



scottish credit and  
qualifications framework

# SCQF CREDIT RATING CRITERIA EXPLAINED:

Learning Outcomes, Notional  
Learning Hours and Assessment

# INTRODUCTION

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is Scotland's Lifelong Learning Framework and it is used to help develop and recognise qualifications and learning programmes from all contexts of learning whatever their source.

This guide will be useful for organisations preparing learning for credit rating by a Credit Rating Body and for staff across all sectors who develop and deliver learning programmes, including staff in professional bodies, training providers, community learning and development and the voluntary sector.

SCQF Credit Rating Bodies use the SCQF Level Descriptors and other relevant reference documents to credit rate learning provision to put it into the Framework. This guidance document provides explanation on how the SCQF Level Descriptors are used for credit rating and provides explanations for SCQF Level and SCQF Credit Points. In particular, it focuses on:

- **writing learning outcomes;**
- activities that can be counted towards the **notional learning hours; and**
- **assessment.**

The SCQF publications *An Overview of Quality Assurance in SCQF Credit Rating Bodies* and *Externality Explained* both provide further explanation of the quality assurance required by the SCQF. These are available to download from the SCQF Website at [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk) and are also available in hard copy through the SCQF Partnership.

This Information should be read in conjunction with the *SCQF Handbook: User Guide* which is a technical document that describes the key features and technicalities of the Framework along with approaches that should be followed in its implementation. Organisations preparing learning programmes for credit rating should also consult their Credit Rating Body to discuss its specific requirements as this document provides general information only.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENT

<b>1.</b>	<b>Development of the SCQF Level Descriptors</b>	Provides brief background information on the consultative approach to establish the SCQF and agree a single set of level descriptors to describe all learning across all sectors in Scotland
<b>2</b>	<b>Explanation of SCQF Level and Credit Points</b>	Explains the meaning of the terms “SCQF Level” and “SCQF Credit Points” as they are used in the context of the SCQF and their importance in the Scottish education and training system
<b>3.</b>	<b>Writing learning outcomes</b>	Provides guidance to learning providers from all sectors on how to write learning outcomes for qualifications and learning programmes
<b>4.</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	Explains the importance of assessment for the SCQF and provides examples of different forms of assessment
<b>5.</b>	<b>Using the SCQF Level Descriptors in formal and informal learning</b>	Provides guidance on why and how to use the SCQF Level Descriptors in the design of learning programmes
<b>6.</b>	<b>Using the SCQF Level Descriptors for the recognition of prior learning</b>	This section provides a definition of recognition of prior learning and how the SCQF Level Descriptors can be used to help to assess prior learning
<b>7.</b>	<b>Using the SCQF Level Descriptors for staff and workforce development</b>	Provides guidance on approaches to use the SCQF Level Descriptors for staff and workforce development and examples from current practice on recognition of work-based learning

### Annexes

- A. Bloom’s Taxonomy**
- B. Examples of SCQF Credit Rating documentation**
- C. References and sources of further information**

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## EXPLANATION OF TERMS

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<b>Benchmarking</b>	An informal process which provides an estimation of where learning might sit on the SCQF, that has not been credit rated. It is not a formal recognised process.
<b>Credit Rating</b>	The process of allocating SCQF Level and Credit Points to qualifications and learning programmes, whether formal, non-formal or informal.
<b>Credit Rating Body</b>	An organisation that carries out credit rating for the SCQF. These are Scotland's colleges; Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs); SQA; and other organisations that have been approved by the SCQF Partnership.
<b>Credit Transfer</b>	The transfer of SCQF Credit Points from one programme into another to minimise the duplication of learning.
<b>Learning: Formal</b>	Takes place within the context of programmes delivered by learning and training providers. It is assessed and leads to recognised qualifications.
<b>Learning: Informal</b>	Informal learning can be defined as experiential learning and takes place through life and work experiences. It is often unintentional learning. The learner may not recognise at the time of the experience that it contributed to the development of their skills and knowledge. The recognition may only happen retrospectively through the RPL process, unless the experiences take place as part of a planned experiential or work-based learning programme.
<b>Learning: Non-formal</b>	Non-formal learning takes place alongside the mainstream systems of education and training. It may be assessed but does not typically lead to formal certification: for example, learning and training activities undertaken in the workplace, voluntary sector or trade union and through community based learning.
<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence.
<b>Learning Providers</b>	Organisations across all education and training sectors that provide formal, non-formal or informal learning.
<b>Notional Learning Hours</b>	The time required for a typical learner at a specified SCQF Level to achieve the learning outcomes. Includes all the learning activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes as well as the assessment.

<b>Professional Judgement</b>	A decision reached by those best qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of skill.
<b>Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (RPL)</b>	RPL is the process for recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts.
<b>SCQF Credit Points: General</b>	Quantified learning outcomes that are subject to valid, reliable methods of assessment. The number of SCQF Credit Points is worked out on the basis of the amount of notional learning time that a typical learner at a specified SCQF level might expect to take to achieve the learning outcomes, including the assessment.
<b>SCQF Credit Points: Specific</b>	General Credit Points become specific when they are recognised as being relevant for entry or transfer to a particular qualification or learning programme.
<b>SCQF Guidelines</b>	The SCQF Guidelines underpin the principles of embedding and implementing the Framework across all sectors of lifelong learning in Scotland. There are Guidelines on SCQF Credit Rating, Credit Transfer and the Recognition of Prior Learning.
<b>SCQF Levels</b>	The SCQF Framework has 12 SCQF Levels. The complexity of learning and level of demand increases from Level 1 through to Level 12.
<b>SCQF Level Descriptors</b>	These define the generic outcomes for the five characteristics for each of the SCQF Levels.

