Credit Rating of SQA Accredited Qualifications for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Guidance for Sector Skills Councils, Standard Setting Organisations, Awarding Bodies and Participants

Contents

Foreword

SQA Accreditation quality assures accredited qualifications offered in Scotland by approving awarding bodies and accrediting their qualifications. We do this by checking awarding bodies and their qualifications against published regulatory principles.

We are the only credit rating body for Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) and we also approve SCQF (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework) credit rating for any SQA accredited qualifications.

This document provides guidance on the calculation of SCQF credit points and the allocation of SCQF levels to units and qualifications. It gives all participants information on their roles and responsibilities when SCQF credit rating.

It should be used by any organisation submitting SCQF credit rating recommendations for SQA Accreditation approval. These organisations include Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), standard setting organisations (SSOs) and awarding bodies (ABs).

The guidance sets out SQA Accreditation's preferred methodology for those recommending SCQF levels and credit for units and qualifications. This approach is not intended to be prescriptive. Alternative methods may be used but their suitability must first be confirmed with SQA Accreditation.

It is intended that the methodology contained in this document could be used when credit rating for other UK credit and qualifications frameworks.

For further information, advice and support in implementing the guidance please contact SQA Accreditation:

Tel: 0345 213 5249

e-mail: accreditation@sqa.org.uk

Section 1: Introduction to the SCQF

The SCQF is a framework that promotes lifelong learning in Scotland. Through the SCQF you can find out about qualifications in Scotland and plan your future learning. The SCQF supports everyone in Scotland, including learning providers and employers, by:

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

Development of the SCQF began in 1991 and the SCQF Partnership was registered as a charity in Scotland in March 2007. Its members are:

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

In addition, Scottish Government has observer status on the Board.

The SCQF Partnership's aims are to:

♦ maintain the quality and integrity of the Framework
♦ promote and develop the Framework as a way of supporting lifelong learning; and
♦ develop and maintain relationships with frameworks in the rest of the UK, Europe and the rest of the world

The Framework provides the language used to describe all learning. Effective communication is at the heart of the Framework, so to complement the SCQF website, the partnership produces publications about learning in Scotland and keeps stakeholders up to date with developments via a bi-annual hard-copy newsletter, *SCQF Update*.

The partnership also provides more regular updates via their bi-monthly e-zine, *In the Frame*, and posts frequent tweets on Twitter — follow them @SCQFPartnership.

To join the mailing list for the *SCQF Update* or *In the Frame*, contact 0845 270 7372 or e-mail info@scqf.org.uk.

For more information on updates and developments, contact the SCQF Partnership at:

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
39 St Vincent Place
Glasgow
G1 2ER
Tel: 0845 270 7371   Fax: 0845 270 7372   e-mail: info@scqf.org.uk   www.scqf.org.uk

Why SCQF credit rate?

The advantages of having a qualification placed in the SCQF are that learners, employers, receiving institutions, awarding bodies, Sector Skills Councils and standard setting organisations (SSOs) etc can see the level of skills being developed by the learner or employee and how the qualification relates to other qualifications and learning programmes in Scotland and other credit frameworks in the United Kingdom and Europe. It can also help when selecting relevant training options and identifying development paths and progression routes.

The SCQF uses two measures to describe qualifications and learning programmes: 'level' and 'credit'. The term 'credit rating' encompasses both the allocation of SCQF level and the calculation of SCQF credit points.

Qualifications can be added to the SCQF provided they meet the following criteria from the SCQF Partnership:

♦ They must be outcome-based, ie must contain statements of knowledge, skills, values or competence that are capable of being measured at the end of a process of learning (based on learning outcomes)
♦ They should be capable of being assessed, ie there must be a robust, effective system of assessing that the outcomes have been achieved (These outcomes must be recorded.)
♦ They are subject to external quality assurance, ie must have a documented process of external quality assurance for the assessment of the learning outcomes
♦ They must consist of a minimum of 10 hours of notional learning time.

What does the SCQF look like?

There are 12 levels within the SCQF, which increase in difficulty from SCQF level 1, for basic learning, to SCQF level 12, for learning at doctoral level. The levels therefore indicate the complexity of learning. The number of credit points indicates the volume of learning required to achieve a qualification.

The SCQF incorporates a wide range of qualifications:

♦ training/workplace qualifications, such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)
♦ school qualifications, such as Nationals and Highers
♦ further and higher education qualifications, such as Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and degrees

The SCQF does not differentiate between types of qualification — academic and vocational qualifications sit side-by-side within the SCQF. This is not to say that they are equivalent, but that the SCQF allows them to be compared in terms of their SCQF level.

