FOREWORD: Dr Andrew Cubie, Chair, Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership

I am delighted to introduce you to the Handbook for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). This provides an excellent explanation of the key principles of the SCQF and its components. It will prove invaluable to all those with an interest in Scottish qualifications and learning.

Since its launch in 2001, the SCQF has progressed beyond implementation to a stage of further development within a national context. The Scottish Executive's Lifelong Learning Strategy 'Life Through Learning; Learning Through Life' (2003), emphasised the Executive's commitment to resourcing the development of the SCQF to aid greater understanding and recognition of achievement through a range of qualifications and experiences.

The Framework:

- provides greater clarity about the relative position of different qualifications, supporting progression between sectors and providers;
- makes it easier for learners to understand the relative value of learning and credit already accumulated, and how this can be used as a stepping stone to further participation in learning.

Scotland's social and economic development is invariably linked with our learning and training provision, whether in schools and colleges, universities, in the workplace or in our communities. The SCQF can help everyone in Scotland to reach their full potential by signposting progression routes and avoiding repetition of learning. This will maximise Scotland's skills capacity, and therefore our effectiveness in competitive global markets whilst creating a truly lifelong learning culture.

The SCQF is at the forefront of European and international developments, by including qualifications across academic and vocational sectors in a single credit-based framework. Discussions continue with relevant bodies on developments of credit frameworks in the rest of the UK, in Europe and beyond, not only to gain knowledge of other developments, but also to influence where we can.

I am pleased to Chair the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework Partnership, which provides an important locus for working together to ensure the Framework meets the needs of all education and training sectors, employers, employees and all Scotland's learners. This is a tremendous example of a genuine partnership working towards a common goal to ultimately maximise the potential of the SCQF for Scotland.

Dr Andrew Cubie, CBE
Chair of the SCQF Partnership

SUMMARY

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was developed to meet the needs of Scotland's learners and was created by bringing together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework.

The SCQF was developed in partnership by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Universities Scotland and was launched in December 2001. In February 2006, the Partnership was extended to include the Association of Scotland's Colleges.

Following the end of the implementation phase in March 2006, the SCQF Partners agreed that the way forward was to establish a company limited by guarantee and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership was incorporated on 7 November 2006. The Board of the Company comprises the Association of Scotland's Colleges, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, Scottish Ministers, Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Universities Scotland.

The main aims of the SCQF Partnership are to:

- Maintain the quality assurance and integrity of the Framework;
- Promote and develop the SCQF; and
- Maintain and develop relationships with other frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally.

The Board has established the SCQF Quality Committee to advise it on all aspects of the quality assurance of the Framework.

This Handbook provides an overview of the main features of the SCQF and how it may be used to support Scotland's lifelong learning goals. It describes the technicalities and use of the Framework and will be of interest to a wide range of practitioners in higher education, further education, schools, work-based training providers and employers.

This Handbook supersedes the SCQF Introduction (October 2003) and all previous SCQF Guidelines. Volume 1 of this Handbook incorporates the SCQF Level Descriptors; the Common Core Set of Headings; the Credit Rating Guidelines; and the Credit Transfer Guidelines. Volume 2 contains the Guidelines for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

The SCQF Partnership Quality Committee will review the Guidelines on a regular basis and they will be updated as and when appropriate. Future changes to the SCQF Guidelines will be highlighted on the SCQF website: www.scqf.org.uk.

Aims of the SCQF

The aims of the SCQF are to:

- help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other,

and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

The SCQF provides a national vocabulary for describing learning and makes the relationships between qualifications clearer. It clarifies entry and exit points; routes for progression within and across education and training sectors; and increases the opportunities for credit transfer. In these ways it can assist learners to plan their progress and minimise duplication of learning.

Structure and key features of the SCQF

Levels and credit points

Two measures are used to place qualifications and learning programmes in the Framework; level and credit. These are the levels of the outcomes of learning and the volume of these outcomes, described in terms of SCQF credit points.

There are 12 levels in the Framework. Each level increases with the complexity of learning and demand of the learning outcomes and this is described in the level descriptors that underpin each level, and relates to changes in characteristics such as:

- complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding;
- links to associated academic, vocational or professional practice;
- the degree of integration, independence and creativity required;
- the range and sophistication of application/practice;
- the role(s) taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks.

Levels are not directly related to years of study. Over a lifetime of learning individuals can move from higher to lower levels or across levels of qualifications as they take on new learning and acquire new skills.

Each level is described in terms of its characteristic general outcomes under five broad headings:

- knowledge and understanding — mainly subject-based;
- practice (applied knowledge and understanding);
- generic cognitive skills, e.g. evaluation, critical analysis;
- communication, numeracy and IT skills;
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

The SCQF Level Descriptors are designed to set out the characteristics and can be found in Appendix 1 of Volume 1: SCQF Information & Guidelines.

The descriptors allow broad comparisons to be made between outcomes of learning. It is not envisaged that every qualification will, or should, have all of the characteristics set out in the level descriptors.

The positioning of two or more qualifications, or programmes of learning, at the same level indicates that they are broadly comparable in terms of the general level of difficulty. It does not indicate that they have the same purpose, content or learning outcomes. The Framework does not demonstrate equivalence of qualifications.

SCQF credit points are used to quantify the learning outcomes and give them a value or currency. The allocation of credit points is based on the amount of time that an 'average' learner at a specified level might expect to take to achieve the specified learning outcomes. One credit point represents a notional 10 hours of learning time.

Credit points can be used to assist learners to transfer between programmes of learning. However, it is the responsibility of the college, university or awarding body to determine how much credit can be transferred into their programmes. This decision will depend upon the nature/content of the learning for which the credit has been given and the requirements of the programme into which transfer is being sought.

The Framework diagram on the next page, shows the mainstream national qualifications of Scotland within the SCQF. The level, credit points and design features of these main qualifications are set out in Appendices 2 and 3 of Volume 1: SCQF Information & Guidelines. Work is being undertaken to refine the positioning of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and Modern Apprenticeships (MAs) and further information on these qualifications is available on www.scqf.org.uk and www.sqa.org.uk.   Other qualifications and programmes of learning are being credit-rated as the work of extending the Framework progresses.

During 2004/5, SQA began a review and consultation on its portfolio of qualifications which was finalised in March 2006. However, as part of this programme of work, SQA will continue to review existing qualifications in vocational areas, and remove, revise or replace qualifications where it proves necessary to do so. The aim of the review is to ensure a coherent system of qualifications, based on SCQF Level and credit, maximising progression and credit transfer opportunities that is fit for purpose for the full range of Scottish learners.   This work has resulted in new design principles for Professional Development Awards, which will now undergo a period of revision; new or revised National Qualification Group Awards e.g. National Certificates and National Progression Awards; and the development of new Courses within the existing suite of National Courses e.g. Skills for Work Courses. Other Group Awards e.g. Scottish Progression Awards and Scottish Group Awards will be reviewed to determine if replacement provision is needed.

Whilst the current SCQF national diagram does not yet include these developments, qualification descriptors are provided in Appendix 2 that explains the aim, purpose and structure of the qualifications in the SQA portfolio. SQA has also produced its own Ready Reckoner that shows where its portfolio of qualifications is placed on the SCQF with accompanying credit point information. For further information of these developments, and for a copy of the Ready Reckoner, please visit www.sqa.org.uk or contact the Customer Contact Centre on: 0845 279 1000 or email: customer@sqa.org.uk

As the SCQF is further embedded across all sectors of education and training in Scotland, there will be many opportunities for exciting and innovative developments based on the potential of the SCQF to provide a shared national context for this work. It is in everyone's interest to ensure that the needs of individual learners are kept paramount in all these developments. The SCQF website provides up-to-date information on developments within the Framework and this can be found at www.scqf.org.uk.

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

SCQF Level	SQA National Units, Courses and Group Awards	Higher Education	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12		Doctorates	
11		Masters	**SVQ 5
10		Honours Degree *Graduate Diploma/Certificate	
9		Ordinary Degree *Graduate Diploma/Certificate	
8		Higher National Diploma Diploma of Higher Education	**SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate Certificate of Higher Education	
6	Higher		**SVQ 3
5	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade		**SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade		**SVQ 1
3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade		
2	Access 2		
1	Access 1		

*These qualifications are differentiated by volume of outcomes and may be offered at either level.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are currently being credit-rated.
The results are available on www.scqf.org.uk and www.sqa.org.uk.

CONTENTS

1. THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

1.1 Introduction

From 2001, mainstream Scottish qualifications have been brought into a single unified framework known as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). In this Framework, qualifications are described in terms of their level and their credit value as defined by a number of SCQF credit points. These qualifications provide the foundations of a learning and credit transfer framework that is being embedded throughout Scotland's education and training provision.

1.2 The Origins and Development of the SCQF

A framework of qualifications was initially recommended in the Garrick Report (1997) as a key development to the achievement of its vision for higher education. Subsequently *Opportunity Scotland* (1998) put forward a 10-point action plan that included the implementation of the SCQF as part of a Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland.

The aims of the Scottish Executive's *Lifelong Learning Strategy for Scotland* (2003) make explicit reference to the SCQF, which is seen as the means to promote post-compulsory education, training and learning in Scotland. The vision identified for lifelong learning in Scotland was defined as:

"The best possible match between the learning opportunities open to people and the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours which will strengthen Scotland's economy and society" (p33, Lifelong Learning Strategy, 2003).

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework was created by bringing together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework: the qualifications of higher education institutions; SQA's National Qualifications and Higher National Qualifications; and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs).

The SCQF is based on a series of national agreements about the levels of the main programmes and qualifications that characterise the Scottish education and training system. Derived from these agreements, the Framework of 12 levels, ranging from Access 1 (national qualifications) at SCQF Level 1 to Doctorates at SCQF Level 12, was developed. This is illustrated in the diagram on page 7 and shows what these main qualifications are and where they sit within the SCQF.

In 2000, a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) made up of representatives of the main providers, funders and users of Scottish qualifications, was established to help take forward the Framework.

A *National Implementation Plan* was developed in 2003, and an Implementation Group was established to carry out the associated activities. During the implementation phase, several sectors such as Health; the Scottish Social Services Council; Communities Scotland; Scotland's colleges and HEIs became actively involved in extending the use of the SCQF. The implementation period ended in March 2006 and the *National Implementation Plan* can be found archived on the SCQF website.

1.3   Developments since 2006

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, which was incorporated in November 2006, is a company limited by guarantee which has been established to undertake the guardianship of Scotland's lifelong learning framework. It will:

- Maintain the quality assurance and integrity of the Framework;
- Promote and develop the SCQF; and
- Maintain and develop relationships with other Frameworks in the UK, Europe and internationally.

The SCQF Quality Committee:

To maintain the quality and integrity of the Framework, the SCQF Partnership established a Quality Committee to advise it on all aspects of the maintenance and quality assurance of the SCQF. The membership of the Committee, drawn from a wide range of sectors, comprises experts in quality and qualifications frameworks.

The SCQF Forum:

Replacing the Joint Advisory Committee is the SCQF Forum, which has been established to promote the use of the SCQF to support access and participation in lifelong learning. The SCQF Forum is a national committee of key organisations with responsibility for providing or supporting education and training in Scotland.

1.4   The Aims of the SCQF

Within the overall context of lifelong learning, the general aims of the SCQF are:

- to help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- to enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how they relate to each other and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

The SCQF also helps to describe the programmes of learning that lead to the various qualifications; support the development of routes to progress from qualification to qualification; and maximise the opportunities to transfer credit points between qualifications. It does this by making the overall system of qualifications and relevant programmes of learning easier to understand. It provides a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities and helps to:

- make the relationships between qualifications clearer;
- clarify entry and exit points, and routes for progression;
- maximise the opportunities for credit transfer;
- assist learners to plan their progress and learning.

It is intended that those with responsibility for the delivery of education and training in Scotland will use the SCQF as a basis for developing and describing provision. This includes schools, further education, higher education, community education and

providers of work-based learning, who are developing programmes to meet local and national education and training needs. Any short programme, module, unit, or work-based learning has the potential to be credit-rated provided that it is based on learning outcomes, is included within an appropriate quality assurance system, and is subject to reliable and valid methods of assessment.

The SCQF also assists in making clear the relationships between Scottish qualifications and those in the rest of the UK, Europe and beyond, thereby clarifying opportunities for international progression routes and credit transfer. This is exemplified through the alignment of qualifications at higher education levels in the UK. At the postgraduate levels, qualifications are common with those frameworks in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and the Honours Degree levels are considered to be in broad alignment.   Further information on developments with national and European frameworks can be found on the SCQF website (www.scqf.org.uk).

1.5   How the SCQF Works

Levels and credit points

The SCQF uses two measures to describe qualifications and learning programmes:

> • the **level** of the outcomes of learning;
> • the **volume** of outcomes, described in terms of the number of credit points.

Levels

Each of the 12 SCQF levels can be the location of one or more qualifications. Level 1 covers all provision that comes below the full achievement of Level 2. Level 6 for example contains outcomes associated with Highers or SVQ 3, while Level 12 contains outcomes associated with doctoral studies.

Increases in level of demand relate to factors such as:

- complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding;
- links to academic, vocational or professional practice;
- the degree of integration, independence and creativity required;
- the range and sophistication of application/practice;
- the role(s) taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks.

SCQF levels are not directly related to years of full-time study. In some circumstances all or most of the study undertaken in a year of full-time study will be at one level, and progression will be from level to level (for example, in full-time four year Honours Degree studies). However, this is not a requirement of the SCQF — in many programmes individuals are likely to be undertaking courses at different levels in the Framework at any one time, and over a lifetime of learning individuals may move from a higher to a lower level qualification as they take on new learning and acquire new skills.

Each level of the SCQF from 2–12 has a descriptor which sets out its characteristic general outcomes under five broad headings:

- knowledge and understanding — mainly subject-based;
- practice (applied knowledge and understanding);

- generic cognitive skills, e.g. evaluation, critical analysis;
- communication, numeracy and IT skills;
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

The SCQF Level Descriptors (described on page 7) are designed to allow broad comparisons to be made between the outcomes of any learning that has been, or can be, subject to valid, reliable, and quality-assured assessment. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning at each level, but can provide a useful reference point when:

- determining the SCQF level of a qualification or programme of learning;
- designing a programme of learning;
- determining the level of individual units/modules etc;
- assessing prior learning;
- providing guidance/information on learning opportunities/training provision.

It is not envisaged that every qualification or programme will, or should, have **all** of the characteristics set out in the level descriptors. More detailed guidance on the SCQF Level Descriptors is provided in Appendix 1.

The positioning of two or more qualifications or programmes of learning at the same level should be taken as indicating that they are **broadly** comparable in terms of the general level of outcome. It does not indicate that they have the same purpose, content or learning outcomes, nor does it take account of any structural or operational features. **It is also important to note that the SCQF does not demonstrate equivalence or interchangeability of qualifications**. An example of this is that Advanced Highers, HNCs, and Certificates of Higher Education are all at SCQF Level 7. These qualifications have quite different forms of delivery and assessment rules. When programme designers create a qualification they need to think about matters such as course content, qualification descriptors, design principles and the nature of the assessment required, and the SCQF is not directly concerned with any of these.

