrate a high level of autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities ■ Take full responsibility for own work ■ Provide leadership to others ■ Make informed judgements on new and emerging issues not addressed by current ethical and/ or professional codes of practice

SCQF Levels 3 and 4

The individual qualified to these levels may have had some work experience or may be a school leaver and should be able to:

- Work alone or with others under frequent supervision and the guidance of others
- Use standard tools and materials safely
- Complete routine, straightforward and pre-planned tasks that demand knowledge and understanding of a limited range of facts about the occupational area or workplace
- Recognise problems and be able to say what the process is to deal with a situation or issue that arises at work
- Use simple communication, numeracy and ICT skills to share information about work
- Participate in the setting of goals and timelines
- Identify their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to work

SCQF Levels 5 and 6

The individual qualified to these levels may either be a new entrant to the workforce as a school leaver or they may have had a few years work experience as a team member in roles at the same or lower levels. They should be able to:

- Work alone or with others with only limited supervision that may mean they have to work autonomously at times
- Potentially undertake some first line supervision of others, particularly in relation to established teams performing routine activities
- Apply a good grasp of the skills and knowledge needed in their area of work
- Take responsibility for solving day-to-day problems that arise
- Use a range of standard communication, ICT and numeracy skills to handle information, some of which may be quite detailed or complex
- Take on some limited management of the resources associated with work that has been allocated to them
- Show awareness of the roles, responsibilities and requirements involved in carrying out work
- Make a real contribution to the evaluation and improvement of work practices and processes

SCQF Levels 9 and 10

The individual qualified to these levels will either be entering a first level professional role after a period in higher education, or will be an experienced practitioner who is starting to take on an increased workload with more responsibility. They will be able to:

- Exercise autonomy and initiative when working independently on professional level activities
- Deal with unpredictability and complexity
- Demonstrate some originality, creativity and insight
- Analyse, evaluate and interpret situations and present solutions that draw on a range of information sources and where judgements may be needed, even though information is limited
- Draw on a broad, detailed and integrated knowledge and understanding of the theories, principles and scope of their occupational area
- Carry out investigations and research into topics or situations that arise within their field
- Take responsibility for the work of others and for a range of resources
- Practise in a way that demonstrates awareness of their own and others' roles and responsibilities
- Use a wide range of communication, ICT and numeracy skills, some of which are advanced or specialist, to support and enhance their work
- Deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes of practice

39 St. Vincent Place Glasgow G1 2ER
T 0845 270 7371 F 0845 270 7372 E info@scqf.org.uk www.scqf.org.uk
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