**Additional support materials that provide further information, explanation and examples of best practice are available on the SCQF website, [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk).**

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# SECTION 1. DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

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## Summary

This section provides an overview of the SCQF and brief background information on the consultative approach to establish and agree a single set of level descriptors to describe all learning across all learning sectors in Scotland.

## Overview of the SCQF

The SCQF is Scotland's Lifelong Learning Framework. It was established in 2001 to provide an agreed means of recognising and valuing learning. It was developed through a consultative approach which drew on the Framework of Qualifications for Higher Education (FQHE) and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) frameworks for general and vocational education and is based on the mainstream qualifications within the Scottish education system.

The SCQF provides a shared context for learning in Scotland. It was created by bringing together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified Framework. Within the overall context of lifelong learning, 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; and
- 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 has 12 Levels which reflect the current Scottish education and training system. Each SCQF Level has a Level Descriptor which provides a broad understanding of the expected attainment at every level.

Further details of the development of the SCQF are available on the SCQF website, [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk).

## The SCQF Level Descriptors

The development of the SCQF Level Descriptors was informed by the SCOTCAT Framework in higher education, subject benchmarks developed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education and developments in SVQs and Higher National qualifications by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

In general terms, the level descriptors are a means of expressing a shared understanding of the expected outcomes, learning and teaching process and assessment for all those involved in learning provision. This includes those involved in the design and/or delivery of learning, those providing guidance to learners, assessors, awarding organisations and administrators. Level descriptors provide an agreed reference point to help make comparisons between levels of qualifications and learning programmes.

Level descriptors are fundamental to the SCQF. The SCQF Level Descriptors describe in broad terms what learners should be able to do or demonstrate at a particular level. Within an integrated Framework, these level descriptors provide a common vocabulary to assist with the comparison of qualifications and learning programmes.

Using level descriptors and learning outcomes as core components of the Framework ensures that the focus is on the complexity of the output or what the learner can do or demonstrate, rather than concentrating on the input or the teaching process.

Level descriptors provide a transparency across different learning contexts and are particularly important to support learning recognition and progression opportunities across levels and contexts including formal, non-formal and

informal learning such as work-based learning and training, multi-disciplinary learning programmes, community based learning and recognition of prior learning.

As there is only one set, the SCQF Level Descriptors provide a common reference point for all learning irrespective of whether it is academic, vocational, non-formal or informal learning. Therefore they are a useful reference point that can be used when:

- Designing a new qualification or learning programme;
- Writing learning outcomes for a qualification or learning programme;
- Designing assessment;
- Allocating an SCQF Level to current qualifications and learning programmes;
- Benchmarking any learning programmes that have not been formally credit rated;
- Recognising prior learning from work-based, informal and non-formal learning contexts;
- Credit rating qualifications and learning programmes.

### Characteristics of the SCQF Level Descriptors

The SCQF Level Descriptors have five characteristics which provide a reference point for determining the level of a qualification, learning programme, module or unit of learning or for the recognition of prior learning. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning for individual qualifications. These are:

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

It is important to remember that some characteristics may not be relevant for particular qualifications or learning programmes. Another important factor in using the SCQF Level Descriptors is to follow a “best fit” approach. It is not expected that learning outcomes in qualifications and learning programmes will cover **all** the characteristics of an SCQF Level as described in the SCQF Level Descriptors.

Detailed information on the SCQF Level Descriptors and full descriptions of how these generic characteristics are described for each of the 12 Levels of the Framework are shown in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide and on the SCQF website, [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk).

### Using the SCQF Level Descriptors

From the early stages of the Framework, guidelines on the criteria for credit rating qualifications and learning programmes were developed and agreed. Credit rating is the process of allocating a level and determining the number of credits in a qualification or learning programme which is to be included in the Framework. Credit rating is described more fully in Section 2.

#### The following key points are important to remember when you are using the SCQF Level Descriptors:

- The SCQF Level Descriptors should be seen as **a useful guide to be used with other reference documents** such as subject benchmarks, arrangement documents and other relevant programmes on the Framework;
- The characteristics of the Level Descriptors are **generic in nature and may not all be relevant** for every qualification or learning programme;
- They provide a **general overview of what would be expected** of a typical learner at a specified SCQF level. However as some of the characteristics may not be relevant it is not necessary that all are met;
- When deciding an appropriate level for a qualification or learning programme, it is **helpful to look at descriptors across a range of levels** to determine the “best fit”; and
- The vocabulary of the **SCQF Level Descriptors may provide appropriate wording** that can be used to describe learning for programme descriptions, learning outcomes and assessment evidence.

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## SECTION 2. EXPLANATION OF SCQF LEVEL AND CREDIT POINTS

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### Summary

The SCQF uses two measures, SCQF Level and Credit Points, to help in understanding and comparing qualifications and learning programmes. This section explains the meaning of the terms Levels, Level Descriptors and Credit Points as they are used in the context of the SCQF and their importance in the Scottish education and training system.

### SCQF Credit Rating

The SCQF Level Descriptors are used along with other reference documents by SCQF Credit Rating Bodies to credit rate learning programmes and qualifications. Credit rating is the process of allocating an SCQF Level and Credit Points to a qualification or learning programme which is formally recorded by an SCQF Credit Rating Body. Credit rating results in a qualification or learning programme being included in the Framework provided that the following criteria are met:

- the learning must be based on learning outcomes;
- the learning outcomes must take a minimum of a notional 10 hours to achieve;
- learning outcomes must be subject to reliable and valid methods of assessment that are recorded; and
- the learning is included within an appropriate quality assurance system as detailed in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide.