Qualifications awarded by Scottish higher education institutions, and those awarded or accredited by SQA, have been placed on the levels of the SCQF. The smallest free-standing qualifications (such as SQA Units) and components of larger qualifications (such as university modules) are allocated to a single level. Larger qualifications are allocated to a final or exit level, but will often be composed of components at a number of different levels. For example, an individual who completes a Higher National Diploma will normally have completed Units at two or more levels, while a holder of an Honours Degree will normally have completed modules at four levels.

In some cases, all the qualifications of a particular type will have the same exit level e.g. Highers or Ordinary Degrees. In other cases, such as SQA's Professional Development Awards (PDAs) and Graduate Diplomas/Certificates awarded by higher education institutions (HEIs), will have different exit levels, depending on the level and volume of the units or modules making up the qualification.

The level descriptors provide a general understanding of each level because they relate to all types of learning and qualifications. These descriptors help to shape the cultural understanding of the level of learning outcomes at each of the SCQF levels and are reviewed periodically by the SCQF Quality Committee to ensure continued relevance and applicability. As a national vocabulary and shared understanding of

the SCQF continues to develop, it will be possible to describe qualifications in terms that will be understood by everyone.

QAA have published more specific descriptions of qualifications in Scottish HEIs, and at a subject level there are now benchmark statements for all Honours Degrees (*The framework for qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland*, January 2001).

SQA and individual HEIs will continue to produce descriptions of their own qualifications. These provide useful internal references for programme designers — and key information to prospective learners and their advisers. These descriptions are grounded in the shared, national, generic level descriptors of the SCQF.

The SCQF levels and credit points appear on the SQA's Scottish Qualification Certificates (SQC) and further information can be accessed from the SQA website (**www.sqa.org.uk**).

Credit points

SCQF credit points are used to quantify learning outcomes and give them a value or currency. These general credit points are allocated to outcomes of learning that are subject to valid, reliable methods of assessment.

The number of credit points is worked out on the basis of the amount of learning time that an 'average' learner at a specified level would be expected to take to achieve the learning outcomes. In common with other credit systems, the SCQF works on the basis that one credit point represents the outcomes of learning achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning time. However, this is merely a **guide** and no credit points are added or taken away if more, or less time is taken by an individual to achieve the learning outcomes. No credit points are awarded to a learner if the learning outcomes are not achieved. The relevant awarding body will decide what the criteria for achievement are.

Most mainstream qualifications in Scotland have been developed on a credit basis with design principles related to the amount and level of credit required. For example, the achievement of an Honours Degree requires the accumulation of 480 credit points, at least 90 of which must be at SCQF Level 10, while an SQA Higher National Diploma requires the accumulation of 240 credit points of which at least 64 must be at SCQF Level 8.

SCQF credit points can be used to assist learners to transfer between programmes. The awarding bodies, e.g. SQA, individual universities and receiving institutions, decide the extent to which credit transfer can take place. They determine how much of the *general* credit already achieved is specific credit – that means it is specifically relevant and incorporated into the new programme. It is the responsibility of the awarding bodies to decide how much credit can be transferred.

The SCQF vocabulary of level and credit should allow the process involved in taking these decisions to become clearer, more consistent and more public.

More detailed information on the nature and uses of levels and credits, plus examples of credit transfer can be found within the Credit Transfer Guidelines in Section 5 of this Handbook.

2. LEVEL DESCRIPTORS AND CREDIT POINTS

2.1 The Level Descriptors

The SCQF has 12 levels, reflecting the current Scottish system of education and training. Level 1 being the least demanding and level 12 the most demanding. The descriptors show how each level becomes increasingly demanding by changes to factors such as complexity and depth of knowledge, links to associated academic, vocational or professional practice, and the degree of autonomy exercised by the learner. The Level Descriptors can be found in Appendix 1.

The SCQF levels provide a basis for broad comparisons between learning and qualifications achieved in different contexts, such as the workplace and formal classroom study, and by a variety of modes, but they can only be applied to learning that is based on learning outcomes, which has been or can be subject to valid, reliable and quality assured assessment.

The generic level descriptors have been designed to provide a general understanding of each level, and their development has drawn extensively on:

- related criteria developed by SQA;
- the levels for Courses and Core Skills developed for SQA's National Qualifications;
- earlier work to develop level descriptors for the SCOTCAT Framework;
- the benchmarks developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) for Honours Degrees;
- the level descriptors for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) / National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) developed by the regulatory bodies — Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) for SVQs, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for NVQs.

The descriptors give broad, general, but meaningful indicators of the characteristics of learning at each level. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning at each level. The descriptors can be used in a number of ways:

- to allocate levels to learning programmes and qualifications;
- in validation events for qualifications and programmes;
- as a basis for communication with learners and other users of qualifications;
- as a guide for mapping progression routes within and across the education and training sectors;
- by programme designers when making entry requirements and recommendations for programmes.

To make the descriptors manageable, five characteristics have been identified at each level. These are:

- knowledge and understanding — mainly subject-based;
- practice: applied knowledge and understanding;
- generic cognitive skills, e.g. evaluation, critical analysis;
- communication, numeracy and IT skills;
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

There is no separate level descriptor for SCQF Level 1, which covers all provision that comes below the full achievement of SCQF Level 2.

Where two or more qualifications or programmes of learning are placed at the same level they will be comparable in certain respects, particularly in terms of their overall level of outcome, but they will each have their own purpose, content or structure.

The SCQF does not demonstrate equivalence or interchangeability of qualifications.

Many programmes of learning have grading systems, e.g. SQA's National Courses, HNCs and HNDs, and awards of higher education institutions. The criteria that distinguish grades of attainment are not included in the level descriptors. Judgement on how well a learner has performed, and the grading and classification systems used to report that performance, is the responsibility of the awarding body. The number of SCQF credit points awarded is not influenced by the grade achieved by the learner.

The development of the descriptors was a complex task and involved workshops and consultations with a range of interested bodies in the different sectors. This Handbook contains the level descriptors developed as a result of these consultations, which will be subject to periodic review by the SCQF Quality Committee.

2.2   Using the Level Descriptors

The level descriptors flesh out the levels of the Framework. They give broad, general but meaningful, indicators of the characteristics of learning outcomes at each level. They are designed to help programme designers and the writers of unit or module specifications for most types of qualifications to look at the range of knowledge and skills that might be covered or required, and match the level of learning outcomes to the appropriate characteristics at a particular SCQF level.

It is envisaged that people assigning a level to a qualification will employ an approach that involves: identifying benchmark qualifications; becoming familiar with the distinctions between the levels; and matching learning outcomes against an appropriate level. This is done by direct matching with the descriptors, and by making comparisons with the SQA and HEI qualifications that make up the Framework.

Getting a sense of the distinctions between levels will probably entail a process of moving between levels as a whole and looking at differences in the levels of each of the five characteristics on knowledge/understanding, practice, cognitive skills, communication and autonomy.

It is not envisaged that learning outcomes in every unit/module/course/programme will cover all of the characteristics of a level. The decision regarding what is included lies with the designers/writers of programmes of learning and the aims and purpose of the learning. However, it is envisaged that *knowledge* and *understanding* and/or *practice* — applied knowledge and understanding, will be key to allocating a level to most programmes.

Level descriptors can be used at any stage in the design, development and validation of programmes, courses, units or modules. The intention is for them to be used as a guide to locate the level of learning outcomes, but not to prescribe the content, range, and so on. They are not intended to be the sole reference source either. However, implementation of the SCQF has established that it is beneficial and easier to consider the level of the learning at the design and development stage, rather than allocate level and credit retrospectively.

Communication, numeracy, and IT skills have been included under a separate heading. However, where one (or more) of these skills is the main component of a course/programme, e.g. a Diploma in Computing, then outcomes should be considered under the 'knowledge and understanding' and/or 'practice' headings.

Further information on allocating learning to a level is given in the Credit Rating Guidelines in Section 4.

2.3   Credit Points

Credit is a way of quantifying the volume of learning outcomes. SCQF credit points provide a method of describing and comparing the amount of learning achieved at the same or different levels of the Framework. To be measured in this way, learning must be assessed by a method that is valid, reliable, and subject to appropriate quality assurance.

Credit points are allocated on the basis that the volume of learning outcomes, including assessment activities, in a qualification or learning programme will be related to the amount of time that an 'average' learner might expect to take to complete them. This is called 'notional time' because it does not measure the time actually taken by any individual learner. One credit point represents the learning outcomes achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning time.

This notional learning time should include all learning activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes, including, for example:

- *Attending formal teaching sessions e.g. classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials;*
- *Involvement in informal learning e.g. community groups, community based workshops, youth groups, outdoor activities, trade unions, church activity, playgroups, political parties;*
- *Practical work in laboratories and other locations;*
- *Relevant ICT activities;*
- *Using libraries or learning resource centres;*
- *Expected private study, revision and remedial work;*
- *Practice through gaining, using and refining skills in the workplace;*
- *Being assessed;*
- *Personal programme planning;*
- *Being counselled or mentored;*
- *Reflection;*
- *Work-based learning;*
- *Self-directed study using online or text based open learning materials.*

The need to undertake any or all of these will be considered when credit is allocated to a qualification or learning programme. The mix of learning activities will vary from programme to programme — in school, the learning might be mostly classroom-based; in higher education much of the learning time is spent outside of formal lectures etc. In other situations, much of the learning will be work-based.

In determining the notional learning time involved in achieving the learning outcomes (e.g. in a module/unit, programme/course, or any piece of assessed learning), no rigid allocation of time is implied in this system, particularly as flexible and distance learning develops. As with the allocation of levels, comparisons with the main SCQF qualifications will also be important.

Further information is available on the Credit Rating Guidelines Section 4 of the Handbook.

2.4   Credit, Exemption and the Recognition of Prior Learning

In some cases, the credit points already gained in one programme of study can be counted towards another. The receiving organisation will make the decision on where *general* credit can be specifically counted towards another programme of learning i.e. *specific* credit transfer. This occurs most commonly when the programmes have been designed to articulate. In other cases, credit points gained previously can be used to get exemptions from parts of a new programme if the receiving organisation is satisfied that the content and level of the previous qualifications are compatible with the new programme. These arrangements can help learners who want, for example, to:

- move between faculties in a university or departments in a college, or to move between universities or colleges;
- move from an HNC or HND course at a college to a degree course at a university, or vice versa;
- count learning, for example from a previously-gained SVQ, towards an SQA qualification or towards a degree.

In some cases, the SCQF levels and credit points may be used as the basis of articulation agreements which will allow previously gained qualifications or assessed learning to count directly towards a new qualification. An example of the former would include a case where an HNC or HND can be used in place of the first or second year of a degree programme.

Where credit is given for previous learning, credit transfer has taken place turning general credit into specific credit. The following lists some possible scenarios:

- A learner wishes to start a Post-Graduate Degree course in Management at university A, having previously completed a Management qualification worth 120 general credit points at SCQF Level 11—university A, which is running a research-based MSc, offers no specific credit for prior learning; university B, which offers an MBA at this level, offers 60 specific credit points.
- A learner completes the first year of a Medical Degree at university C and wants to transfer to a science course at university D. The previously achieved learning is worth 120 general credit points at SCQF Level 7, of which most

covers science courses. University D grants 100 specific credit points at SCQF Level 7 towards the new course.

- A learner completes part of a degree in Engineering at university E and wants to transfer to an HND in Information Technology at college F. The learning achieved at university E is worth 80 general credit points at SCQF Level 7, and part of that is on computer-aided design: college F grants 20 specific credit points at SCQF Level 7 towards the new course.
- A learner has achieved a Professional Development Award (PDA) in Engineering Practice: Electrical Engineering at SCQF level 7 and wants to do a HNC in Engineering Practice. The 48 credit points for the PDA Units count towards the HNC and the learner has only to achieve another 48 credit points from Units of the Award structure to achieve the HNC.
- A learner completes the HNC in Social Care with SVQ 3 in Health and Social Care (Adults) and wants to do a BA in Social Work. One university offers 120 specific credit points (the whole of stage one) towards the BA.

There are more examples in the case studies on the SCQF website.

How much specific credit can be given in each case is a matter for the receiving organisation's judgement, based on comparing the outcomes of the achieved learning with the requirements of the new course. In some popular areas there are articulation agreements, which form a kind of case law, but even here the receiving organisation will make the final decision. The SCQF helps promote transparency and consistency in the processes involved in making these decisions.

In some cases, it is possible to recognise uncertificated prior learning by matching it to the outcomes of existing qualifications. In general, this prior learning will need to be shown to have been (or to have been capable of being) assessed in a valid, reliable and quality assured manner. Here, the SCQF Level Descriptors and credit points can provide a guide. The RPL Guidelines form Volume 2 of this Handbook.

Since the SCQF relates only to general credit and **not** to specific credit, the allocation of SCQF credit points to a particular qualification does not imply that these can be automatically transferred to another qualification. Those responsible for designing qualifications are encouraged to make clear where there are opportunities for credit transfer into their programmes of learning, and to specify the level and number of credit points which can be transferred from other programmes.

Credit Transfer Guidelines can be found in Section 5 of the Handbook and on the website (www.scqf.org.uk).

3.   THE COMMON CORE SET OF HEADINGS

The Common Core Set of Headings was produced after consultation with a wide range of sectors of education and training and can be used by institutions and organisations to describe to the public their qualifications/programmes of learning in SCQF terms.

The Common Core Set of Headings can be added to as institutions and organisations see fit.

   a) **Name of Qualification**

   b) **SCQF Level**

   c) **SCQF Credit Points**

   d) **The Awarding Body**

   e) **Aims and Outcomes of the Qualification**

   f) **Content/Design/Structure of the Qualification (including any 'mandatory requirements' or 'conditions of award')**

   g) **Entry and Credit Transfer Routes**

   h) **Progression**

4.   CREDIT RATING GUIDELINES

4.1   General Information on Credit Rating

Two measures are used to place learning, qualifications, programmes, units or modules within the SCQF:

- The level of learning outcomes – described in terms of SCQF levels;

- The volume of learning outcomes – described in terms of SCQF credit points.

The SCQF Framework has 12 levels and Levels 2 -12 have been defined by Level Descriptors which are given in Appendix 1.

Learning outcomes are expressed in terms of a statement of competencies, including knowledge, skills and values, capable of being demonstrated at the end of a process of learning. They include practical demonstration in the work place. The concept of notional time of learner effort is used as a proxy to measure the volume of learning outcomes.

Learning will come from formal contexts like programmes, courses, modules, and units; from less formal contexts in community learning; from work-based learning and continuing professional development; and from life experience itself. If learning can be assessed in a valid, reliable and quality assured manner it can be credit-rated.

Credit rating is a process of professional judgement leading to a statement on the level and volume of learning outcomes. Professional judgement is exercised by those best qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of skill.

The focus of the credit rating process is on learning outcomes and on the arrangements for assessing learner achievement of these. Credit rating is therefore **not** concerned with the quality of any programme of teaching and learning that might be provided to support learners in achieving the defined learning outcomes. Issues of programme design and delivery are addressed through programme approval and validation processes. All credit rating bodies will have quality assurance processes for programme approval, validation, accreditation or other related activities. However, while an SCQF credit rating does not imply approval of a course or a programme, the process will ensure that these quality assurance mechanisms are in place.

