



**Arrangements for:
National Progression Award (NPA) in
Administration:
Office Skills and Services
at SCQF level 5**

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SQA acknowledges the valuable contribution that Scotland's colleges have made to the development of National Qualification Group Awards.

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1 Introduction

This is the Arrangements Document for the National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services, at SCQF level 5, which was validated in March 2009. This document includes: background information on the development of the Group Award, its aims, guidance on access, details of the Group Award structure, and guidance on delivery.

The NPA in Administration: Office Skills and Services has been designed to provide candidates with the practical experience and theoretical knowledge of the administrative systems and services essential to the effective working of a modern office or to allow for progression to further academic qualifications.

2 Rationale for the development of the Group Award

The National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services at SCQF level 5 consists of three mandatory 40 hour Units.

The NPA has been developed by SQA following consultation with stakeholders. It meets the needs of colleges which require a greater degree of flexibility in the delivery of their programmes.

National Progression Awards are designed to:

- ◆ mainly be used in post-compulsory education
- ◆ be followed part-time for those already in work; or for those who have a desire to enter employment in the administrative function
- ◆ assess and certificate a defined set of skills and knowledge in the vocational area of administrative services
- ◆ give credit to full-time candidates who may not be able to complete their full Course

The NPA is designed to attract individuals who may wish to gain up-to-date practical skills and knowledge of a modern office environment, in a short period of time. Alternatively, as the Units are core to the NQ in Administration they can also be used in a 'stepping stone' approach towards completion of this Group Award, employment or to other advanced level qualifications.

2.1 Nature and purpose of the award

The National Progression Award Administration: Office Skills and Services at SCQF level 5 is designed as a programme which will provide candidates with theoretical knowledge and also allow them to have 'hands on' experience of key pieces of office equipment, develop communication skills with internal and external customers and improve skills in locating, retrieving and presenting required information.

The award structure and Unit content provides a vocational and relevant curriculum which creates and promotes effective articulation and transition into further and higher education, whilst simultaneously recognising and supporting skills for industry and future employment including the soft skills demanded by employers.

2.2 Establishing the need for the qualification

For some time it has been felt that although many candidates undertaking a course in Administration have been successful in gaining a range of Units, the lack of a recognised award has resulted in employers becoming confused as to the actual qualifications gained, and this may have influenced whether candidates have progressed into employment.

Consultation was undertaken with sector practitioners and other stakeholders and it was agreed that two NPAs would be offered — Administration: Information Technology and Audio and Administration: Office Skills and Services. By splitting in this way candidates can either concentrate on IT skills or on the knowledge and understanding required for the administration/office services area.

In recent years candidates have also looked for more flexibility in delivery and have been less prepared to commit to a full year's programme of study. Overall the QDT felt that there was a requirement for an award which would:

- ◆ be recognised by schools, employers and other educational institutions
- ◆ award a group of Units signifying achievement
- ◆ retain flexibility in delivery
- ◆ provide a progression route from level 4 courses
- ◆ provide an exit route
- ◆ match the capabilities, expectations and interests of candidates enrolling for the award

2.3 Establishing the level of the award

The level of the national progression award is influenced by the NC in Administration at level 5. SQA design principles allow a minimum credit value of 12 SCQF credit points (at least two Units) and at least half of the credit points have to be at the level of the Group Award. All three Units in this NPA are at level 5. Learners however, if undertaking the NC, may have started with Units at SCQF level 4 and progressed to the Units at SCQF level 5. Learners wishing to progress to level 6 and above will be able to do so once they accumulate sufficient Units and skills.

2.4 Target client group

Earlier scoping undertaken by the SQA indicates that there are six main client groups for provision at this level. They are:

- ◆ Young people who have may still be at or have left school recently
- ◆ Mature 'adult returners' who have decided to re-enter education
- ◆ Potential candidates whose first language is not English
- ◆ Employees wishing to enhance their qualifications
- ◆ Potential candidates looking for access to HN
- ◆ Employers wishing short CPD course for their employees

These groups have quite different characteristics. Many recent school leavers have limited formal school attainment. Adult returners may also possess few formal qualifications and while they frequently have valuable experience, they may lack confidence in their ability to learn. Candidates whose first language is not English may find they need to undertake an ESOL course first but others may be able to undertake Units if they have good oral communication. As more emphasis is put on life long learning and Continuing Professional Development (CPD), employers are keen to offer certificated courses to employees.

It is envisaged that this award could be offered in one of the modes:

- ◆ Full-time
- ◆ Part-time
- ◆ Open and Distance Learning
- ◆ Infill to existing classes
- ◆ Evening

The NPA will provide formal recognition of existing skills and provide new skills and candidates will also be able to progress and undertake the NPA in Administration: Information Technology and Audio if they wish to improve, build on or gain certification for their IT skills.