Credit Rating Bodies may adopt different procedures for their credit rating operations. These procedures will be based on the principles detailed in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide. You should consult with your Credit Rating Body to be informed of their procedures.

### SCQF Levels

As outlined in the previous sections the SCQF Levels are based on a single set of level descriptors that are the common reference points and definitions which provide a way of recognising learning that is outcome-based and quality-assured. SCQF Levels provide a basis for individuals, employers and learning providers to make broad comparisons between learning programmes and qualifications achieved in different contexts, such as the workplace, community, informal and non-formal learning and formal classroom study, and by a variety of modes.

***“A level is an indicator of relative demand; complexity; depth of study; and learner autonomy” (Gosling and Moon: 2001).***

There are 12 SCQF Levels which provide an indication of the complexity of qualifications and learning programmes. SCQF Level 1 is the least demanding and SCQF Level 12 is the most demanding. Decisions on appropriate levels for qualifications and learning programmes involve a process of professional judgement, normally made by staff who have expert knowledge and experience in the occupational area, skills area or subject. The credit rating process for qualifications and learning programmes normally involves peer judgement of decisions on allocating levels within quality assurance systems.

It should not be assumed that all learners undertaking new studies would start at the same level in which they may have achieved other prior qualifications or learning programmes. Over a lifetime, as individuals undertake new learning and acquire new skills, their learning will be pitched at the appropriate level, such as learning a new language or ICT skills.

### **Why are different qualifications and learning programmes in the SCQF at the same level?**

Different types of qualifications are positioned at the same level on the Framework to illustrate that they require the same level of skill, knowledge and understanding. This gives a general reference point to compare the levels of different types of qualifications. In instances where two or more qualifications or learning programmes are placed at the same level on the Framework, they are comparable in respect of the overall level of learning outcomes and assessment, but they may have different purposes, content and structures.

Examples of qualifications awarded by SQA and Higher Education Institutions that are comparably placed on the Framework according to their level of complexity of skill, knowledge and understanding are shown in Section 2.5 of the SCQF Handbook: User Guide. Other qualifications and learning programmes that are credit rated by other credit rating bodies are similarly referenced against the Framework. For further details of credit rated qualifications and learning programmes, refer to the SCQF database available on the SCQF website, [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

### **SCQF Credit Points**

The number of Credit Points allocated to qualifications and learning programmes is based on the outcome of professional judgement on how many notional learning hours are required to achieve the learning outcomes. One SCQF Credit Point represents 10 notional learning hours. Professional judgement is carried out by those best qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of skill and familiarity with the levels of the SCQF.

SCQF Credit Points are awarded to learners when they successfully achieve the learning outcomes of the learning programme or qualification. Although the actual amount of time taken by individual learners to achieve the learning outcomes may vary, this does not affect the number of Credit Points that are awarded.

Credit Points provide a way for learners, employers and learning providers to describe and compare the amount of learning that has been achieved, or is required to be achieved within a qualification or learning programme at a given level of the Framework. SCQF Credit Points quantify learning outcomes that are subject to valid, reliable methods of assessment.

As noted above, SCQF Credit Points are used to quantify the amount of learning required to achieve specified learning outcomes at a particular level. Most mainstream qualifications in Scotland have been credit rated. Details of these are available in Annex 3 of the SCQF Handbook: User Guide.

### **What Are General and Specific Credit Points?**

When qualifications and learning programmes are credit rated the credit that is allocated is known as General Credit. The number of credits allocated reflects the number of notional learning hours that will be required to meet the learning outcomes. All mainstream qualifications have been awarded General Credit points.

In some cases it may be possible to transfer General Credit from one qualification or learning programme into another. Depending on the requirements of the programme, it may be possible to transfer some or all of the General Credit Points. The credit that is imported to another programme is referred to as Specific Credit.

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## Notional Learning Hours

General Credit Points are allocated based on the number of notional learning hours that it would typically take a learner at a specified level to achieve the learning outcomes.

Notional learning hours includes all the learning activities that are required to achieve the learning outcomes. When credit rating a qualification or learning programme, it is important to consider the time spent on activities that take place before and after delivery as well as the actual delivery.

### For example, activities before delivery might include:

- Preparation such as reading materials provided prior to delivery;
- Self reflection on prior knowledge and experience and how it links to the delivery;
- Personal programme planning;
- Using libraries or learning resource centres for reading and research.

### Some of the more obvious activities for actual delivery are:

- Attending formal teaching sessions;
- Practical work in laboratories and other locations;
- Relevant ICT activities;
- Self directed study using online or text-based open learning materials;
- Involvement in informal learning such as community groups, youth groups, outdoor activities.

### After delivery, notional hours might include:

- Private study, revision or remedial work;
- Assessment of learning;
- Reflection on what has been learned;
- Practice through gaining, using and refining skills in the workplace.

Notional hours must reflect the time spent on ALL of the activities relating to the programme. Further examples of the type of learning activities that might be included in the notional learning hours are given in Section 3.3 of the SCQF Handbook: User Guide.

The allocation of SCQF Level and Credit Points does not demonstrate inter-changeability of qualifications or learning programmes. For further information on General and Specific Credit Points and SCQF Credit Transfer see Section 3.4 and Section 5 respectively of the SCQF Handbook: User Guide.

An example of a proforma that some Credit Rating Bodies find useful in helping to determine the notional hours is included in Annex B of this guide.