4.2   SCQF Credit Rating Bodies

At present SCQF credit rating can be carried out **only** by the Scottish higher education institutions (HEIs); the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and Scotland's colleges. However, beyond the qualifications of HEIs, SQA and Scotland's colleges, the purpose of the SCQF is to provide a national framework for all learning, provided it is based on learning outcomes and has quality assured assessment of learner achievement. It is therefore currently open to other providers to seek credit rating for appropriate learning from these bodies.

Credit rating processes should be established in accordance with the Credit Rating Guidelines set out in this Handbook and with the credit rating body's own quality assurance arrangements.   These processes should be explicit, reliable, valid and

available for scrutiny by appropriate external quality assurance, for example by an external auditing body.

Scotland's colleges, SQA and the HEIs are subject to external accountability; the former through HM Inspectorate for Education, SQA through the Scottish Executive and external auditors and the latter through the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. All are required to have exacting procedures and standards of quality assurance for the process of credit rating.

Work is currently underway to propose a robust and credible quality assurance process which will allow other bodies, subject to full compliance with this process, to carry out SCQF credit rating. Updates on further developments will be made available on the SCQF website (www.scqf.org.uk).

4.3   Shared Confidence

The Guidelines set out below are designed to ensure a shared confidence that:

▪ there are rigorous processes to ensure that the stated levels and volume of outcomes accurately reflect the intended purpose and aims of the learning experience being credit-rated;

▪ there are rigorous, secure and appropriate arrangements for assessing learner achievement against those learning outcomes;

▪ the credit rating is based on sound evidence supported by peer judgement.

It is assumed that while these Guidelines are concerned with the processes required to determine a general credit rating, the principles contained within them will apply equally to the determination of allocating specific credit within particular institutions or awards.

The purpose of these Credit Rating Guidelines is to provide a core set of principles that will enable all users of the SCQF, including learners themselves, to have confidence that there is a consistent approach to determining the level and credit value of learning. They encapsulate good practice developed through consultation.

The focus of these Guidelines is exclusively on procedures for ascribing an SCQF Level and SCQF credit points to defined learning outcomes. Their concern is with the learning outcomes, not the learning itself. They provide an approach to the measurement of the result of learning wherever, whenever, and however it has been achieved.

4.4.   Terminology

One consequence of the inclusion of a wide range of qualifications and levels in the SCQF is the need to recognise that different bodies can use different terms to describe similar processes. The use of words like programme approval, validation and accreditation varies across organisations. Particularly, there are variations in practice between the further and the higher education sectors. The SCQF Handbook supports the development of a common language within education and training in Scotland.

The following Guidelines are the basic requirements but in addition Credit Rating Bodies may wish to augment these processes in additional ways to support their role in credit rating.

4.5   SCQF Credit Rating Guidelines

A.   SCQF Credit Points

Guideline 1

Credit points are a measure of appropriate and defined learning outcomes at a specified level.

The learning outcomes being credit-rated should be set out in explicit statements of what learners should know and/or be able to do as a result of their learning.

Guideline 2

One credit point equates to the learning outcomes achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning time.

The number of credit points to be allocated to a programme is determined on the basis of the notional amount of time an 'average' learner at the level in question would take to achieve a specific set of outcomes. The amount of time actually taken by individuals to achieve these outcomes will vary for example with motivation, experience and ability. Detail on the kind of activities included in learning time is given under Guideline 3.

The allocation of credit points is not one of simple arithmetic but the result of a process involving expert subject practitioners agreeing an allocation. This judgement will be based on: experience; the use of appropriate reference points; credit ratings of comparable sets of outcomes; and the agreed analysis of clear learning outcomes and quality assured assessment arrangements.

Guideline 3

'Learning time' refers to the average time judged to be required by an average learner at a particular level to achieve defined learning outcomes. It includes all the learning activities relevant to the achievement of the outcomes, including the undertaking and completion of assessment tasks.

This includes placement and, where the learning is work-based, time on assessed activity at work that supports the achievement of learning outcomes.

Examples of learning activities include:

- *Attending formal teaching sessions e.g. classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials;*

- *Involvement in informal learning e.g. community groups, community based workshops, youth groups, outdoor activities, trade unions, church activity, playgroups, political parties;*
- *Practical work in laboratories and other locations;*
- *Relevant ICT activities;*
- *Using libraries or learning resource centres;*
- *Expected private study, revision and remedial work;*
- *Practice through gaining, using and refining skills in the workplace;*
- *Being assessed;*
- *Personal programme planning;*
- *Being counselled or mentored;*
- *Reflection;*
- *Work-based learning;*
- *Self-directed study using online or text based open learning materials.*

The mix of these learning activities will vary. In some contexts, for instance in school, learning might be mostly classroom-based while in others, for instance in professional development or the vocational area, much of the learning may be work-based. Informal learning can take place in a wide variety of settings.

Placement periods carry the potential for the award of credit points provided that there are appropriate, clearly defined and assessed learning outcomes that are set against an amount of learning time needed to achieve them. Time devoted to repetition and practice may be considered relevant in defining the amount of credit.

Learning time does not include learner initiated private study over and above that estimated as being required by the average learner. Nor should any prior knowledge or skill required of the learner be included.

Guideline 4

*The minimum number of credit points is **one.***

There are circumstances in which small amounts of time will be appropriate, for instance in some kinds of work-based learning. Other examples can be found in some programmes that offer quite tightly defined units of highly specific content.

This Guideline does not imply that learning opportunities require to be defined in small units; consideration of credit rating can be done on a holistic larger scale. In both further and higher education the amount of time allocated to a unit of learning will normally be greater than ten hours. Neither is it implying that assessed learning taking less time is not worthwhile.

There is no limit to the number of credit points that can be gained at any level by an individual, or allocated to a programme of learning. The determining factor in allocating the volume of credit points is the amount of time required to achieve the specified outcomes.

Guideline 5

Credit points are always allocated at a specified level normally determined by the original design content of a unit of learning.

The content of a unit of learning may be the same for different learners but if the assessment is at different levels it effectively becomes two, or more than two, units. Level is determined by the assessment of learning outcomes and not by any consideration of content. The credit points are always at the assessed level.

The question of virement, e.g. where a course or programme is predominately at one level but units at another level are admitted, is an issue for course or programme design.

Guideline 6

The number of credit points assigned to a unit of learning, or module, is independent of the perceived centrality or importance of the unit within any wider programme.

The number of credit points is based exclusively on the volume of learning. This will be determined by the amount of learning time, in the professional judgement of the designers, that is needed to complete the unit. Where programme designers consider a unit of learning central, it is open to them to make it a compulsory element in the programme and/or adjust the weighting of its contribution to the overall assessment grade for the programme.

Guideline 7

The number of credit points awarded is independent of the standard at which the outcomes are achieved.

This does not preclude normative judgements of the performance of learners in achieving the outcomes e.g. Higher grades, merit or distinction awards, or Degree classifications. It is the outcomes of any process of learning that are credit-rated not the individual performance. However, the assessment process should be such, that there is a threshold that demonstrates that outcomes have been achieved.

B.   General and Specific Credit

Guideline 8

Credit points are general in that they define a volume and a level of outcome within the SCQF. They become specific when related to transfer to a particular programme or to an individual's claim for credit towards a particular programme.

General credit relates to the agreed determination of levels and volumes within the SCQF as a whole. Specific credit is that which is recognised as being relevant to entry to a particular programme.

Guideline 9

Credit points can be transferred.

The allocation of credit points to the outcomes of a particular programme establishes their relationship to a level in the SCQF. They can therefore be transferred to other programmes at that level. This does not imply, however, that they can be transferred **automatically** to another programme. The organisation providing the programme will always make the final decision on the allocation of specific credit.

Credit points assigned to a unit of learning will always maintain their general level; how they are used in constructing learning programmes will be a matter for programme designers. How much specific credit can be accepted by the organisation providing the programme is a matter of judgement based on comparing the outcomes of the learning with the requirements of the new programme.

The SCQF will help promote greater transparency in the decision making process. For example, it is expected that programme designers will increasingly make clear where opportunities for credit transfer exist and specify the number and level of credit points that can be transferred from other relevant programmes.

C.   Levels within the SCQF

'Level' is a statement of the inherent degree of complexity in a given set of learning outcomes.

The Level Descriptors are designed to allow broad comparisons to be made between outcomes of learning. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning at each level but to provide a reference point for determining the level of a programme or unit of learning.

Guideline 10

Allocation of a level to learning is essentially a matter of professional judgement using appropriate reference points such as the SCQF Level Descriptors, relevant programme descriptors, higher education subject benchmark information, the SQA specifications and other appropriate sources of information and guidance.

Characteristic generic outcomes for Levels 2 - 12 are identified in Appendix 1. These are intended to be indicative rather than prescriptive and, similarly, any defined SCQF credit is not required to encompass all five areas of competence. Their application to specific fields of activity will be the responsibility of specialists in these fields, who are best qualified by their experience to make appropriate judgements.

There are twelve levels within the SCQF: Level 1 represents outcomes for learners with learning difficulties; Level 12 contains outcomes associated with doctoral studies.

Each level is described in terms of a range of general outcomes that are characteristic of that particular level. These outcomes are set out in the SCQF Level Descriptors and are listed under five broad headings:

- Knowledge and understanding;
- Practice (applied knowledge and understanding);
- Generic cognitive skills such as evaluation and critical analysis;
- Communication, numeracy and IT skills;
- Autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Increases in level of demand relate to factors such as:

- complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding;
- links to academic, vocational or professional practice;
- the degree of integration, independence and creativity required;

- the range and sophistication of application or practice;
- the roles taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks.

Guideline 11

SCQF levels are not related directly to years of study. They are defined by the extent of demands made of the learner in each of the five broad categories of competence.

For example:

At Level 3 the knowledge and understanding expected would be for the learner to demonstrate and/or work with:

- Basic knowledge in a subject/discipline;
- Simple facts and ideas associated with a subject or discipline;
- Knowledge and understanding of basic processes, materials and terminology.

At Level 6 the learner would be expected to demonstrate or work with:

- Generalised knowledge of a subject/discipline;
- Factual and theoretical knowledge;
- A range of facts, ideas, properties, materials, terminology, practices, techniques about/associated with a subject or discipline;
- And be able to relate the subject, or discipline, to a range of practical and/or everyday applications.

A learner demonstrating the achievement of Level 3 outcomes could have taken a course at Access 3 or at Standard Grade Foundation level. A learner demonstrating Level 6 competences might have completed a Higher or an SVQ3.

D. Quality Assurance

Guideline 12

The credit rating body will be responsible for ensuring that the credit rating process and outcomes are consistent with relevant reference points.

These will include the credit rating of comparable units, modules, programmes or qualifications delivered by the body itself, and any credit rating of other comparable programmes undertaken by the body itself or by other bodies. Reference should be made to existing SCQF credit ratings of comparable sets of outcomes.

The quality assurance framework for credit rating should be integrated in a systematic manner within the credit rating body's general arrangements for assuring quality and standards. It should be part of the core quality assurance system within the credit rating body.

4.6 Credit Rating Guidelines and Processes – For Learning that has been Submitted for Credit Rating by Non-SCQF Credit Rating Bodies.

A. Introduction

The credit rating of learning provided by bodies that do not themselves have the authority to carry out the SCQF credit rating can be carried out by Scottish HEIs, SQA and Scotland's colleges.

The following set of Guidelines apply to the processes used by the SCQF credit rating bodies in determining the credit rating of outcomes submitted by non-credit rating bodies. For the purposes of this document, bodies of this type are referred to as a *submitting body*. These will include a wide variety of education and training providers from both the public and the private sectors. As stated above, processes and criteria for extending the number of SCQF credit rating bodies are under development.

These Guidelines are intended to match the procedures that existing credit rating bodies apply to the credit rating of their own provision as covered by Guidelines 1-12 above.

Greater detail is specified in Guidelines 13 – 27 than in Guidelines 1 -12 since it is assumed that within the credit rating bodies themselves relevant information and procedures will already exist and can be drawn on. The SQA, HEIs and Scotland's colleges are subject to external accountability and are required to have exacting procedures and standards of quality assurance.

In credit rating outcomes from submitting bodies, the SQA, Scottish HEIs and Scotland's colleges are acting as partners within the SCQF and should therefore show as much care and diligence as they do when they credit-rate their own awards. In applying the Guidelines, however, credit rating bodies should also seek to ensure that their procedures are appropriate in scale to the amount of credit being sought and to the body seeking credit.

Credit rating a large number of outcomes might require a greater amount of effort on the part of both parties to the negotiation. Similarly, credit rating outcomes for an organisation previously unknown to the credit rating body might also require more effort than would be needed where there is a history of collaboration. At one end of this spectrum there would be meetings and site visits; at the other, credit rating might be done entirely through the exchange and scrutiny of documents.

There will be a cost to both sides in this process. This will include document preparation and scrutiny and, perhaps meetings and travel. Each credit rating body will require to consider how it meets or recovers these costs.

Credit rating may also be undertaken alongside other processes, e.g. validation or approvals or accreditation, and the credit rating body may wish some additional role in quality assurance.

B.   General Processes to be Undertaken by the Credit Rating Body

Guideline 13

The credit rating body should offer an appropriate person to act as the principal link between the credit rating body and the submitting body.

This person should not be responsible for the decisions on the outcomes of the process of credit rating but could be a member of a credit rating group and be able to offer advice to submitting bodies on the volume and level of credit that might be sought.

Guideline 14

The credit rating institution should establish systematic arrangements for credit rating.

The system should provide for an appropriate panel or group to be formed to consider any application for credit rating. Its role and authority should be aligned with the credit rating body's main framework and arrangements for quality and standards.

The membership of the group should have among them:

- knowledge and understanding of the SCQF, the Level Descriptors and the agreed processes for allocating level and credit rating as set out in these Guidelines;

- experience of credit rating;

- experience of quality assurance including programme approval or review, and programme delivery and learner assessment in the relevant subject area and at the level of the programme being submitted for credit rating;

- knowledge and experience of the level of the subject being considered.

The constitution of a credit rating group is a matter for credit rating bodies. It might, for instance, take the form of a standing committee with external members as specialist advisers, or it might be an ad hoc group of specialists. Whatever the constitution of the group, membership should reflect the level and subject area involved. Establishing a credit rating group has the advantage that it provides the opportunity for non-experienced members to gain experience.

The group that is considering an application requires to be satisfied that the submitting body has a clear and robust understanding of the nature of outcomes it is proposing and of the relationship between these outcomes and assessment.

Records of decisions and key supporting information should be kept.

Guideline 15

The credit rating body should give written guidance on its SCQF credit rating processes and criteria to the submitting body.

This should include setting out in accordance with the credit rating body's quality assurance framework:

- the responsibilities of the credit rating body and of the submitting body, including any arrangements for publicity;

- a statement of what the credit rating body will do and what its requirements are of the submitting body;

- all financial charges that may be applicable;

- the requirements for reporting to the credit rating body;

- whether there are maximum amounts of specific credit that can be awarded and, if so, what those amounts are;

- any conditions attached to the credit rating process, including any under which the credit rating would be withdrawn;

- the provision of an appeals process against the credit rating decision;

- monitoring arrangements after the credit rating decision.

Guideline 16

Opportunities for initial informal discussions about the processes and potential outcomes of the proposed credit rating should be offered.