2.5 Progression routes

Candidates undertaking and successfully completing a NPA in Administration: Office Skills and Services could progress onto level 6 Units for example *Admin Services*.

Some centres may consider candidates who have successfully completed both this NPA and the NPA in Administration: Information and Technology and Audio for progression onto an HN in Administration and Information Technology or alternatively into the Professional Development Awards in IT in Business and Administration at SCQF level 7.

2.6 Relationship to National Occupational Standards

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are developed by the key employment sectors of the United Kingdom. These standards set the competences required for job roles within a particular employment sector.

The NPA in Administration: Office Skills and Services (level 5) gives candidates the underpinning skills to consider undertaking Scottish Vocational Qualifications in Business and Administration at level 3.

Links to occupational standards are shown in the following table. The Council for Administration publishes the standards for SVQs in Business and Administration. The table below shows where the Units for this award have specific links to the National Occupational Standards.

| Mandatory Units | Level | Links to NOS |
|---|---------|---------------|
| Central Services | Level 5 | 209 |
| Front of Office | Level 5 | 203, 206, 219 |
| Researching and Preparing Presentations | Level 5 | 210, 215, 217 |

3 Aims of the Group Award

The National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services (level 5) has been designed to provide a structured award that recognises existing skills and competences within the administrative sector (for those currently in employment); or develops a range of introductory practical skills, competences and understanding of working in an office environment which will allow candidates to develop expertise and benefit from practical experience of working with IT and office equipment to develop skills and knowledge that can support and develop future career aspirations within the administrative sector. As a result it offers multiple exit routes, either towards employment or further study.

3.1 Principal aims of the Group Award

- 1 Encourage candidates to take charge of their own learning and development.
- 2 Provide a range of learning and assessment styles to motivate candidates to achieve their full potential.
- 3 Provide candidates with knowledge and skills which are directly relevant to current and/or future practice in the areas of Information Technology and Office Skills and Services.
- 4 Provide opportunities for the individual development of skills and aptitudes which will improve candidates' employment potential and career development within the administrative sector.
- 5 Enable candidates to consider the various options open to them and make informed career choices for their future.

The table below references these Aims to the individual three mandatory Units.

| Unit code | Unit title | Reference to aims of the award |
|-----------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| F595 11 | Central Services | 1,2,3,5 |
| F59P 11 | Front of Office Skills | 1,2,3,5 |
| F5A0 11 | Research and Preparing Presentations | 1,2,3,4,5 |

3.2 General aims of the Group Award

The general aim of the National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services (level 5) is to provide candidates with knowledge and skills required within an office environment and to certificate same. As a result it is hoped that candidates would then be able to either progress in education, find suitable employment or progress within current employment.

3.3 Target groups

It is envisaged that the following groups would be targeted:

- ◆ School leavers
- ◆ Adult returners
- ◆ Employees wishing to enhance their qualifications
- ◆ Potential candidates looking for access to HN
- ◆ As 'added value' to full-time candidates
- ◆ Migrant workers

3.4 Employment opportunities

On successful completion of the NPA in Administration: Office Skills and Services it is envisaged that employment could be gained in the admin, business and commercial sector in one of the following areas:

- ◆ Administrative Assistant
- ◆ Office Junior/Receptionist
- ◆ Clerical Assistant

4 Access to Group Award

While entry is at the discretion of the centre, candidates would benefit from some previous experience of administration.

5 Group Award structure

The new qualification comprises a framework of three complementary administration Units taken from the validated NC in Administration (SCQF level 5). All three Units are mandatory to the NC award and all are at level 5.

5.1 Framework

Candidates must complete all three Units in the table below to achieve the NPA at SCQF level 5

| Unit title | Code | SCQF credit points | SCQF level | SQA credit value |
|---|---------|--------------------|------------|------------------|
| Front of Office Skills | F59P 11 | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| Central Services | F595 11 | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| Researching and Preparing Presentations | F5A0 11 | 6 | 5 | 1 |

5.2 Mapping information

The structure of this NPA meets the requirements for a new Award in a number of ways, for example:

- ◆ It provides flexibility for learners and centres
- ◆ It provides skills, knowledge and capabilities needed for employment
- ◆ It provides progression routes
- ◆ It provides an exit route
- ◆ It is compatible with existing arrangements currently adopted by centres
- ◆ It consists of Units which are practical and will engage the interests of learners

A small grouping of relevant Units nationally accredited into a named award is attractive to many learners who don't want or have the time for a long period of study. It will provide learners with the options to move into employment or take further study at the same level allowing them to broaden their skills, or progress to SCQF level 6 for example Higher Administration. Because the award is made up of Units which form the mandatory core of the NQ in Administration it is likely that many candidates will also have the necessary skills to progress to HN awards.