### Further Information

More detailed information on using the SCQF can be found in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide available in hard copy from the SCQF Partnership or downloadable from [www.scqf.org.uk/Resources](http://www.scqf.org.uk/Resources). SCQF Credit Rating Bodies allocating SCQF Level and Credit Points to Learning Programmes and Qualifications should refer to the SCQF Handbook: User Guide, Section 4 Credit Rating. Employers should refer to the SCQF Guide for Employers which provides a contextualised version of the Framework available in hard copy from the SCQF Partnership or downloadable from [www.scqf.org.uk/Resources](http://www.scqf.org.uk/Resources)

## SECTION 3. WRITING LEARNING OUTCOMES

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### Summary

**This section provides guidance to learning providers from all sectors on how to write learning outcomes for learning programmes.**

### What is a Learning Outcome?

A learning outcome is a statement of what a learner will know or be able to do as a result of a learning activity. Learning outcomes should be achievable and assessable. The outcomes based approach to learning, teaching and assessment is used widely in learning programme specifications, benchmark statements and national qualification frameworks, including the SCQF. Learning outcomes provide a common approach across all learning sectors to express and measure learning achievements within qualifications or learning programmes. The use of learning outcomes is one of the criteria that are applied for a qualification or learning programme to be included on the SCQF.

### Using Learning Outcomes in Course Design and Development

Using learning outcomes in course design and development leads to a learner-centred approach so that the focus is on the outcome of the learning rather than the input or teaching process.

#### Learning outcomes can:

- Help to guide learners in their learning by:
  - explaining what is expected of them;
  - describing the level of learning anticipated; and
  - providing clear information to support learning progression and recognition of prior learning.
- Provide information to potential learners and employers about the knowledge and skills that they will have on successfully completing a particular qualification or learning programme;
- Help staff to:
  - design the content of a qualification or learning programme;
  - focus on exactly what they want students to achieve in terms of both knowledge and skills;
  - show the connection between the programme aims and the learner outcomes;
  - decide on appropriate assessment criteria and methods.

#### Typically, learning outcomes should:

- Be written in the future tense;
- Use active verbs to describe what the learner will be able to do and to enable the learner to show their knowledge and understanding;
- Avoid using verbs whose meaning is ambiguous;
- Describe the final output or achievement for the learner;
- Use clear language that is easily understood by learners and non-experts;
- Be informed by the SCQF Levels and Level Descriptors;
- Be achievable as a result of the learning activity;
- Be able to be assessed; and
- Be specific.

Some examples of learning outcomes:

Investigative Interviewing Techniques Training (IITT)	
<b>Aim:</b>	The aim of this course is to enable trainers to facilitate and deliver Investigative Interview Techniques Training (IITT) and provide feedback to Police Officers and Police Staff.
<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>	On completion of this course students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Apply the application of the PRICE model during suspect and witness interviews;</li> <li>■ Critically evaluate and assess students conducting investigative interviews of witnesses and suspects, in accordance with guidelines and legislation.</li> </ul>

Fitness Awareness	
<b>Aim:</b>	The aim of the course is to enable individuals to organise and instruct training sessions, administer the National Fitness Standard and advise others on factors affecting physical fitness.
<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>	On completion of this course students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Assist and advise others on health and exercise at a basic level;</li> <li>■ Administer the National Fitness Standard.</li> </ul>

Open and Distance Learning Authors' Course	
<b>Aim:</b>	The aim of the course is to enable individuals to plan, research and produce text based open and distance learning materials.
<b>Learning Outcomes:</b>	On completion of this course you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Design appropriate activities and feedback for selected media;</li> <li>■ Comply with Copyright, Rights and Permissions legislation when developing ODL materials.</li> </ul>

### Some Guidelines For Writing Learning Outcomes

Organisations will write learning outcomes that meet the particular requirements of their own organisations. The following general principles may be helpful to consider when writing learning outcomes:

- Keep learning outcomes to a manageable number to focus on the essential requirements for the learner;
- It is helpful to start a learning outcome with a phrase such as “on completion of this qualification/learning programme/unit/module, learners/you will be able to.....”

When writing learning outcomes, you may wish to consider using Bloom’s Taxonomy as a reference tool to find the active verb to match the level of learning. A summary of key features is included at Annex A.

## SECTION 4. ASSESSMENT

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### Summary

This section explains the importance of assessment for learning programmes to be included in the SCQF and provides examples of different forms of assessment.

### Key Principles of Assessment

Assessment is the process of evaluating an individual's learning. It involves generating and collecting evidence of a learner's attainment of knowledge and skills and judging that evidence against defined standards which are expressed in the learning outcomes.

Assessment has many different purposes, such as to:

- Identify strengths and development needs;
- Plan learning;
- Provide feedback to learners;
- Measure individual attainment;
- Support the learning process and move learning forward;
- Help learner to make future choices;
- Provide information for learning providers;
- Provide information for employers;
- Award qualifications;
- Monitor and maintain standards; and
- Evaluate performance levels.

The fact that some of these purposes of assessment support individual development and others are used by external organisations can cause tension because of perceived conflicting requirements. The overall aim of assessment is to support both the learning and the teaching experience.

The key principles that underpin assessment are that it should be valid, reliable, proportionate, practicable and cost-effective, and equitable and fair. Assessment is important to:

- measure learner achievement;
- show progress and distance travelled;
- provide evidence of the efficacy of teaching methods

### What is Formative and Summative Assessment?

**Formative assessment** forms the basis of active learning. It is ongoing throughout the learning, teaching and assessment process as it helps assessors and learners to identify any gaps that exist between the learner's desired goal and their current understanding, knowledge and skills in order to advise them of actions that are required to help them reach their goal. It is not formally recorded. It is used to complement learning and teaching.

**Summative assessment** measures and records an individual's achievement — the assessment of learning. It can be completed internally or externally. Assessment may involve observation, product evaluation, or questioning or a combination of some or all of the three.