This can help clarify what is being proposed and offered and can save time and misplaced effort, on both sides.

Guideline 17

The credit rating body should assure itself, as far as is practically possible, of the general good standing of the submitting body.

While not directly relevant to credit rating as such, knowledge of the organisation is, or could be, important to the reputation of the credit rating body and to the public perception of the SCQF.

This **could** include seeking information on:

- documented quality assurance systems;

- any kite marks or other statements of quality awarded by appropriate bodies;

- the maintenance of appropriate ethical standards and practices;

- facilities and support for staff development;

- stability, assessed, for example, through the examination of organisational aims, business plans or staff resources;

- facilities and support for learners.

How much information of this kind should be sought is a matter for the judgement of the credit rating body. The demands of quality assurance should not be such that they are unreasonably onerous either for the credit rating body or the submitting body.

C. Information to be provided by the Submitting Body

Guideline 18

Submitting bodies should provide the credit rating body with a formal written proposal.

This should include a statement of whether the submitting body has sought, or is in the process of seeking, credit rating from any other credit rating body and of any outcome.

It should also include full details of:

- the defined aims and objectives of the learning opportunities, including a statement of possible articulation and progression arrangements;

- a clearly defined set of outcomes for the programme as a whole and each of its constituent parts;

- a clear statement of the coherence of the outcomes in relation to the overall aims of the programme;

- the criteria and processes for assessment of the outcomes as described in Guideline 19;

- the claim for credit rating in terms of the number and level of credit points for the programme as a whole and for each of its constituent parts, together with a detailed justification of the claim.

Additionally, as an aid in understanding the context, though not for use in making judgements on the quality of the learning opportunities, the proposal should include:

- a description of the learning process including the notional hours of learning activity that supports the achievement of the defined outcomes;

- an indication of how the learning opportunities will be sustained and enhanced as a result of monitoring and evaluation.

Information Required on Assessment

Guideline 19

Documented evidence on assessment processes must be submitted to the credit rating body.

SCQF credit rating bodies will require documented evidence from submitting bodies that includes:

- the principles, procedures and processes of the assessment of outcomes. These should be explicit, valid and reliable and involve appropriate elements of external quality assurance procedures beyond the submitting body's delivering staff;

- evidence that the assessment criteria and processes are appropriate to the defined learning outcomes;

- evidence that the assessment arrangements are as secure as they can practically be against plagiarism, cheating and other forms of fraud;

- effective procedures for approving, supervising and reviewing assessment strategies and assessment decisions, including taking into account views and recommendations from external person(s) used in the quality assurance procedures;

- clear criteria for marking assessments, particularly for distinguishing a pass/fail;

- the arrangements for re-examination/assessment;

- details showing the appropriateness, effectiveness and rigour of any system of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning or Accreditation of Prior Formal Learning in order to ensure that learners have demonstrated achievement of the outcomes;

- methods of proper and secure recording of learner achievement including the issuing of formal records, transcripts or certificates.

External Evaluation of the Assessment of Outcomes

A key aspect of credit rating, from the point of view of the credit rating body, is ensuring that due regard is paid to the role of external judgements and monitoring of the submitting body's assessment procedures. Therefore credit rating bodies will require evidence from the submitting body that appropriate external evaluations will be made regarding the assessment of outcomes. This will include evaluation both of the validity of the judgements made and of the appropriateness of the assessment instrument(s) in relation to the specified outcomes.

Guideline 20

The assessment system of a submitting body that results in the award of credit points to a programme of learning should be subject to external assessment.

The submitting body must have an explicit policy on, and arrangements for, the appointment of external person(s). This policy should ensure that external roles are clear and that external person(s) are fully informed of and fully competent to carry out their roles. It is a matter for the discretion of the credit rating body whether it should require to give prior approval for any such appointments.

Periodic reports from external assessors/verifiers, auditors, examiners or evaluators should include:

- whether or not the assessment processes and criteria have been applied consistently and remain appropriate to the achievement of the defined outcomes;

- when a programme is delivered, whether learners have achieved the outcomes e.g. through the endorsement of pass lists or other records of achievement.

External person(s) may have other roles to fulfil within the quality assurance arrangements of the submitting body but they must include the above for SCQF credit rating purposes.

Guideline 21

Certificates of SCQF credit gained, issued to learners should specify the credit rating body.

Certificates awarded to learners for the achievement of learning that has been credit-rated should clearly identify the credit rating body either by title or by use of a logo or by both. Credit rating bodies are free to use the SCQF logo on the certificate if they wish to do so.

D.   Outcomes of Credit Rating Decisions and Monitoring

There are four possible outcomes of the credit rating process:

- to credit-rate unconditionally;

- to credit-rate conditionally;

- to defer a decision on credit rating, subject to amendments being made to the proposal;

- to decline to credit-rate.

If credit rating is not granted, submitting bodies may be given the opportunity to submit revised proposals. Some credit rating bodies may not wish to credit-rate programmes without some form of additional quality assurance relationship with the submitting body.

Guideline 22

The credit rating body should specify the maximum duration of the credit rating before review.

The maximum duration of credit rating before review should be 5 years. It is open to a credit rating body to specify a lesser amount of time if it thinks that more appropriate e.g. if its relationship with the submitting body is new or if the nature of the outcomes is liable to more rapid change.

Guideline 23

The credit rating body should clarify the distinction between general and specific credit and explicitly identify the nature of the credit being considered.

General credit is assigned in relation to the volume of outcome and the SCQF level; specific credit is defined by its relationship to a course, programme or module offered by an awarding body. Credit rating bodies should make it clear whether the credit is general or specific. It is open to the credit rating body to assign both general and specific credit to learning outcomes.

Guideline 24

Any conditions should be defined by the credit rating body.

If the credit rating is conditional on changes being made, the requirements for this should be clearly defined by the credit rating body along with the timescale within which they have to be met. Some conditions may require to be met before a credit rating can be allocated. Others may require to be met through the submitting body's normal monitoring, evaluation and review procedures within a specified timescale. It will be a requirement of the submitting body that its response to such conditions will be reported to the credit rating body at an appropriate time.

Actions Required of the Credit Rating Body:

Guideline 25

The credit rating process and its results should be reported to the credit rating body's system of government and copied to the submitting body.

The credit rating process should lead to:

- a report to the credit rating body's normal quality assurance system confirming that the process documented in the guidance to submitters has been used. This may involve appropriate records of evidence gathered and considered;

- a statement on the decisions reached;

The statement of decisions should include:

- the number and level of credit points;

- the duration of the credit rating;

- any conditions or special requirements attached to the credit rating;

- the requirements for monitoring and review of the credit rating;

The period set for review of the credit rating should take account of:

- the expected currency of the competences being credit-rated;

- the degree of confidence the credit rating body has in the submitting body; where the submitting body is new or unknown to the credit rating body it will be open to the credit rating body to limit the period set for approval.

It is for each credit rating body to decide how active its engagement in monitoring arrangements for assessment should be.

This statement should be copied to the submitting body.

The credit rating body should keep a record of credit rating decisions. This should be available for scrutiny by the credit rating body's own quality assurance system.

Actions Required of the Submitting Body:

Guideline 26

Regular reports should be submitted to the credit rating body.

Reports to the credit rating body should include:

- any proposed major or minor changes in the outcomes expected;

- external examiners/evaluators reports.

It is open to credit rating bodies to specify any additional requirements, such as details of the number of learners achieving the outcomes, that they consider appropriate.

Reports should normally be submitted annually but in some circumstances might be expected more frequently e.g. where the credit-rated programme is short or has a limited life or where the credit rating body has limited experience of the submitting body.

Guideline 27

Submitting bodies should explain their credit ratings to their learners.

These Guidelines have been written as a business document, to provide a basis for a business-to-business transaction. It is important that learners should understand the meaning of the credit rating of their learning and submitting bodies should therefore explain this to them.

5.   CREDIT TRANSFER GUIDELINES

Guideline 9 in Section 4 referred to Credit Transfer. This next section will deal with the Credit Transfer Guidelines in more detail.

In principle, credit can be transferred only if it already exists i.e. has been awarded as the result of a credit rating judgement by an SCQF credit rating body.

Credit can be given to learning based on a wide range of activities, such as:

* learning that has previously been assessed and certificated, although not by the organisation from which recognition is being sought;

* learning that has taken place at some time prior to the educational experience that a learner is about to embark on or with which they are engaged;

* learning that occurs concurrent to that educational experience, but is not a formal part of that experience;

* learning that occurred or occurs through experience and reflection, but not part of a formal learning programme;

* work or community based learning that has not been previously assessed.

The award of credit to an individual **always** requires assessment of learning outcomes based on procedures that meet nationally agreed quality assurance standards. For Guidelines on credit for learning that has not been previously assessed please refer to Volume 2 on RPL.

5.1   Using these Guidelines

These Guidelines have been written as general statements of principles and procedures, applicable at any level of the SCQF. The SCQF aims to facilitate and promote the development of competences and, to have these recognised and used in the development of further competence. Learners who can demonstrate competence should be able to expect not to undergo further education and training at the same level in relation to that particular competence.

How the Guidelines are applied in practice will depend on professional judgements, for example, on the scale of the credit points being transferred. A small volume of credit points offered to a limited number of applicants can be expected to be handled with a lighter touch than where credit transfer is central to an organisation's mainstream activity. The Guidelines are intended to be used as a support, not a strait jacket.

Nor are organisations required to provide for the transfer of credit in any or all of their provision. It is for the organisation receiving any application for the transfer of credit to decide whether and what weight to give it. The receiving organisation knows its business best.

Many organisations will establish specific articulation arrangements that will enable credit to be transferred within previously agreed rules. These Guidelines will assist

the development of such arrangements. There will also be circumstances where **individuals** bring to organisations certificates of credit gained outwith the SCQF. Again, these Guidelines are intended to assist the transparency and quality of the individual transfer of credit.

Finally, the Guidelines are intended **not** to be onerous. Any organisation with quality assurance procedures in place should be able to identify, readily, how these procedures fit the Guidelines.

The key focus of credit transfer decisions should be on the benefit for learners and on support for effective learning pathways. Transparency in credit recognition and transfer decision-making across the education system is a critical factor in supporting and encouraging the ongoing involvement of learners in education and training.

In these Guidelines the term 'organisation' is used rather than words like 'institution'. The Guidelines are for use in any form of education or training, formal and informal, in schools, colleges and universities, in professional bodies, in business and industry and the community. The term 'education' is used to include all forms of provision for learning. The term 'learner' is used in preference to other terms that might imply a more limited definition.

5.2   Credit Transfer Guideline 1

Procedures for the transfer of credit should be embedded in general good practice in assuring quality and standards.

General principles that apply to arrangements within an organisation for considering and determining the outcomes of applications for the recognition of credit should include:

- policies and procedures that are explicit and fair and applied consistently;

- policies and procedures that assist an organisation to demonstrate it exercises properly its responsibility for the standards of all awards granted in its name;

- policies and procedures that are monitored and reviewed;

- clear definitions of the roles and responsibilities of staff, applicants and learners, and the expectation that staff should be competent to undertake their responsibilities;

- information to potential applicants, existing learners and staff that is clear, explicit and accessible;

- appropriate support for potential or existing learners.

Credit transfer processes should facilitate access and promote new learning opportunities without compromising the quality or standards of qualifications.

5.3 Credit Transfer Guideline 2

Policies, procedures and information available to potential applicants, existing learners and staff should be clear, explicit and accessible.

Policies, procedures and the information made available might include:

- when a claim for the credit transfer of learning can be made;

- the nature of any support and advice available to applicants;

- how a claim will be assessed;

- statements of minimum and maximum amounts of credit that may be awarded and of the 'shelf life' of learning outcomes;

- how a successful application for credit transfer will affect the learner's standing on a programme;

- how recognised credit will affect the availability of any potential awards or qualifications;

- how applications for credit transfer should be presented and submitted, including the scope and nature of the evidence that will be required to support the application, and any time limits applied to the currency of evidence;

- the requirements of professional and regulatory bodies, where appropriate;

- whether, and if so how, group claims will be considered, e.g. from applicants who have completed an employer's in-house programme;

- possible outcomes of a claim, such as partial recognition and/or opportunities for the re-submission of an unsuccessful application;

- the circumstances in which an appeal against a decision on the recognition of credit would be considered and the procedures, including time scales, that would be followed;

- any fees charged for the consideration of claims, and for subsequent planned learning.

5.4   Credit Transfer Guideline 3

Receiving organisations should establish when it is appropriate for them to deal with applications for the transfer of credit.

Credit can be gained for learning at any time or in any place. In principle, therefore, learners have the potential to make an application for credit to be transferred at any time. In practice, organisations and institutions dealing with credit transfer will seek to make professional judgements on the appropriate times for dealing with applications.

These judgements will take account of, management issues such as the economic size of learning groups, the availability of staff and the dates for meetings of boards and committees. They will also be based on good educational practice. This would include consideration of, for example:

- the potential influence of the opportunity to submit a claim at a number of stages on motivation of learners;

- whether the approach will promote equality of opportunity and how, for example, part-time learners might be affected;

- the effect on the coherence of the learning experience both for the applicant and for other learners of mid-programme submissions for credit transfer;

- whether the design of learning programmes should explicitly facilitate applications for credit transfer.

Applications could be considered, for example:

- only prior to the start of the programme;

- within a designated time from the start of the programme in order to provide learners, once they have started their programme, with the opportunity to recognise that they have the potential for credit transfer;

- from learners at any stage of the programme.

Credit transfer decisions should be timely so that a learner's ability to access learning opportunities is not unnecessarily inhibited.

5.5   Credit Transfer Guideline 4

Staff should be competent to undertake their responsibilities.

Staff with responsibility for making decisions about the transfer of credit should be able to demonstrate:

- knowledge and experience of the area and level of the learning being considered including, where appropriate, the requirements of professional and regulatory bodies;

- knowledge and understanding of the SCQF and the Level Descriptors;

- understanding of the SCQF credit rating procedures.

This does not imply that any one member of staff should necessarily have all these competences. For instance, an organisation might have staff who are centrally concerned with the credit rating process per se but who can call for support on colleagues who have specific knowledge and understanding of the area of learning in question.

Organisations should consider how best to provide support to staff. This could include matters such as the allocation of sufficient time, appropriate accommodation, secretarial assistance, supervision and mentoring and training. Staff making decisions about credit transfer should have colleagues they can discuss issues with.

Recognition of the need for support should apply to all staff involved in the credit transfer process. This includes 'teaching' and support staff as well as staff involved in registration and recording procedures.

5.6   Credit Transfer Guideline 5

Appropriate support should be offered to applicants for credit transfer and to those who have made successful claims.

Consideration should be given to providing support both to applicants seeking the transfer of credit, and to those who have been successful in making a claim and joined a new learning programme. This should primarily be the responsibility of the receiving organisation but might also be the concern of the sending body, for example where a specific articulation agreement exists.

Forms of support could include:

- Pre-entry preparation courses or advice;

- Post-entry targeted support courses or advice;

- Personal Development Plans for learners;

- 'Buddy' systems.

In establishing arrangements for support, factors to consider include:

- the numbers and size of the cohort progressing;

- the risk of stigmatising learners as 'needing' support;

- the subject discipline;

- whether programmes can bridge gaps in organisational cultures where, for instance, there may be significant changes in expectations.