The flexibility of the Award is further enhanced as the structure takes into account that centres are likely to offer the NC in Administration as the central part of programmes of 17–20 modules. The new award is, therefore compatible with existing arrangements.

6 Approaches to delivery and assessment

The delivery of this award is at the discretion of individual centres.

The structure of the qualification allows centres a high degree of flexibility in the delivery. The award can be offered:

- ◆ in a practical setting which could either be within the candidate's current place of employment, a placement scenario or within a simulated practical learning environment in a presenting centre
- ◆ as a full-time short programme, day release, or evening class
- ◆ using a combination of delivery styles. For example, candidates may want to study on a half-day/evening basis or combine evening (or day release) study with some distance/open/on line learning provision

Timetabling of the three Units would be at the discretion of individual centres. Assessment Support Packs are available for all three Units which will reinforce the practical aspect of the Unit specification, as well as setting a common standard across centres.

Assessment Support Packs have a critical role in ensuring that delivery of Units is linked to administration and admin-related situations allowing for integration of delivery and assessment where possible. An example could be that a topic for the Researching and Preparing of Presentations assessment could be examining the emerging technologies that are being used in modern office environments.

6.1 Sequence of delivery

Centres can choose the order to teach and assess the Units, according to their local market needs and resources. It may be beneficial to have two or three Units taught at the same time to allow integration of teaching and assessments.

6.2 Core Skills

The National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services offers candidates the opportunity to develop aspects of the following Core Skills: *Information Technology* (SCQF levels 3 and 4), *Problem Solving* (SCQF levels 3 and 4), *Working with Others* (SCQF level 4) and *Communication* (SCQF level 4).

7 General information for centres

Disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments, or considering whether any reasonable adjustments may be required. Further advice can be found on our website www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements

Internal and external verification

All instruments of assessment used within this/these Group Award(s) should be internally verified, using the appropriate policy within the centre and the guidelines set by SQA.

External verification will be carried out by SQA to ensure that internal assessment is within the national guidelines for these qualifications.

Further information on internal and external verification can be found in *SQA's Guide to Assessment and Quality Assurance for Colleges of Further Education* (www.sqa.org.uk).

8 General information for candidates

The National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services at level 5 has been designed to provide you with a grouping of three relevant Units which will give you the practical skills and theoretical knowledge required for working in a modern office environment. This is a stand-alone qualification but it can also be undertaken as part of the NQ in Administration.

The National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services contains three mandatory Units which you need to successfully complete in order to gain the award.

There are no specific entry requirements for the National Progression Award in Administration: Office Skills and Services. However, it would be beneficial if you had some basic previous admin knowledge and IT skills.

The Units will equip you with skills such as:

- ◆ Practical ICT skills
- ◆ Research and presentation skills
- ◆ Working with internal and external customers
- ◆ Employability skills:
 - Adaptability flexibility
 - Working with others
 - Customer care skills
 - Communication

9 Glossary of terms

SCQF: This stands for the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework, which is a new way of speaking about qualifications and how they inter-relate. We use SCQF terminology throughout this guide to refer to credits and levels. For further information on the SCQF visit the SCQF website at www.scqf.org.uk

SCQF credit points: One SCQF credit point equates to 10 hours of learning. NQ Units at SCQF levels 2–6 are worth 6 SCQF credit points, NQ Units at level 7 are worth 8 SCQF points.

SCQF levels: The SCQF covers 12 levels of learning. National Qualification Group Awards are available at SCQF levels 2-6 and will normally be made up of National Units which are available from SCQF levels 2–7.

Dedicated Unit to cover Core Skills: This is a non-subject Unit that is written to cover one or more particular Core Skills.

Embedded Core Skills: This is where the development of a Core Skill is incorporated into the Unit and where the Unit assessment also covers the requirements of Core Skill assessment at a particular level.

Signposted Core Skills: This refers to the opportunities to develop a particular Core Skill at a specified level that lie outwith automatic certification.

Qualification Design Team: The QDT works in conjunction with a Qualification Manager/Development Manager to steer the development of the National Certificate/National Progression Award from its inception/revision through to validation. The group is made up of key stakeholders representing the interests of centres, employers, universities and other relevant organisations.

Consortium-devised National Certificates/National Progression Awards are those developments or revisions undertaken by a group of centres in partnership with SQA.