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## Assessment Methods

There are many different methods of assessment, known to learning providers as 'assessment instruments'. Each of these instruments can be classified under one or more of observation, product evaluation or questioning. Whether they are used formatively or summatively, the most important issue is whether the assessment is appropriate for the intended outcome. Methods of assessment include:

- Observation
- Products of work
- Simulation
- Witness testimony
- Questioning
- Case studies and projects
- Personal statements, portfolios and logs
- E-assessment
- Examinations and tests
- Written assignments/essays.

The vocabulary of the SCQF Level Descriptors can be used with the learning outcomes statements to define the criteria for assessment. When designing a qualification or learning programme, you need to think about the intended learning outcomes and the assessment together. The method of assessment used should be appropriate for the learning.

**For example, it would not be appropriate to ask a learner to write an essay as evidence that they can swim. If the learning outcome was "...to be able to swim 50 metres without using any aids", an appropriate method of assessment would be to observe the learner swimming the required length. Equally, using the example of swimming, if the learning outcome was "... to describe the actions that a swimmer must perform to be able to swim", the assessment method would involve the learner providing evidence of knowledge and understanding of how to perform the action of swimming. This might be assessed by a written report or by questioning the learner.**

Summative assessment of qualifications and learning programmes is essential for inclusion on the Framework. In some instances, this can be a key factor in deciding whether to credit rate qualifications or learning programmes. In some learning contexts, especially the voluntary sector and community based learning sectors there may be concerns that formal assessment would have a negative impact on the learning activity and compromise operating principles. However, it is important to recognise that there are a range of assessment methods that can be used to fit with all learning contexts, that will not intrude on the learning and will add value to both the learner and the provider in recognising particular learning achievements. In these learning contexts, assessment is often done through a process of review and reflection of learning. There are materials that have been produced to support this reflection and review process.

For sources of further information on assessment, see Annex C.

## SECTION 5. USING THE SCQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS IN FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

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### Summary

This section provides guidance to learning providers from all sectors on why and how to use the SCQF Level Descriptors in the design of learning programmes.

#### Including a Qualification or Learning Programme on the SCQF

Any qualification or learning programme, or components of a qualification or learning programme, must meet the following criteria to be considered for inclusion in the Framework:

- The learning must be based on learning outcomes (see Section 3 of this guide for more information on writing learning outcomes);
- The learning outcomes must take a minimum of 10 hours of notional learning time;
- Learning outcomes must be formally assessed and recorded using reliable and valid methods of summative assessment;
- The learning must have a documented process of quality assurance in terms of assessing learning outcomes, credit rating decisions and external quality assurance processes.

**Qualifications and learning programmes must have been formally credit rated to be described in terms of the SCQF and use the SCQF logo on documents.**

#### How do I allocate an SCQF level to units or modules in a qualification or learning programme

The content of the learning outcomes combined with the assessments will determine the level of a learning component/unit/module and ultimately the level of the overall qualification or learning programme. The following suggested actions may help to identify the level of a qualification or learning programme:

- Become familiar with the SCQF Level Descriptors and the distinctions between levels;
- Refer to appropriate sources of information and advice on credit rating;
- Match the overall aims and learning outcomes to the SCQF Level Descriptors;
- Ensure the learning outcomes relate clearly to a particular SCQF Level;
- Check that the wording of the learning outcomes suggest a level of skill;
- Ensure that the assessment evidence indicates a particular level of performance;
- Identify other similar qualifications that have been credit rated/allocated an SCQF Level to use as a “benchmark”;
- Look at other reference points for comparison such as relevant occupational or professional standards if available and subject benchmarks;
- Consider the SCQF Level Descriptors at the levels above and below the anticipated level for the qualification or learning programme. Ask why the qualification or learning programme would not be placed at the level above or below your decision.

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## How can I use the SCQF level descriptors to allocate an SCQF level to a qualification or learning programme?

- Qualifications or learning programmes will generally consist of several components, such as units or modules;
- When individual units or modules have been mapped against the SCQF Level Descriptors to allocate an SCQF Level, the next stage is to decide how to allocate an SCQF Level to a whole qualification or learning programme;
- You should level each of the units or modules individually using the five characteristics of the SCQF Level Descriptors and then aggregate the scores to decide on an overall SCQF Level for the qualification or learning programme;
- In many instances, all units or modules will have been mapped against the SCQF Level Descriptor for one level. If that is the case, it is likely that the whole qualification or learning programme can be allocated that SCQF Level. However, it is still necessary to review and test this allocation;
- If that is not the case, there are different approaches to allocate a level to a whole qualification or learning programme.

## What happens if the learning outcomes for some units in my learning programme are at different levels?

In instances where a qualification or learning programme includes components from different SCQF Levels, they should be reviewed together to make a decision about the overall level of the qualification or learning programme. The following models can be used to reach this decision to allocate an overall level:

### Exit level model

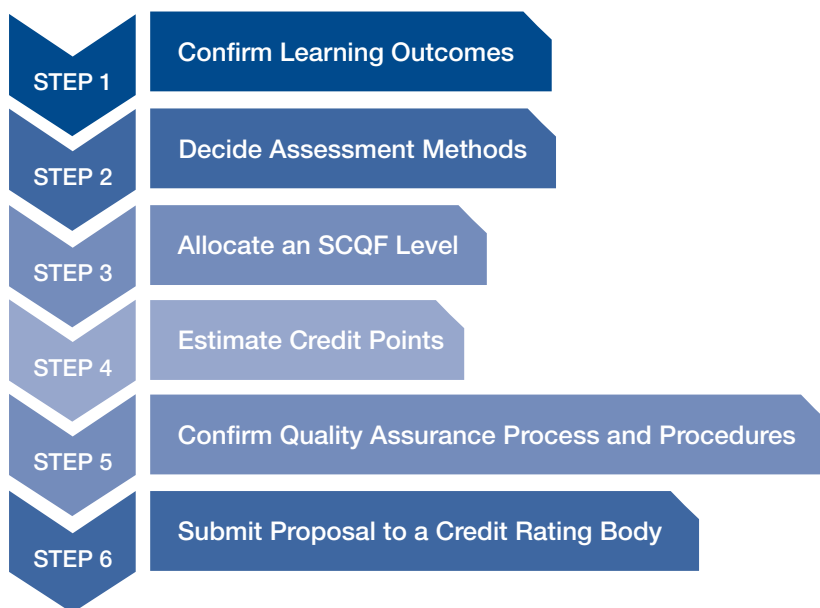
- Is it designed to take learners from a lower starting point to a higher end point?
- Does it involve a form of exit assessment that is at the level of the qualification or learning programme?

### Proportional design model

- Does it have core components that cover the main elements with a range of options?
- Does it have a minimum of half of the Credit Points at, or above, the overall level?

### How do I credit rate a qualification or learning programme for the SCQF?

Credit Rating Bodies may adopt different procedures for their credit rating operations. These procedures will be based on the principles detailed in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide. You should consult with your Credit Rating Body to be informed of their procedures. However, in general, the steps in the credit rating process will be similar to the following suggested model.



Further details on the process of credit rating qualifications and learning programmes are available in Section 4 of the SCQF Handbook: User Guide.

### What is the difference between credit rating and benchmarking a qualification or learning programme?

SCQF Level Descriptors are used in the first stage of the credit rating process for qualifications and learning programmes, whether formal or informal, to indicate an SCQF Level. For some organisations this “benchmarking” stage is as far as they may wish to go. It is a useful way of valuing all types of learning that has not been credit rated or which does not meet the criteria for credit rating. It provides an estimation of where learning might sit on the Framework and is an informal estimation before a detailed analysis takes place for credit rating. However, qualifications and learning programmes must have been formally credit rated to be described in terms of the SCQF and use the SCQF logo on documents.

### How can I provide evidence of my decision on the level of a qualification or learning programme?

Each Credit Rating Body may use its own documentation to record information for their credit rating process and procedures.

There are examples of materials used in Annex B that might be helpful to consider. You should check with your Credit Rating Body to confirm any specific forms they require.

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## SECTION 6. USING THE SCQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR THE RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

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### Summary

This section provides a definition of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and how the SCQF Level Descriptors can be used to help to assess prior learning.

### Defining What We Mean by “Recognition of Prior Learning” (RPL)

The process of RPL can give individuals an opportunity to get recognition for all prior informal and non-formal learning that has not been assessed or credit rated. It can help learners to:

- progress their personal/career development;
- gain entry to a qualification or learning programme by showing that they have the necessary knowledge, skills and understanding if they do not have the required formal entry qualifications;
- gain Specific Credit Transfer towards a qualification or learning programme to shorten the normal period of study;
- be awarded SCQF General Credit Points at a specified SCQF Level which recognises the learning achievement and may be used to progress their learning by meeting entry requirements for a qualification or learning programme.

Recognition is not given for the experience itself, but for what has been learned from the experience.

#### An RPL claim must include:

- clear statements about what was actually learned; and
- supporting evidence that the learning being claimed has been achieved.

Learners can compare the evidence of their experiential learning with the SCQF Level Descriptors as part of the RPL process. During the RPL process, learners can also compare their experiential learning with learning outcomes for specific qualifications, learning programmes or job requirements to assess any credit transfer that may be offered.

The SCQF has developed core principles that should be applied to the process of RPL. As explained in the SCQF Guideline No. 43, RPL systems should be:

- learner-focused;
- accessible;
- flexible; and
- quality-assured.

### Determining SCQF Level and Credit Points of Prior Learning

The process of determining an SCQF Level and Credit Points is similar to the process of allocating an SCQF Level and Credit Points to a qualification or learning programme as explained in Section 5 of this guide. Once learners have produced evidence to submit a claim for RPL, subject experts will review the evidence that the learner has produced on prior experience or learning to check that it meets the assessment criteria as described above and in Section 7 of the SCQF Handbook: User Guide and the SCQF Facilitating the Recognition of Prior Learning: Toolkit.

## SECTION 7. USING THE SCQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS FOR STAFF AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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### Summary

This section provides guidance on approaches to using the SCQF Level Descriptors for staff and workforce development and examples from current practice on recognition of work-based learning.

### Using the SCQF Level Descriptors in the Workplace

The SCQF Level Descriptors can be used in a range of contexts in the workplace. There are case studies available on the SCQF website, [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk), that give examples of how organisations have used the SCQF Level Descriptors in the workplace. The following summary indicates some of the ways in which they can be applied in the workplace:

#### Recruitment

After finding that the SCQF was a useful tool in the process of job evaluation to recognise how different qualifications relate to each other, Aberlour Childcare Trust decided to use the SCQF within their recruitment practice. It allowed them to identify the level of qualification for each post. They found that advertising posts at particular SCQF Levels rather than specifying particular qualifications has helped to broaden the pool of applicants. The organisation now uses the SCQF in other aspects of their staff development including performance management, staff appraisal, identifying training needs, and workforce planning.