5.7   Credit Transfer Guideline 6

Policies and procedures should be monitored and reviewed.

Regular review of policies and practices will assist an organisation to assure itself of the quality of its approach towards credit transfer and the maintenance of appropriate standards. This could include:

- specifying how judgements about claims are verified and how decisions are shared in ways that promote consistency and equity;

- specifying how feedback from external examiners or assessors is considered and acted upon;

- collecting, considering and acting upon feedback from applicants who have made a claim for credit;

- tracking and monitoring the progress and performance of those who have made a claim for credit, including in relation to other learners who have not made similar claims for recognition;

- monitoring progression and retention rates, withdrawal and transfer, and reasons for non-completion;

- monitoring the effectiveness of specific articulation agreements and other arrangements that allow learners to enter programmes with advanced standing.

It will be expected that, where appropriate, professional bodies with regulatory or accreditation powers will be informed of the arrangements made for monitoring and review.

5.8   Credit Transfer Guideline 7

Qualification, course and programme development and design should promote and facilitate credit recognition and transfer.

As the Introduction to Volume 1 of the SCQF Handbook makes clear, a central purpose of the SCQF is to maximise the opportunities to transfer credit between qualifications and learning programmes. Ideally, where a learner has already demonstrated the achievement of particular learning outcomes it should not be necessary either, to undergo a further process of learning in the same area or, to be reassessed. It is wasteful both for the learner and for the organisation providing the learning. It can be demotivating for the learner in devaluing already achieved success. Therefore, wherever possible, programme designers should make arrangements for the recognition of learning already achieved.

How this is done will be a matter for professional judgment. Issues that should be taken into account will include:

- the viability of cohorts of learners in terms of the resources available to support them;

- the social cohesion of groups of learners;

- the extent to which the learning experienced is conceived as an integrated whole;

- the relative cost in terms of time and other resources in planning and operating systems for credit transfer.

In some circumstances, especially where there is a potential risk in recognising the particular practice competence of an individual, for example in child care, in medical procedures or in financial regulation, organisations receiving applications for credit will see a need to carry out their own assessment. Organisations in these circumstances will need to be assured about the precise nature of the competences in a claim for credit transfer.

5.9 Credit Transfer Guideline 8

Articulation arrangements should be managed flexibly and actively

Specific credit transfer arrangements can be effective in ensuring continuity of practice and transparency of transfer routes but the arrangements need to ensure that such provision does not reduce organisational flexibility or prevent the strategic review of operations.

In the operation of specific articulation agreements the organisations involved should actively maintain and develop communication and shared understandings. This could include:

- the encouragement and development of staff exchanges;

- monitoring by the receiving organisation of the development and progress of learners and feeding this information back to its partners;

- ensuring the compatibility of learner data;

- joint planning and delivery of staff development;

- communicating administrative or staffing changes effectively.

The receiving organisation should consider whether it requires to identify and approve staff in the sending organisation and, if so, it should have agreed mechanisms in place.

5.10 Credit Transfer Guideline 9

Credit transferred is of equal standing to the credit awarded to the qualification/learning programme entered.

Where an application for the transfer of credit is being made, the receiving organisation should be able to demonstrate that the transferred learning is equivalent to that of other learners on the programme or module for which the claim is being considered.

5.11   Credit Transfer Guideline 10

Applications for the transfer of credit from learning programmes awarded by non-SCQF credit rating organisations should be considered in the context of the specific procedures set out in the Credit Rating Guidelines Section 4 of the SCQF Handbook.

In principle, the SCQF credit points can be awarded only to learning that has been, or is capable of being, subject to valid, reliable methods of assessment. If this assessment has been carried out by an organisation approved by a credit rating body, it is open to awarding bodies to transfer credit into programmes leading to their awards.

6.   APPENDICES

Appendix   1

The Level Descriptors

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are revised in the light of feedback on their use.

SCQF Level 1 — (Access 1)

There is no separate Level Descriptor for Level 1, which covers all provision that comes below the full achievement of Level 2.

SCQF Level 2 (Access 2 is an example of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations are revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • knowledge of simple facts and ideas in a subject/discipline	Relate knowledge to a few simple everyday contexts with prompting. Use a few very simple skills. Carry out, with guidance, a few familiar tasks. Use, under supervision, basic tools and materials.	Use rehearsed stages for solving problems. Operate in personal and/or everyday contexts. Take some account, with prompting, of identified consequences of action.	Use very simple skills with assistance — for example: • produce and respond to a limited range of very simple written and oral communication in familiar/routine contexts • carry out a limited range of very simple tasks to process data and access information • use a limited range of very simple and familiar numerical and graphical data in familiar and everyday contexts	Work alone or with others on simple routine, familiar tasks under frequent and directive supervision. Identify, given simple criteria, some successes and/or failures of the work.

SCQF Level 3 (Access 3, Standard Grade Foundation Level are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • basic knowledge in a subject/discipline • simple facts and ideas associated with a subject/discipline	Relate knowledge with some prompting to personal and/or everyday contexts. Use a few basic, routine skills to undertake familiar and routine tasks. Complete pre-planned tasks. Use, with guidance, basic tools and materials safely and effectively.	Identify, with some prompting, a process to deal with a situation or issue. Operate in familiar contexts using given criteria. Take account of some identified consequences of action.	Use simple skills — for example: • produce and respond to simple written and oral communication in familiar, routine contexts • carry out simple tasks to process data and access information • use simple numerical and graphical data in everyday contexts	Work alone or with others on simple tasks under frequent supervision. Participate in the setting of goals, timelines etc. Participate in the review of completed work and the identification of ways of improving practices and processes. Identify, given simple criteria, own strengths and weaknesses relative to the work.

SCQF Level 4 (Intermediate 1, Standard Grade General Level, SVQ 1 are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • basic knowledge in a subject/ discipline which is mainly factual • some simple facts and ideas about and associated with a subject/ discipline • knowledge of basic processes, materials and terminology	Relate knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts. Use a few skills to complete straightforward tasks with some non-routine elements. Select and use, with guidance, appropriate tools and materials safely and effectively.	Use, with guidance, given stages of a problem solving approach to deal with a situation or issue. Operate in straightforward contexts. Identify and/or take account of some of the consequences of action/inaction.	Use straightforward skills — for example: • produce and respond to simple but detailed written and oral communication in familiar contexts • use the most straightforward features of familiar applications to process and obtain information • use straightforward numerical and graphical data in straightforward and familiar contexts	Work alone or with others on straightforward tasks. Contribute to the setting of goals, timelines etc. Contribute to the review of completed work and offer suggestions for improving practices and processes. Identify own strengths and weaknesses relative to the work.

SCQF Level 5 (Intermediate 2, Standard Grade Credit level, SVQ 2 are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • basic knowledge in a subject/ discipline which is mainly factual but has some theoretical component • a range of simple facts and ideas about and associated with a subject/discipline • knowledge and understanding of basic processes, materials and terminology	Relate ideas and knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts. Complete some routine and non-routine tasks using knowledge associated with a subject/discipline. Plan and organise both familiar and new tasks. Select appropriate tools and materials and use safely and effectively (eg without waste). Adjust tools where necessary following safe practices.	Use a problem solving approach to deal with a situation or issue which is straightforward in relation to a subject/discipline. Operate in a familiar context, but where there is a need to take account of or use additional information of different kinds, some of which will be theoretical or hypothetical. Use some abstract constructs — eg make generalisations and/ or draw conclusions.	Use a range of routine skills — for example: • produce and respond to detailed written and oral communication in familiar contexts • use standard applications to process, obtain and combine information • use a range of numerical and graphical data in straightforward contexts which have some complex features	Work alone or with others on tasks with minimum supervision. Agree goals and responsibilities for self and/or work team with manager/ supervisor. Take leadership responsibility for some tasks. Show an awareness of others' roles, responsibilities and requirements in carrying out work and make a contribution to the evaluation and improvement of practices and processes.

SCQF Level 6 (Higher, SVQ 3 are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • generalised knowledge of a subject/discipline • factual and theoretical knowledge • a range of facts, ideas, properties, materials, terminology, practices, techniques about/ associated with a subject/discipline • Relate the subject/ discipline to a range of practical and/or everyday applications.	Apply knowledge and understanding in known, practical contexts. Use some of the basic, routine practices, techniques and/or materials associated with a subject/ discipline in routine contexts which may have non-routine elements. Plan how skills will be used to address set situations and/or problems and adapt these as necessary.	Obtain, organise and use factual and theoretical information in problem solving. Make generalisations and predictions. Draw conclusions and suggest solutions.	Use a wide range of skills — for example: • produce and respond to detailed and relatively complex written and oral communication in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts • select and use standard applications to process, obtain and combine information • use a wide range of numerical and graphical data in routine contexts which may have non-routine elements	Take responsibility for the carrying out of a range of activities, where the overall goal is clear, under non-directive supervision. Take some supervisory responsibility for the work of others and lead established teams in the implementation of routine work. Manage limited resources within defined and supervised areas of work. Take account of roles and responsibilities related to the tasks being carried out and take a significant role in the evaluation of work and the improvement of practices and processes.

41

SCQF Level 7 (SHE level 1) (Cert HE, HNC, Advanced Higher are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • a broad knowledge of the subject/discipline in general • knowledge that is embedded in the main theories, concepts and principles • an awareness of the evolving/ changing nature of knowledge and understanding • an understanding of the difference between explanations based in evidence and/or research and other forms of explanation, and of the importance of this difference	Use some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline. Practise these in both routine and non-routine contexts.	Present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas which are routine to the subject/ discipline. Use a range of approaches to addressing defined and/or routine problems and issues within familiar contexts.	Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with the subject/discipline — for example: • convey complex ideas in well-structured and coherent form • use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and new contexts • use standard applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data • use a range of numerical and graphical skills in combination • use numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/ targets	Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level. Take supervision in less familiar areas of work. Take some managerial responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure. Manage limited resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead in implementing agreed plans in familiar or defined contexts. Take account of own and others' roles and responsibilities in carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work with others in support of current professional practice under guidance.

SCQF Level 8 (SHE level 2) (Dip HE, HND, SVQ 4 are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • a broad knowledge of the scope, defining features, and main areas of a subject/discipline • detailed knowledge in some areas • understanding of a limited range of core theories, principles and concepts • limited knowledge and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms • an outline knowledge and understanding of research and equivalent scholarly/academic processes	Use a range of routine skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline, a few of which are advanced or complex. Carry out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues. Adapt routine practices within accepted standards.	Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues which are within the common understandings of the subject/discipline. Use a range of approaches to formulate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues. Critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems/issues.	Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills associated with a subject/discipline — for example: • convey complex information to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes • use a range of standard applications to process and obtain data • use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets	Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level. Take significant managerial or supervisory responsibility for the work of others in defined areas of work. Manage resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts. Take continuing account of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions in carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work in support of current professional practice under guidance. Deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices under guidance.

43

SCQF Level 9 (SHE level 3) (Ordinary Degrees, Graduate Certificates are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • a broad and integrated knowledge and understanding of the scope, main areas and boundaries of a subject/discipline • a critical understanding of a selection of the principal theories, principles, concepts and terminology • knowledge that is detailed in some areas and/or knowledge of one or more specialisms that are informed by forefront developments	Use a selection of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline. Use a few skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are specialised or advanced. Practise routine methods of enquiry and/or research. Practise in a range of professional level contexts which include a degree of unpredictability.	Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues. Identify and analyse routine professional problems and issues. Draw on a range of sources in making judgements.	Use a range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline, for example: • make formal and informal presentations on standard/mainstream topics in the subject/discipline to a range of audiences • use a range of IT applications to support and enhance work • interpret, use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to achieve goals/targets	Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level. Take some responsibility for the work of others and for a range of resources. Practise in ways which take account of own and others' roles and responsibilities. Work under guidance with qualified practitioners. Deal with ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices, seeking guidance where appropriate.

SCQF Level 10 (SHE level 4) (Honours Degrees, Graduate Diplomas are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • knowledge that covers and integrates most of the principal areas, features, boundaries, terminology and conventions of a subject/discipline • a critical understanding of the principal theories, concepts and principles • detailed knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, some of which is informed by or at the forefront of a subject/discipline • knowledge and understanding of the ways in which the subject/discipline is developed, including a range of established techniques of enquiry or research methodologies	Use a range of the principal skills, practices and/or materials associated with a subject/discipline. Use a few skills, practices and/or materials which are specialised, advanced, or at the forefront of a subject/discipline. Execute a defined project of research, development or investigation and identify and implement relevant outcomes. Practise in a range of professional level contexts which include a degree of unpredictability and/or specialism.	Critically identify, define, conceptualise, and analyse complex/professional level problems and issues. Offer professional level insights, interpretations and solutions to problems and issues. Critically review and consolidate knowledge, skills and practices and thinking in a subject/discipline. Demonstrate some originality and creativity in dealing with professional level issues. Make judgements where data/information is limited or comes from a range of sources.	Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills in support of established practices in a subject/discipline — for example: • make formal presentations about specialised topics to informed audiences • communicate with professional level peers, senior colleagues and specialists • use a range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify refinements/improvements to software to increase effectiveness • interpret, use and evaluate a wide range of numerical and graphical data to set and achieve goals/targets	Exercise autonomy and initiative in professional/equivalent activities. Take significant responsibility for the work of others and for a range of resources. Practise in ways which show a clear awareness of own and others' roles and responsibilities. Work effectively under guidance in a peer relationship with qualified practitioners. Work with others to bring about change, development and/or new thinking. Deal with complex ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes or practices. Recognise the limits of these codes and seek guidance where appropriate.

SCQF Level 11 (SHE level 5, PG 1) (PG Dip, PG Cert, MA, MSc, SVQ 5 are examples of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • knowledge that covers and integrates most, if not all, of the main areas of a subject/ discipline — including their features, boundaries, terminology and conventions • a critical understanding of the principal theories, principles and concepts • a critical understanding of a range of specialised theories, principles and concepts • extensive, detailed and critical knowledge and understanding in one or more specialisms, much of which is at or informed by developments at the forefront • critical awareness of current issues in a subject/discipline and one or more specialisms	Use a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices and/or materials that are associated with a subject/discipline. Use a range of specialised skills, techniques, practices and/or materials which are at the forefront or informed by forefront developments. Apply a range of standard and specialised research or equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry. Plan and execute a significant project of research, investigation or development. Demonstrate originality or creativity in the application of knowledge, understanding and/or practices. Practise in a wide and often unpredictable variety of professional level contexts.	Apply critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis to issues which are at the forefront or informed by developments at the forefront of a subject/discipline. Identify, conceptualise and define new and abstract problems and issues. Develop original and creative responses to problems and issues. Critically review, consolidate and extend knowledge, skills practices and thinking in a subject/discipline. Deal with complex issues and make informed judgements in situations in the absence of complete or consistent data/ information.	Use a range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline — for example: • communicate, using appropriate methods, to a range of audiences with different levels of knowledge/ expertise • communicate with peers, more senior colleagues and specialists • use a wide range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify new software or refinements/ improvements to existing software to increase effectiveness • undertake critical evaluations of a wide range of numerical and graphical data	Exercise substantial autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities. Take responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others. Take responsibility for a significant range of resources. Demonstrate leadership and/or initiative and make an identifiable contribution to change and development. Practise in ways which draw on critical reflection on own and others' roles and responsibilities. Deal with complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.

SCQF Level 12 (SHE level 6, PG 2) (Ph.D. — Doctorate is an example of qualifications on this level)

NB These descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of each level. They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of each level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements, and there is no expectation that every qualification or programme should have all of the characteristics. The descriptors have been developed through a series of consultations and are offered as a first working guide which will be revised in the light of feedback on their use.

Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Characteristic outcomes of learning at each level include the ability to:				
Demonstrate and/or work with: • a critical overview of a subject/discipline, including critical understanding of the principal theories, principles and concepts • a critical, detailed and often leading knowledge and understanding at the forefront of one or more specialisms • knowledge and understanding that is generated through personal research or equivalent work which makes a significant contribution to the development of the subject/discipline	Use a significant range of the principal skills, techniques, practices and materials associated with a subject/discipline. Use and enhance a range of complex skills, techniques, practices and materials at the forefront of one or more specialisms. Apply a range of standard and specialised research/equivalent instruments and techniques of enquiry. Design and execute research, investigative or development projects to deal with new problems and issues. Demonstrate originality and creativity in the development and application of new knowledge, understanding and practices. Practice in the context of new problems and circumstances.	Apply a constant and integrated approach to critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas, information and issues. Identify, conceptualise and offer original and creative insights into new, complex and abstract ideas, information and issues. Develop creative and original responses to problems and issues. Deal with very complex and/or new issues and make informed judgements in the absence of complete or consistent data/information.	Use a significant range of advanced and specialised skills as appropriate to a subject/discipline — for example: • communicate at an appropriate level to a range of audiences and adapt communication to the context and purpose • communicate at the standard of published academic work and/or critical dialogue and review with peers and experts in other specialisms • use a range of software to support and enhance work at this level and specify software requirements to enhance work • critically evaluate numerical and graphical data	Exercise a high level of autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities. Take full responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others. Demonstrate leadership and/or originality in tackling and solving problems and issues. Work in ways which are reflective, self-critical and based on research/evidence. Deal with complex ethical and professional issues. Make informed judgements on new and emerging issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes or practices.

47

Appendix   2

QUALIFICATIONS AWARDED BY THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SQA)

During 2004/5, SQA began a review and consultation on its portfolio of qualifications which was finalised in March 2006. However, as part of this programme of work, SQA will continue to review existing qualifications in vocational areas, and remove, revise or replace qualifications where it proves necessary to do so. The aim of the review is to ensure a coherent system of qualifications, based on SCQF Level and credit, maximising progression and credit transfer opportunities that is fit for purpose for the full range of Scottish learners. This work has resulted in new design principles for Professional Development Awards, which will now undergo a period of revision; new or revised National Qualification Group Awards e.g. National Certificates and National Progression Awards; and the development of new Courses within the existing suite of National Courses e.g. Skills for Work Courses. Other Group Awards e.g. Scottish Progression Awards and Scottish Group Awards will be reviewed to determine if replacement provision is needed.

Whilst the current SCQF national diagram (page 8) does not yet include these developments, qualification descriptors are provided in Appendix 2 that explains the aim, purpose and structure of the qualifications in the SQA portfolio. SQA has also produced its own Ready Reckoner that shows where its portfolio of qualifications is placed on the SCQF with accompanying credit point information. For further information of these developments, and for a copy of the Ready Reckoner, please visit **www.sqa.org.uk** or contact the **Customer Contact Centre on: 0845 279 1000** or email: **customer@sqa.org.uk**

National Unit at Access 1

SCQF Level 1   SCQF Credit Points – 6

General Information
National Units at Access 1 are designed for learners with learning difficulties. They are used in programmes of learning which deal with the personal needs of learners and contribute to enhancing their life skills and therefore their independence**.** They are usually taken in secondary schools, special schools or colleges. In schools they are usually taken from the third year upwards. National Units at Access 1 are available in a range of subjects such as Science, Healthy Basic Cooking, Office Skills and Using Computer Aided Learning.

Design of Qualification
An Access 1 Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 1. Typically, a National Unit at Access 1 will require 60 hours of learning – although learners may need more time and substantial teacher/lecturer support**.**

Progression
National Units at Access 1 are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:

- other Units at Access 1 or Access 2;
- National Courses at Access 2.

National Courses at Access 2

SCQF Level 2   SCQF Credit Points – 18

General Information
National Courses at Access 2 are designed for learners who need to build up confidence or may have additional support needs. National Courses aim to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area.   Achieving a National Course at Access 2 shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills in a particular subject at the defined national standard. They are usually taken in secondary schools, special schools or colleges. In schools they are usually taken from the third year upwards. National Courses are available in a range of subjects such as Biology, Computing, Maths and Media Studies.

Design
A National Course at Access 2 is allocated 18 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 2 and is usually made up of three Units, all at the level of the Course. Each Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 6 depending on the size of the Unit. In some cases, learners may count Units at higher levels towards a National Course at Access 2. There is no external assessment. The Units which make up the National Course can also be taken as freestanding qualifications.

Typically, holders of a National Course at Access 2 will be able to:

- Demonstrate a knowledge of simple facts and ideas in a subject;
- Relate knowledge to some simple everyday contexts with prompting;
- Use some very simple skills;
- Carry out, with guidance, some familiar tasks;
- Use rehearsed stages for solving problems.

Progression
National Courses at Access 2 are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:
- other National Courses or Units at Access 2 or Access 3;
- National Progression Awards at Access 2 or Access 3;
- National Certificates at Access 2 or Access 3;
- Other courses in further education, training or employment.

National Courses at Access 3

SCQF Level 3   SCQF Credit Points – 18

General Information
National Courses at Access 3 are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area.   Achieving a National Course at Access 3 shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills in a particular subject at the defined national standard. There may be a choice of Units available**.** They are usually taken in the third or fourth year of secondary schools or colleges. National Courses are available in a range of subjects such as Biology, Computing, Maths and Media Studies.

Design
A National Course at Access 3 is allocated 18 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 3. It is usually made up of three National Units at the level of the Course. Each Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 6 depending on the size of the Unit. In some cases, learners may count Units at higher levels towards a National Course at Access 3. The Units which make up the National Course can also be taken as freestanding qualifications.

Typically, holders of a National Course at Access 3 will be able to:

- Demonstrate basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas in a subject;
- Relate knowledge with some prompting to personal and/or everyday contexts;
- Use a few basic routine skills to undertake familiar and routine tasks;
- Identify, with some prompting, a process to deal with a situation or issue.

Progression
National Courses at Access 3 are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:
- National Courses at Intermediate 1;
- National Progression Awards at Access 3 or Intermediate 1;
- National Certificates at Access 3 or Intermediate 1;
- Other courses in further education, training or employment.

Standard Grade at Foundation Level

SCQF Level 3   SCQF Credit Points – 24

General Information
Standard Grades are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area. Achieving a Standard Grade at Foundation Level shows that a learner has demonstrated the defined knowledge and skills for a particular subject to the defined national standard. They are usually taken in secondary schools over two years in the third and fourth years**.**

Design
A Standard Grade at Foundation Level is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 3. They are made up of different parts called *elements* e.g. Knowledge and Understanding, Practical Abilities and Problem Solving. Each element is assessed to determine a grade for a learner. Standard Grades at Foundation Level are awarded at grades 5 and 6. The Course assessment is an external assessment and can be, for example, an exam or project work or a folio completed during the Course and then marked by SQA.

Typically, the holder of a Standard Grade at Foundation Level will be able to:

- Demonstrate basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas in a subject;
- Relate knowledge with some prompting to personal and/or everyday contexts;
- Identify, with some prompting, a process to deal with a situation or issue;
- Use a few basic routine skills to undertake familiar and routine tasks.

Progression
Standard Grades at Foundation Level support progression to National Courses at Intermediate 1 or to other courses in further education, training or employment.

National Certificates

SCQF Levels 2 – 3   SCQF Credit Points – 54

General Information
National Certificates at SCQF Levels 2-3 are designed to provide candidates with the skills and knowledge (including transferable skills and Core Skills*) that employers expect and also to provide articulation to higher level programmes of study (for example National Certificates at higher levels). They are delivered within the broad context of a subject/occupational area and are vocationally related qualifications which are linked to National Occupational Standards**. They are mainly delivered in college and can be taken through full-time study or part-time study and, in some cases, can be taken on a flexible or distance learning basis.

New design principals have been created for National Certificates and details are given below.

Design of Qualification
At SCQF Levels 2 - 3, National Certificates are made up of Units with a total credit value of 54 SCQF credit points. At least half of the SCQF credit points must be at the level of the award. They have mandatory and optional sections. The mandatory section must have a minimum of 27 SCQF credit points. National Certificates are designed and developed by Qualification Design Teams in consultation with employers, students, colleges and Sector Skills Councils.

Progression
National Certificates at SCQF Levels 2 -3 are designed to provide a progression pathway to employment and to articulate to higher level qualifications (National Certificates at higher levels).

*Core Skills apply to a wide range of contexts in education and training, in life, and in work. They underpin and promote the development of learning and study skills, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning and personal development. They enable people to put their knowledge and understanding into action, adapting them to new situations. The Core Skills are:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Information Technology
- Working with Others

**National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do. They cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation. NOS are defined on a UK basis by employers in the industry to which they apply and are developed and maintained by Sector Skills Councils.

Standard Grade at General Level

SCQF Level 4   SCQF Credit Points – 24

General Information
Standard Grades are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area. Achieving a Standard Grade at General Level shows that a learner has demonstrated the defined knowledge and skills for a particular subject to the defined national standard. They are usually taken in secondary schools over two years in the third and fourth years.

Design
A Standard Grade at General Level is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 4. Standard Grades are made up of different parts called 'elements' – e.g. Knowledge and Understanding, Practical Abilities and Problem Solving. Each element is assessed to give a grade to the candidate. Standard Grades at General Level are awarded at grades 3 and 4. The Course assessment is an external assessment and can be, for example, an exam or project work or a folio completed during the Course and then marked by SQA.

Typically, the holder of a Standard Grade at General Level will be able to:
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of simple facts and ideas in a subject;
- Relate knowledge with some prompting to person and/or everyday contexts;
- Identify, with some prompting, a process to deal with a situation or issue;
- Use a few basic routine skills to undertake familiar and routine tasks.

Progression
Standard Grades at General Level support progression to National Courses at Intermediate 2 or to other courses in further education, or to training or employment.

National Courses at Intermediate 1 - with grading

SCQF Level 4   SCQF Credit Points - 24

General Information
National Courses are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area. Achieving a National Course at Intermediate 1 shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills in a particular subject at the defined national standard. They are usually taken in secondary schools or colleges. In schools they are usually taken in fifth year, although some schools are introducing them earlier – in the third or fourth year.

Many learners taking National Courses at Intermediate 1 will previously have taken Courses at SCQF Level 3, such as Standard Grade at Foundation level or a National Course at Access 3, or Units at this level, but it is not mandatory. In some cases, learners may count Units at higher levels towards a National Course at Intermediate 1. The Units which make up the National Course can also be taken as freestanding qualifications. National Courses are available in a wide range of subjects, to suit everyone's interests and skills, from Biology to Business Management, Information Systems to Italian, and Maths to Media Studies.

Design
A National Course at Intermediate 1 is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 4. It is usually made up of three National Units and a Course Assessment*, all at the level of the Course. Each Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 6 depending on the size of the Unit, and the Course as a whole is allocated a further 6 SCQF credit points. National Courses are awarded at four grades – A, B, C and D. The Grade is determined by a learner's performance in the Course assessment.

Typically, holders of an Intermediate 1 National Course will be able to:

- Demonstrate a basic, mainly factual knowledge of a subject;
- Relate knowledge to personal and/or practical context;
- Use, with guidance, given stages of a problem solving approach to deal with a situation or issue;
- Select and use, with guidance, appropriate tools and materials safely and effectively.

Progression
National Courses at Intermediate 1 are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:

- National Courses at Intermediate 2;
- National Progression Awards at Intermediate 1 or Intermediate 2;
- National Certificates at Intermediate 1or Intermediate 2;
- Other courses in further education, training or employment.

* This is an external assessment and can be, for example, an exam, or project work or a folio completed during the Course and then marked by SQA.

National Courses at Intermediate 1 – without grading: Skills for Work

SCQF Level 4   SCQF Credit Points - 24

General Information
Skills for Work National Courses at Intermediate 1 are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific vocational area, as well as an understanding of the workplace, skills and attitudes for employability, and Core Skills*.   Achieving a Skills for Work National Course at Intermediate 1 shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills in a particular area at the defined national standard. In some cases, learners may count Units at higher levels towards a Skills for Work National Course at Intermediate 1. Learning programmes include practical experience and learning through reflection. The Units which make up the National Course can also be taken as freestanding qualifications.

Skills for Work are usually offered by partnerships of schools and colleges, sometimes working with employers or other training providers**.** In schools they are usually taken from the third year onward. Skills for Work National Courses are being piloted in session 2006/7 and will be available to all centres from 2007/8.

Design
A Skills for Work National Course at Intermediate 1 is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 4. They are usually made up of four National Units at the level of the Course. Each Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 6 depending on the size of the Unit.

Progression
Skills for Work National Courses at Intermediate 1 are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:

- National Courses at Intermediate 2;
- National Progression Awards at Intermediate 1 or Intermediate 2;
- National Certificates at Intermediate 1 or Intermediate 2;
- Other courses in further education, training or employment.

*Core Skills apply to a wide range of contexts in education and training, in life, and in work. They underpin and promote the development of learning and study skills, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning and personal development. They enable people to put their knowledge and understanding into action flexibly, adapting them to new situations. The Core Skills are:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Information Technology
- Working with Others

National Certificates

SCQF Levels 4 – 6   SCQF Credit Points – 72

General Information
National Certificates are designed to provide candidates with the skills and knowledge (including transferable skills and Core Skills*) that employers expect and also to provide articulation to Higher National (HN) programmes of study. They are delivered within the broad context of a subject/occupational area. They are vocationally related qualifications linked to National Occupational Standards** which are undertaken mainly in colleges. National Certificates can be taken through full-time study or part-time study and, in some cases, can be taken on a flexible or distance learning basis.

New design principals have been created for National Certificates and details are given below.

Design of Qualification
National Certificates at SCQF Levels 4 -6 are made up of Units with a credit value of 72 credit points. Half of the credit points must be at the level of the award. They have mandatory and optional Units. The mandatory section must have a minimum of 36 SCQF credit points. They are designed and developed by Qualification Design Teams in consultation with employers, students, colleges and Sector Skills Councils.

Progression
National Certificates at SCQF Levels 4 -6 are designed to prepare candidates for progression into employment or further education, and to articulate to HN programmes.

* Core Skills apply to a wide range of contexts in education and training, in life, and in work. They underpin and promote the development of learning and study skills, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning and personal development. They enable people to put their knowledge and understanding into action flexibly, adapting them to new situations. The Core Skills are:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Information Technology
- Working with Others

**National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do. They cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation. NOS are defined on a UK basis by employers in the industry to which they apply and are developed and maintained by Sector Skills Councils.