#### Formal Recognition of Learning

Microsoft partnered with the Scottish Qualifications Authority to integrate much of the Windows 2003 Server range of certifications into the Higher National Certificates and Diplomas in computing and related subjects that are delivered throughout Scotland's Colleges. The benefits of having industry-specific qualifications credit rated means that they can be easily compared with other mainstream qualifications. It helps learners and employers to understand the range of IT courses available and, where appropriate learners can transfer credit from work-based learning to progress their qualifications in other learning contexts.

#### Workforce Development

BAE systems identified a need to upgrade the skill level of their maintenance engineers, add professional value to the business and significantly reduce dependence on external suppliers and, consequently, costs. The Centre for Credit Rating at Edinburgh Napier University facilitated a collaborative partnership between BAE Systems and Machine Tool Technologies (MTT) and enabled a bespoke award to be designed. They were able to meet the need for workforce development through related complementary modules culminating in a period of work based learning.

#### Scottish Federation of Meat Traders

Improve, the food and drink Sector Skills Council, has been working with food and drink manufacturers, industry bodies and training providers to have specialist food industry training schemes credit rated and levelled on the SCQF. The first programme to be completed, the Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Association (SFMTA) Craftsman Certificate for retail butchery, was re-launched in 2010. The SFMTA feel that having their programmes credit rated and levelled makes it easy to make comparisons with other qualifications and transfer the skills gained to other qualifications such as SVQs, HNC/Ds or degrees. They also recognise that the opportunity for employees to gain formal recognition of their skills not only encourages them to continue to develop their learning but also has a positive effect on every part of a business from staff morale to productivity.

#### Gathering Evidence in a Work-Based Context

SCQF Level Descriptors are fundamental to the process of recognising competence, knowledge, skills and understanding of learning achieved in the workplace. Evidence of learning should be based on similar assessment criteria to those used in the RPL process.

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## ANNEX A: BLOOM'S TAXONOMY

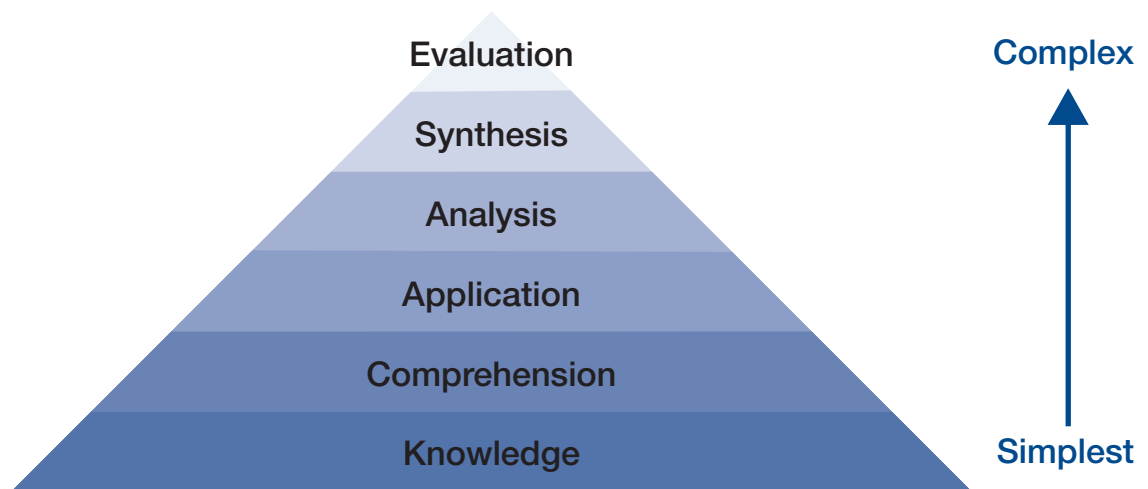
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There are numerous sources of information on the topic of Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). The following information has been developed by the Scottish Police College, an SCQF Credit Rating Body, as part of support information for those involved in the credit rating process. Further sources of information on this are available by searching the internet .

### Bloom's Taxonomy: Overview and Key Features

Bloom's Taxonomy is a useful reference tool to indicate vocabulary that is related to specific levels and specific knowledge and understanding and intellectual skills.

In Bloom's Taxonomy six categories of learning In the Cognitive Domain were identified. The following summary explains key features of this that relate to writing learning outcomes.



Level	Behaviour	Example 'Action Verbs'	COMPLEXITY ↑
Evaluation	Critical thinking, strategic comparisons	Judge; evaluate; appraise; criticise; assess.	
Synthesis	Design solutions, develop plans, integrate methods	Develop; design; formulate; integrate; modify.	
Analysis	Interpret elements, constituent parts of process, make qualitative assessment	Appraise; contrast; examine; investigate; analyse.	
Application	Use or apply knowledge, put theory into practice	Apply; construct; produce; manipulate; solve.	
Comprehension	Understand meaning, re-state information in own words	Explain; classify; discuss; describe; interpret.	
Knowledge	Recall, remember or recognise information (without necessarily understanding it)	Define; list; outline; select; state.	

The following table lists some active verbs. You might find others through an internet search for Bloom's Taxonomy.

Knowledge		Comprehension		Application	
Arrange	Order	Classify	Locate	Apply	Operate
Define	Reorganise	Describe	Reorganise	Choose	Practice
Duplicate	Recall	Discuss	Report	Demonstrate	Schedule
Label	Relate	Explain	Restate	Dramatise	Sketch
List	Repeat	Express	Review	Employ	Solve
Memorise	Reproduce	Identify	Select	Illustrate	Use
Name		Indicate	Translate	Interpret	
Analysis		Synthesis		Evaluation	
Analyse	Differentiate	Arrange	Manage	Appraise	Evaluate
Appraise	Discriminate	Assemble	Organise	Argue	Judge
Calculate	Distinguish	Collect	Plan	Assess	Predict
Categorise	Examine	Compose	Prepare	Attach	Rate
Compare	Experiment	Construct	Propose	Choose	Score
Contrast	Question	Create	Set up	Compare	Select
Criticise	Test	Design	Write	Defend	Support
		Formulate		Estimate	Value

## ANNEX B: EXAMPLES OF SCQF CREDIT RATING DOCUMENTATION

SCQF Credit Rating Bodies may adopt different procedures and recording documents for their credit rating operations. This annex provides two examples of credit rating scorecards for SCQF levels and credit used by Credit Rating Bodies to present details of SCQF Levels and Credit Points recommendations.