Standard Grade at Credit Level

SCQF Level 5   SCQF Credit Points - 24

General Information
Standard Grades are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area. Achieving a Standard Grade at Credit Level shows that a learner has demonstrated the defined knowledge and skills for a particular subject to the defined national standard. They are usually taken in secondary schools over two years in the third and fourth years.

Design
A Standard Grade at Credit Level is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 5. Standard Grades are made up of different parts called 'elements' – e.g. Knowledge and Understanding, Practical Abilities and Problem Solving. Each element is assessed to give a grade to the candidate. Standard Grades at Credit Level are awarded at grades 1 and 2. The Course assessment is an external assessment and can be, for example, an exam or project work or a folio completed during the Course and then marked by SQA.

Typically, the holder of a Standard Grade at Credit Level will be able to:

- Demonstrate a basic knowledge of a subject which is mainly factual but has some theoretical content;
- Relate ideas and knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts;
- Use a problem solving approach to deal with straightforward issues in relation to the subject;
- Use a range of routine skills;
- Use some abstract constructs – e.g. make generalisations and/or draw conclusions.

Progression
Standard Grades at Credit Level support progression to National Courses at Higher or to other courses in further education, training or employment.

National Courses at Intermediate 2 - with grading

SCQF Level 5   SCQF Credit Points – 25

General information
National Courses are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area. Achieving a National Course at Intermediate 2 shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills for a particular subject at the defined national standard. They are usually taken in secondary schools or colleges. In schools they are usually taken in fifth or sixth year, although some schools are introducing them earlier – in the third or fourth year.

In some cases, learners may count Units at higher levels towards a National Course and many learners will previously have taken Courses at SCQF Level 4, such as Standard Grade at General Level or a National Course at Intermediate 1, or Units at this level, but it is not mandatory. National Courses are available in a wide range of subjects, to suit everyone's interests and skills, from Biology to Business Management, Information Systems to Italian, and Maths to Media Studies.

Design
A National Course at Intermediate 2 is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 5. It is usually made up of three National Units and a Course Assessment*, all at the level of the Course. Each Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 6 depending on the size of the Unit and the Course as a whole is allocated a further 6 SCQF credit points. National Courses are awarded at four grades – A, B, C and D. The grade is determined by a learner's performance in the Course assessment.

Typically, holders of a National Course at Intermediate 2 will be able to:

- Demonstrate a basic knowledge of a subject which is mainly factual but has some theoretical content;
- Relate ideas and knowledge to personal and/or practical contexts;
- Use a problem solving approach to deal with straightforward issues in relation to the subject;
- Use a range of routine skills;
- Use some abstract constructs – e.g. make generalisations and/or draw conclusions.

Progression
National Courses at Intermediate 2 are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:

- National Courses at Higher;
- National Progression Awards at Intermediate 2 or Higher;
- National Certificates at Intermediate 2 or Higher;
- Other courses in further education, training or employment.

* This is an external assessment and can be, for example, an exam, or project work or a folio completed during the Course and then marked by SQA.

National Courses at Intermediate 2 – without grading - Skills for Work

SCQF Level 5   SCQF Credit points - 24

General information
Skills for Work National Courses at Intermediate 2 are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific vocational area, as well as an understanding of the workplace, skills and attitudes for employability, and Core Skills*.   Achieving a Skills for Work National Course at Intermediate 2 shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills in a particular area at the defined national standard. In some cases, learners may count Units at higher levels towards a Skills for Work National Course at Intermediate 2. Learning programmes include practical experience and learning through reflection. The Units which make up the National Course can also be taken as freestanding qualifications.

Skills for Work are usually offered by partnerships of schools and colleges, sometimes working with employers or other training providers. In schools they are usually taken from the third year onward. Skills for Work National Courses are being piloted in session 2006/7 and will be available to all centres from 2007/8.

Design
A Skills for Work National Course at Intermediate 2 is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 5. They are usually made up of four National Units at the level of the Course and each Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 6 depending on the size of the Unit.

Progression
Skills for Work National Courses at Intermediate 2 are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:

- National Courses at Higher;
- Skills for Work National Courses at Higher;
- National Progression Awards at Intermediate 2 or Higher;
- National Certificates at Intermediate 2 or Higher;
- Other courses in further education, training or employment.

*Core Skills apply to a wide range of contexts in education and training, in life, and in work. They underpin and promote the development of learning and study skills, and provide a foundation for lifelong learning and personal development. They enable people to put their knowledge and understanding into action flexibly, adapting them to new situations. The Core Skills are:

- Communication
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Information Technology
- Working with Others

National Progression Award

SCQF Levels 2 – 6   SCQF Credit Points: Minimum credit value of 12

General information:
National Progression Awards (NPAs) are small flexible group that are linked to National Occupational Standards* or other professional or trade standards and are designed to assess and certificate a defined set of skills in a specialist vocational area. NPA's are aimed at candidates in work or those preparing to enter or return to work and can be delivered in college or the workplace. They can be taken through full-time study or part-time study and, in some cases, can be taken on a flexible or distance learning basis.

New design principles have been created for NPAs and details are given below. Revised NPAs will be certificated from January 2007.

Design of Qualification:
National Progression Awards are made up of a minimum of 2 Units with a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points. There is no maximum credit value and therefore each NPA will vary. NPAs have mandatory and/or optional Units which reflect the title of the award. However, the credit value will be determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award. They are designed and developed by Qualification Design Teams in consultation with employers, students, colleges and Sector Skills Councils

Progression:
NPAs can be used as part of the ongoing skills development of candidates and allow progression within an occupation. They can also be used to gain the required skills/knowledge to enter employment in a particular occupational area.

* Statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do, and cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation.

National Courses at Higher

SCQF Level 6   SCQF Credit Points – 24

General Information
National Courses are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area. Achieving a National Course at Higher shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills for a particular subject at the defined national standard. Highers are taken in schools and colleges, and in schools they are normally taken in the fifth year. Learners in full-time education may take up to five or more Highers in a year. Most learners taking Highers will previously have gained Courses or Units at SCQF Level 5, such as Standard Grades or National Courses at Intermediate 2, but this is not a mandatory requirement. The Units which make up the Course can also be taken as freestanding qualifications.

National Courses are available in a wide range of subjects, to suit everyone's interests and skills, from Biology to Business Management, Information Systems to Italian, and Maths to Media Studies.

Design of qualification
A National Course at Higher is allocated 24 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 6. It is usually made up of three Units and an external or Course assessment*, all at the level of the Course. Each Unit is allocated 6 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 6 depending on the size of the Unit and the Course as a whole is allocated a further 6 SCQF credit points. National Courses are awarded at four grades – A, B, C and D. The Grade is determined by a learner's performance in the Course assessment.

Typically, holders of a Higher National Course will be able to:

- Demonstrate a general factual and theoretical knowledge of a subject - and the ideas, terminology, skills and techniques associated with it - and apply this in known practical contexts (when appropriate to the subject);
- Obtain, organise and use factual and theoretical information in problem solving;
- Make generalisations and predictions;
- Draw conclusions and suggest solutions.

Progression
National Courses at Higher are designed to support progression. Learners may progress to:

- National Courses at Advanced Higher;
- Degree courses in higher education (Highers form the main entry qualification for programmes in higher education);
- Other courses in higher or further education, training or employment.

*This is an external assessment and can be, for example, an exam, or project work or a folio completed during the Course and then marked by SQA.

Professional Development Awards

SCQF Level 6   SCQF Credit Points – minimum credit value of 12

General Information:
Professional Development Awards (PDAs) are designed for those normally already in a career or vocation who wish to extend or broaden their skills base, usually after completing a degree or vocational qualification relevant to their area of interest. However, in some cases they will be designed for those wishing to enter or re-enter employment. They are designed to assess and certificate progression in a defined set of specialist occupational skills and are aligned to National Occupational Standards* or other professional body standards.

PDAs are undergoing a revision programme using a new set of Design Principles details of which are given below.

Design of Qualification:
At SCQF level 6, PDAs will have a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points and will comprise at least two Units. There is no maximum credit value and therefore each PDA at this level will vary.   At least half the credit points will be at the level of the Group Award. The maximum credit value for each PDA will be determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award.

Progression:
PDAs can be used as part of ongoing professional development and allow progression within an occupation or a move to another occupation.

*National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do. They cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation. NOS are defined on a UK basis by employers in the industry to which they apply and are developed and maintained by Sector Skills Councils.

National Courses at Advanced Higher

SCQF Level 7   SCQF Credit Points – 32

General information
National Courses are designed to develop skills and knowledge in a specific subject area.   Achieving a National Course at Advanced Higher shows that a learner has demonstrated the specified knowledge and skills for a particular subject at the defined national standard. They are usually taken in secondary schools or colleges and in schools they are usually taken in sixth year, building on the knowledge and skills gained in the related National Courses at Higher. Most learners taking National Courses at Advanced Higher will previously have taken Courses at SCQF Level 6 – i.e. National Courses at Higher - but it is not mandatory. The Units which make up the National Course can also be taken as freestanding qualifications.

National Courses are available in a wide range of subjects, to suit everyone's interests and skills, from Biology to Business Management, Information Systems to Italian, and Maths to Media Studies.

Design
A National Course at Advanced Higher is allocated 32 SCQF credit points at SCQF Level 7. They are usually made up of three National Units and a Course Assessment*, all at the level of the Course. Each Unit is allocated 8 SCQF credit points, or a proportion of 8 depending on the size of the Unit and the Course as a whole is allocated a further 8 SCQF credit points. National Courses are awarded at four grades – A, B, C and D. The Grade is determined by a learner's performance in the Course assessment.

Typically, holders of a National Course at Advanced Higher will be able to:

- Demonstrate a broad knowledge and understanding of the subject and its main theories, concepts and principles;
- Present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas which are routine to the subject;
- Use a range of approaches to address defined problems;
- Convey complex ideas in well-structured and coherent form.

Progression
National Courses at Advanced Higher are designed to support progression.
Learners may progress to:

- Degree courses in higher education;
- Other courses in further and higher education;
- Training or employment.

*This is an external assessment and can be, for example, an exam, or project work or a folio completed during the Course and then marked by SQA.

Higher National Certificate (HNC)

SCQF Level 7   SCQF Credit Points – 96

General Information
Higher National Certificates (HNCs) are designed to provide people with the practical skills and theoretical knowledge that employers expect and also to provide articulation to HNDs and degree programmes. They are higher education vocational qualifications, related to National Occupational Standards*, which are undertaken mainly in Further Education Colleges but also in some Higher Education Institutions. Some HNCs exempt learners from taking all or part of the professional examinations needed to gain membership of the associated professional body.

HNCs can be taken through full-time study or part-time study and, in some cases, can be taken on a flexible or distance learning basis. They cover a wide range of areas from Business to Social Science to Game-keeping.

Design
They are designed to SCQF Level 7 and are worth 96 SCQF credit points. At least 48 SCQF credit points must be at the level of the award but typically most of the Units in HNCs are at the level of the award.

They are made up of mandatory and optional Units and the mandatory section must have a minimum of 48 SCQF points and include a Graded Unit of 8 SCQF points at Level 7. The Graded Unit will be an examination or project, which will allow students to demonstrate that they can integrate and apply the knowledge and skills that they have gained in the individual Units to meet the principal aims and objectives of the HNC. Candidate achievement will be graded A, B or C.

HNCs are designed and developed by Qualification Design Teams in consultation with employers, professional bodies and higher education, who ensure they are fit for purpose.

Typically, holders of an HNC will be able to:

- Demonstrate a broad knowledge of the subject/discipline/vocational area in general;
- Use professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a vocational area, and practice them in vocational contexts;
- Demonstrate core skills to the level specified by the vocational sector;
- Exercise initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level;
- Work with others in support of current professional practice under guidance.

Progression
HNCs are designed to provide progression to employment at technician/technologist level and to articulation to HNDs and degree programmes at Level 7 or 8 depending on articulation agreements.

* National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do. They cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation. NOS are defined on a UK basis by employers in the industry to which they apply and are developed and maintained by Sector Skills Councils.

Professional Development Awards

SCQF Levels 7 – 12   SCQF Credit Points – Minimum credit value 16
SCQF   credit points

General Information
Professional Development Awards (PDA) are designed for those normally already in a career or vocation who wish to extend or broaden their skills base, usually after completing a degree or vocational qualification relevant to their area of interest. However, in some cases they will be designed for those wishing to enter or re-enter employment. They are designed to assess and certificate progression in a defined set of specialist occupational skills. They are aligned to National Occupational Standards* or other professional body standards.

PDAs are undergoing a revision programme using a new set of design principles. Details of these new design principles are given below.

Design of Qualification
At SCQF Levels 7 - 12, PDAs will have a minimum credit value of 16 SCQF credit points and will comprise at least two Units. At least half the credit points will be at the level of the Group Award. There is no maximum credit value and therefore each PDA at this level will vary. The maximum credit value for each PDA will be determined by the defined aims and rationale of the Group Award and this will be checked at validation.

Progression
PDAs can be used as part of ongoing professional development and allow progression within an occupation or a move to another occupation.

* National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do. They cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation. NOS are defined on a UK basis by employers in the industry to which they apply and are developed and maintained by Sector Skills Council.

Higher National Diploma

SCQF Level 8   SCQF Credit Points – 240

General Information

Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are designed to provide people with the practical skills and theoretical knowledge that employers expect and also to provide articulation to degree programmes. Some HNDs exempt learners from taking all or part of the professional examinations needed to gain membership of the associated professional body. They are higher education vocational qualifications, related to National Occupational Standards *, which are undertaken mainly in Further Education Colleges but also in some Higher Education Institutions.

HNDs can be taken through full-time study or part-time study and, in some cases, can be taken on a flexible or distance learning basis. They cover a wide range of vocational areas from Accountancy to Engineering to Music, with the content of each HND reflecting the needs of a particular sector.

Design

They are designed to SCQF Level 8 and are worth 240 SCQF credit points. At least 64 SCQF credit points must be at the level of the award but typically most of the credits in the second year of an HND are at the level of the award.

They are made up of mandatory and optional Units. The mandatory section must have a minimum of 96 SCQF credit points and include a Graded Unit of 8 SCQF credit points at Level 7 and 16 SCQF credit points of Graded Unit(s) at SCQF Level 8. The Graded Units will be an examination(s) or project(s), which will allow students to demonstrate that they can integrate and apply the knowledge and skills that they have gained in the individual Units to meet the principal aims and objectives of the HND. Candidate achievement will be graded A, B or C.

HNDs are designed and developed by Qualification Design Teams in consultation with employers, professional bodies and higher education, who ensure they are fit for purpose.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

- Demonstrate a broad knowledge of the scope, defining features and main areas of a subject/discipline;
- Use a range of skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with a vocational area, some of which are advanced or complex, and practice them in a vocational context;
- Demonstrate Core Skills to the level specified by the vocational sector;
- Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level;
- Work in support of current professional practice and deal with ethical and professional issues under guidance.

Progression

Holders of an HND may progress to employment at a higher technician, technologist or first line manager level, or to the second or third year of a degree programme (Level 8 or 9) depending on the articulation arrangements of particular universities.

* Statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do, and cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation.

Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

SCQF Level - Dependent on the SVQ

SCQF Credit Points – Dependent on the Structure of the SVQ

General Information
SVQs are work-based qualifications which are delivered in the workplace and/or in partnership with a college or other training provider. They are a means of recognising the skills and knowledge people need in employment and are based on National Occupational Standards* which reflect the competences in a particular industry. SVQs are composed of Units that define one aspect of a job or work-role, and says what it is to be competent in that aspect of the job. They cover all types and levels of job, including operatives, craft-workers, technicians and managers. To be awarded an SVQ, learners must achieve each of the SVQ Units which make it up by demonstrating to an Assessor that they are competent in that aspect of the job. The Units which make up the SVQ can also be taken as freestanding awards.

Design
SVQs are notionally placed on the SCQF (see SCQF Diagram on page 7). SVQs range from SVQ level 1 to SVQ level 5, from operational level to senior management level. They can have mandatory and optional sections and the number and size of Units that make up the SVQ will vary dependent on the competence standards of the particular industry they reflect. The defined competences and structure of the SVQ is agreed by Sector Skills Councils with input from relevant employers and Awarding Bodies and others with a role in the vocational area, e.g. practitioners, professional and regulatory bodies, trades unions.

Work to allocate SCQF level and credit points is being funded by the Scottish Executive and managed by SQA and is being conducted over 3 phases between 2005 – 2008. During 2005- 2006, 600 component Units of 24 nominated SVQs were credit-rated. Further work is being conducted to credit-rate the mandatory section of Modern Apprenticeship Frameworks during 2006 – 2007. Reports on this work can be found on the SQA and SCQF websites.

Typically, holders of an SVQ will be able to:
This information will be dependent on the particular SVQ, but in general, possession of an SVQ will demonstrate that the learner is competent in carrying out the job which the SVQ covers and has demonstrated this competence in the workplace.

Progression
This information will be dependent on the particular SVQ, but in general will enhance the learner's opportunities for progression within their chosen career.

* National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements of performance that describe what competent people in a particular occupation are able to do. They cover all the main aspects of an occupation, including current best practice, the ability to adapt to future trends and the knowledge and understanding needed to be competent in that occupation. NOS are defined on a UK basis by employers in the industry to which they apply and are developed and maintained by Sector Skills Council.

Appendix   3

QUALIFICATIONS AWARDED BY HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The Certificate of Higher Education

SCQF Level 7

SCQF Credit Points

At least 120 credits of which a minimum of 90 are at SHE level 1 or higher

General information

The Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) is available in a number of Scottish higher education institutions typically as an exit award after the equivalent of one year of full-time study.

Design of Qualification

Some CertHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the relevant programme specifications.

Typically, holders of the Certificate of Higher Education will be able to:

Demonstrate and outline knowledge of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its links with related subjects and a more extensive knowledge of some of the key areas;

Use their knowledge of the subject and its techniques in a routine manner to evaluate and formulate a range of arguments and solutions to problems and issues of a routine nature.

Show an understanding of the major theories, principles and concepts; communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably and within structured and coherent arguments.

Gain familiarity with some of the routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject;

Undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment;

Develop skills for the gathering, basic analysis, and presentation of routine information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and qualitative data within a clearly defined context. This will include the use of information and communications technology (ICT) as appropriate to the subject; apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where individuals may have some limited personal responsibility, but the criteria for decisions and the scope of the task are well defined.

The Diploma of Higher Education

SCQF Level 8

SCQF Credit Points:

At least 240 credits of which, a minimum of 90 are at SHE level 2 or higher.

General information

The Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE) is typically offered after the equivalent of the first two years of full-time higher education in Scotland.

Design of Qualification

Some DipHEs are awarded for achievement over a breadth of subject areas while others focus on one subject, in some cases with a strong vocational focus. The precise focus and outcomes will be identified in the relevant programme specifications.

Typically, holders of the Diploma of Higher Education will be able to:

Demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the scope and main areas of the subject(s) and its interactions with related subjects.

Detailed knowledge of some key areas which may include some knowledge of current issues in limited specialised areas;

Use their knowledge, understanding and skills to critically evaluate and formulate evidence-based arguments and identify solutions to clearly defined problems of a generally routine nature;

Show familiarity with and understanding of a range of the essential theories, principles and concepts and an awareness of major issues at the forefront of the subject(s);

Communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using a range of specialist techniques.

Gain familiarity with and demonstrate effective deployment of essential/routine materials, techniques and practices of the subject(s);

Identify and address their own major learning needs within defined contexts and to undertake guided further learning in new areas.

Develop skills for the gathering, critical analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and/or quantitative and qualitative data that is core to the subject(s).

This will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s);

Apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts where the scope of the task and the criteria for decisions are generally well defined but where some personal responsibility and initiative is required.

The Scottish Bachelors degree

SCQF Level 9

SCQF Credit Points

At least 360 credits of which a minimum of 60 are at SHE level 3

General

The Scottish Bachelors (non-Honours) degree is typically achieved after the equivalent of three years of full-time higher education. In the main, and depending on the subjects or professional area(s) studied, it is awarded either a Bachelor of Science (BSc), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA).

Design of qualification

Although all degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth, some degrees will be highly focused while others will develop greater breadth of outcomes. The particular characteristics of each degree will be articulated in the programme specification. Many degrees which have a specific vocational focus carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA'. The Scottish Bachelors degree is a recognised 'normal' entry requirement to a number of professions across the UK.

Typically, holders of the degree will be able to:

Demonstrate a broad and comparative knowledge of the general scope of the subject, its different areas and applications, and its interactions with related subjects;

Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of a defined subject or a more limited coverage of a specialist area balanced by a wider range of study. In each case, specialised study will be informed by current developments in the subject;

Use their knowledge, understanding and skills, in both identifying and analysing problems and issues and in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments.

Show a critical understanding of the essential theories, principles and concepts of the subject(s) and of the ways in which these are developed through the main methods of enquiry in the subject;

Show an awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge;

Communicate the results of their studies and other work accurately and reliably in a range of different contexts using the main specialist concepts, constructs and techniques of the subject(s);

Gain familiarity with and competence in the use of routine materials, practices and skills; and gain familiarity with and competence in a few that are more specialised, advanced and complex; Identify and address their own learning needs including being able to draw on a range of current research, development and professional materials;

Obtain well developed skills for the gathering, evaluation, analysis and presentation of information, ideas, concepts and quantitative and/or qualitative data, drawing on a wide range of current sources. This will include the use of ICT as appropriate to the subject(s);

Apply their subject and transferable skills to contexts where criteria for decisions and the scope of the task may be well defined but where personal responsibility, initiative and decision-making is also required.

The Scottish Bachelors degree with Honours

SCQF Level 10

SCQF Credit Points

At least 480 credits of which a minimum of 180 are at SHE levels 3 and H including a minimum of 90 at SHE level H

General information

The Scottish Bachelors degree with Honours is typically offered through the equivalent of four years of full-time higher education. It is awarded mainly as either a Bachelor of Science (BSc Hons), or a Bachelor of Arts (BA Hons).

Design of qualification

All Honours degrees will exhibit a balance of breadth and depth as will be clear from particular programme specifications. Many Honours degrees will have a specific vocational focus, and in some cases will carry recognition by the appropriate professional or statutory body. In a small number of universities, in some faculties, this qualification is titled 'MA (Hons)'. The Honours degree is the recognised 'normal' entry requirement to postgraduate study and to many professions across the UK.

Typically, holders of the degree with Honours will be able to:

Demonstrate a systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge and understanding of the subject(s) as a whole and its links to related subject(s);

Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of a few specialisms and developments, some of which are at, or informed by, the forefront of the subject;

Use their knowledge, understanding and skills in the systematic and critical assessment of a wide range of concepts, ideas, and data (that may be incomplete), and in identifying and analysing complex problems and issues; demonstrate some originality and creativity in formulating, evaluating and applying evidence-based solutions and arguments.

Show a critical understanding of the established theories, principles and concepts, and of a number of advanced and emerging issues at the forefront of the subject(s);

Show a comprehensive knowledge and familiarity with essential and advanced materials, techniques and skills including some at the forefront of the subject;

Communicate the results of their study and other work accurately and reliably using the full repertoire of the principal concepts and constructs of the subject(s).

Show a critical understanding of the uncertainty and limits of knowledge and how it is developed and an ability to deploy established techniques of analysis and enquiry within the subject;

Systematically identify and address their own learning needs both in current and in new areas, making use of research, development and professional materials as appropriate, including those related to the forefront of developments.

Develop skills in identifying information needs, and in the systematic gathering, analysis and interpretation of ideas, concepts and qualitative and quantitative data

and information from a range of evaluated sources including current research, scholarly, and/or professional literature;

Apply their subject-related and transferable skills in contexts of a professional or equivalent nature where there is a requirement for:

- the exercise of personal responsibility and initiative;

- decision-making in complex and unpredictable contexts;

- the ability to undertake further developments of a professional or equivalent nature.

Masters degrees

SCQF Level 11

SCQF Credit Points

At least 180 credits of which a minimum of 150 are at SHE level M. For integrated Masters, at least 600 credits of which a minimum of 120 are at SHE level M. (Credit definitions do not normally apply to the MPhil)

General information

The Masters degree is available through several different routes: as a programme for graduates or equivalent, through at least one year of full-time postgraduate study or an equivalent period of part-time study; as a programme of typically the equivalent of five years' full-time study that integrates a period of undergraduate study with the Masters degree.

The first of these typically leads to award of Master of Science or Master of Arts, depending on the subject taken, but other titles are also used. Integrated programmes, frequently offered over the equivalent of five years' full-time study, typically lead to a subject-specific qualification title (e.g. MEng) and are often linked to professional/statutory body recognition.

Design of qualification

In the majority of cases, the Masters degree reflects a specialised knowledge and understanding of particular areas, applications or levels of expertise in particular subject or professional areas. In some professional areas, Masters degrees are linked to structures of continuing professional development.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

Demonstrate a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice;

Deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Show a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship;

Demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level.
Demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline;

Continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and develop new skills to a high level.

Show a conceptual understanding that enables the student:

- to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline, and to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses

- to demonstrate the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring: the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility; decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations; and the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Doctoral degrees

SCQF Level 12

SCQF Credit points

At least 540 credits of which a minimum of 420 are at SHE level D. Credit definitions do not apply to research-based Doctorates

General Information

The Doctoral degrees are available through several different routes. The PhD is normally awarded following successful completion of a thesis which requires the equivalent of a minimum of three years' full-time research and study to complete. Professional doctorates also require the equivalent of three years' full-time research and study to complete and will frequently involve work-based as well as HEI-based research and study.

Design of qualification

Doctoral degrees reflect specialised, advanced knowledge, understanding and practice at the frontiers of the subject or professional area.

Typically, holders of the qualification will be able to:

Demonstrate the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research, or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication;

Demonstrate a systematic acquisition and understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline or area of professional practice;

Make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, often in the absence of complete data, and be able to communicate their ideas and conclusions clearly and effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences;

Demonstrate the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of new knowledge, applications or understanding at the forefront of the discipline, and to adjust the project design in the light of unforeseen problems;

Continue to undertake pure and/or applied research and development at an advanced level, contributing substantially to the development of new techniques, ideas, or approaches;

Gain a detailed understanding of applicable techniques for research and advanced academic enquiry; and demonstrate the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and largely autonomous initiative in complex and unpredictable situations, in professional or equivalent environments.

Appendix   4

GLOSSARY

Glossary of terms – an explanation of abbreviations and key terms associated with the SCQF and used on the website:

FE   Further Education

The FE Sector is now referred to as Scotland's colleges. It is the largest provider of lifelong learning in Scotland and provides programmes of learning that meet the needs of individuals, communities and employers and has a key role in securing social justice and economic development in Scotland. Scotland's 43 colleges provide education and training to nearly 500,000 students each year. Around 75% of students take part-time courses, around 56% are female and around 12% are over 50s.

HE   Higher Education

In Scotland, education above Higher and Advanced Higher Grade is provided in 14 universities, 7 colleges of higher education and in some colleges. There are over 260,000 students taking higher education courses in Scotland. Around 28% of HE students attend courses at Scotland's colleges. Around 54% are female and around 45% are over 25s. An ordinary Degree is recognised as the normal entry to a number of professions across Scotland. Postgraduate study leads to higher Degrees, such as Master and Doctoral degrees.

HN   Higher National (award)

There are Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) in a wide range of subjects. They are designed to provide people with the practical skills and theoretical knowledge that employers expect. HNCs and HNDs help people to start, improve and extend their careers. Local colleges will advise on entry requirements (such as the number of Highers or Intermediate 2s). Some colleges offer tailored entry programmes for people who do not meet the usual entry requirements.

HNC   Higher National Certificate

HNCs are normally offered through the equivalent of one year's full-time higher education study. HNCs can be achieved by part-time study during the day, at evening classes, or a combination of the two. Students working on a part-time basis would normally take 2 to 3 years to achieve an HNC. An HNC can give entry to HNDs and degree programmes at SCQF Level 7 or 8.

HND   Higher National Diploma

HND courses offer a broader range of study than HNC courses. HNDs are normally offered through the equivalent of two years' full-time higher education. Many HND courses are also available on a part-time basis. An HND can give entry to degree programmes at SCQF Level 8 or 9.

SCOTCAT   Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer

The Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) Framework is the national credit framework relating to higher education in Scotland. It has 4 undergraduate levels and credit to reflect the Scottish 4-year degree.
SCOTCAT was established in 1991-92 and was the first national credit framework for higher education in the UK. It is supported through the Quality Assurance Agency Scotland and overall policy is steered by the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access (SACCA).

The model consists of an agreement between higher education institutions to work together on the development of credit-based learning and to adopt a common tariff of levels and points.

SCQF Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

The Framework brings together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework and provides a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities.

The central aims of the SCQF are to:

- Enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how they relate to each other and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills and workforce;
- Help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential.

SHE   Scottish Higher Education

SQA   Scottish Qualifications Authority

SQA is the national body for Scotland with responsibility for the development, accreditation, assessment and certification of qualifications other than degrees.

SQA's functions are to:

- Devise, develop and validate qualifications, and keep them under review
- Accredit qualifications;
- Approve education and training establishments as being suitable for entering people for these qualifications;
- Arrange for, assist in, and carry out the assessment of people taking SQA qualifications;
- Quality assure education and training establishments that offer SQA qualifications.

Qualifications include:

- National Qualifications (including Standard Grade and National Units and courses at Access, Intermediate, Higher and Advanced Higher Levels);
- Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNC/HND);
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs);
- Customised awards and Professional Development Awards.

SQA also has responsibility for developing and distributing 5-14 National Tests to schools as part of the Government's 5-14 Programme.

SVQ   Scottish Vocational Qualification

SVQs are based on national standards of performance developed by representatives from industry, commerce and education. They are usually achieved in the workplace and combine work-based competences and the knowledge needed to acquire those skills. Some SVQs or SVQ Units are incorporated into other awards or programmes including HNCs and Modern Apprenticeships. There are SVQs for nearly all occupations in Scotland. SVQs help people to progress throughout their working life. They are available at 5 levels of difficulty, making them suitable for people starting out on careers and for people with many years of experience. Employers now regard education and training for their workforce as an investment, with SVQs as an integral part of their business development strategy. Working to national standards of competence through an effective SVQ programme can deliver measurable benefits and is recognised as the way forward for a progressive company.