Example 1 shows the documentation used by SQA's Credit Rating Service.

Example 2 shows the verification report used by Edinburgh Napier University. Other Credit Rating Bodies may have another form of documentation. If you are submitting provision to be credit rated, you must consult with your Credit Rating Body to be informed of their procedures.

### EXAMPLE 1: SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY Credit Rating Scorecard

SCQF COMPONENT GRID – LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS		
Component title (unit/module):		
SCQF characteristics	Best fit level	Comments (Note – not all characteristics will be relevant and not all aspects of the level descriptors will be relevant)
Knowledge and understanding		(expand section as required)
Practice/applied knowledge		(expand section as required)
Generic cognitive skills		(expand section as required)
Communication/ICT/numeracy		(expand section as required)
Autonomy/working with others		(expand section as required)
<b>Estimated level</b> (best fit)		
<b>Summary of Rationale</b> for recommended component level including reasons for final level selected (if different levels identified for characteristic); justification of selection with reference to levels above and below; quotes/extracts from component (unit/module) to support selection.		
(expand section as required)		
<b>Notes on Approach</b> used plus who was consulted, discussions points, issues raised, etc		
(expand section as required)		

**Credit Rating Scorecard: SQA's SCQF Credit Rating Service: Guide for Submitting Bodies**

<b>SCQF COMPONENT GRID – CREDIT RECOMMENDATIONS</b>				
<b>Component title</b> (unit/module):				
<b>Component breakdown (if relevant)</b> eg topics/ sections from the component	<b>Formal input</b> (eg contact time with tutor, acquisition of knowledge/ understanding) (hrs)	<b>Additional activities</b> (eg developing practice, reflection, research/study time) (hrs)	<b>Assessment</b> (eg planning, completion of assessment tasks) (hrs)	<b>Total time</b>
(add sections as required)				
<b>Total hours</b>				
			<b>Credit value</b> (hrs/10)	
Notes on Approach				

<b>RECOMMENDATION FOR SCQF LEVEL AND CREDIT OF QUALIFICATION/ LEARNING PROGRAMME SCQF COMPONENT SUMMARY GRID – PLEASE ONLY COMPLETE ONE OF THESE</b>				
<b>Number</b>	<b>Component Title</b>	<b>Core/option</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Credit</b>
Recommended SCQF level for qualification/ learning programme:		Recommended SCQF credit points for qualification/ learning programme:		

<b>RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATIONS ON LEVEL FOR QUALIFICATION/LEARNING PROGRAMME</b>	
(include details of approach used to determine level for the qualification/learning programme)	
Name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

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## EXAMPLE 2: Edinburgh Napier University

### VERIFICATION REPORT – PART 1

#### Verifier's Report

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Programme Title:

---

Proposer/Contact:

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Overview:

### VERIFICATION REPORT – PART 2

#### Appointment of Credit Rating Reporter

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Faculty Nominee:

---

Nominated Credit Rating Reporter:

---

Summary of Qualifications:

Year	Qualification	University/ College

Professional Experience:

Year	Experience

Professional Membership:

Year	Membership Organisation

## VERIFICATION REPORT – PART 3

### Credit Rating Outcome

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Conditions:

---

Recommendations:

---

Credit Rating Decision:

---

Agreed Credit Rating:

Credits                      SCQF Level

---

Credit Rating Reporter:

---

Verifier, Centre for Credit Rating

---

Date

---

Period of validity:

Approved from:	
Approved to:	
Review Date:	

Approved:

---

Chair, Academic Development

---

Date

Approvals Board

---

## ANNEX C: REFERENCES AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

### SCQF Publications and Resources (available from SCQF website - [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk))

- SCQF Handbook: User Guide
- The SCQF: A Guide for Employers
- SCQF Level Descriptors Booklet
- Credit Rating and Benchmarking: What's the Difference?
- SCQF Level Descriptors: Guidance for NHS
- Evaluation Report: SCQF College Credit Rating Report
- Worth Doing: Using the SCQF in Community Learning and Development
- RPL Toolkit
- Employer Case Studies

### SQA Publications and Resources (available from the SQA website - [www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk))

- SQA's SCQF Credit Rating Service Guide for Submitting Bodies
- SQA Guide to Assessment

### SCQF Credit Rating Bodies

Materials developed by current Credit Rating Bodies have provided useful references and sources of information. In particular, materials developed by the Scottish Police College, SQA and Edinburgh Napier University Centre for Credit Rating are included in this publication.

### Learning Outcomes

- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education website, [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)
- How to Use Level Descriptors, Jenny Moon , SEEC (2002)
- How to use Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria, Gosling D. and Moon J. (2001)
- Guide to Learning Outcomes, UCE Birmingham, [www.ssdd.bcu.ac.uk/outcomes/UCE%20Guide%20to%20Learning](http://www.ssdd.bcu.ac.uk/outcomes/UCE%20Guide%20to%20Learning)

### Bloom's Digital Taxonomy

Many references and information about the updated version of Bloom's Taxonomy can be found on the internet.



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