Qualifications can be small or large; or they can cover a wide range of skills or focus on a narrow, specialised area. The SCQF allows you to compare their level of complexity and their size. For example:

♦ a Higher and an SVQ 3 both sitting at SCQF level 6
♦ a Higher National Diploma and an SVQ 4 both sitting at SCQF level 8

These qualifications are designed to meet different needs and have different forms of delivery and assessment. The fact that they are at the same SCQF level means that they are operating at the same level of learning.

SCQF level descriptors

The level descriptors are fundamental to the SCQF, describing 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.

They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning for individual qualifications or learning programmes.

The SCQF level descriptors are available from the SCQF Partnership website: www.scqf.org.uk

The SCQF has 12 levels ranging from National 1 at SCQF level 1, up to Doctorate at SCQF level 12. These indicate the level of difficulty of a particular qualification and increases in levels relate to factors such as:

♦ the 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; and
♦ the role(s) taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks

Each level descriptor has five characteristics, which provide a reference point for determining the level of qualifications and units or for the recognition of prior learning (RPL):

♦ Knowledge and understanding
♦ Practice: Applied knowledge skills and understanding
♦ Generic cognitive skills
♦ Communication, numeracy and IT skills; and
♦ Autonomy, accountability and working with others

The descriptors allow broad comparisons to be made between the outcomes of any learning, and allow learners, employers and the public in general to understand the range of skills and learning that should be achieved at each level. SCQF levels are increasingly used in job advertisements to help employers articulate the skills they require for a particular role and to help potential employees to highlight their skills, thus ensuring the right person gets the right job.

Section 2: SQA Accreditation credit rating methodology

The following provides submitting organisations and participants with information on their roles and responsibilities when SCQF credit rating.

Submitting organisations

The submitting organisation may be an SSC, SSO or awarding body.

It is important that the submitting organisation involves their Accreditation Manager from the beginning of the credit rating process

It is the role of the submitting organisation to organise, manage and submit credit rating recommendations to SQA Accreditation.

Participants

Participants are appointed by the submitting organisation to undertake credit rating for the SCQF.

They must be:

♦ knowledgeable about the qualification, the units, and the sector occupation(s) to which they relate
♦ unbiased and capable of acting objectively
♦ respected by others in the sector
♦ able to reach balanced judgements on the basis of experience and the analysis of relevant information
♦ able to record the outcomes of their decision-making in a manner that is auditable and shows how decisions have been reached

Credit rating and levelling for the SCQF is not a science. You should at all times consider the following:

♦ it is a 'best fit' that is called for
♦ the SCQF level descriptors are indicative, not prescriptive
♦ it is important to record evidence to support your decisions
♦ you will need to use professional judgement

Participants must have a copy of the relevant unit(s), and ensure they are familiar with the contents. Always remember: Do not make assumptions.

Credit rating methodology

First-time participants and those requiring a refresher session should attend a training event to explain what is involved in SCQF credit rating. During training, the aims and objectives of credit rating for the SCQF and the SQA Accreditation methodology will be explained.

Whether a training session is required or not, it is important to have an initial meeting of all participants to ensure consistency of approach. At the end of the initial meeting the participants will agree on the roles of those involved. Timelines for completion will be agreed. The participants will work on the calculation of the SCQF credit and the allocation of the SCQF level for the units.

SQA Accreditation will work with each submitting organisation to ensure that the methodology is followed. For units that are imported from another organisation, the submitting organisation should liaise with the originator to establish if SCQF credit rating has already been approved.

SQA Accreditation provides guidance and support for SSCs, SSOs and awarding bodies in order to ensure consistency in the application of the methodology to credit rate qualifications.

Credit rating process

The first stage in the process of adding a qualification to the SCQF is to consider the credit and level of the individual units.

Each unit must be allocated an SCQF level mapped against the level descriptors for the SCQF. This should be followed by the calculation of credit.

Once the SCQF level and credit points have been established for each unit and standardisation has taken place, the next stage is to identify the relevant SCQF level and credit points for the whole qualification. Many qualifications will be made up of units which are at different SCQF levels and have different SCQF credit points.

The total SCQF credit points for a qualification will vary due to the mandatory and optional units which make up many qualification structures.

All SCQF credit rating must be confirmed and approved by an authorised credit rating body for the SCQF. SQA Accreditation is an approved SCQF credit rating body.

> *All SVQs must be credit rated.*
>
> *This must be done in conjunction with SQA Accreditation.*

It is essential to keep full details of the allocated SCQF levels and SCQF credit points throughout the credit rating process. In order to assist with this, SQA Accreditation has developed recording documentation which should be used when credit rating units. These are as follows:

♦ Part 1: Unit level recommendation
♦ Part 2: Unit credit point recommendation

This reflects our recommendation that levelling is undertaken before calculating credit. In addition to completing these forms you will also create an average learner profile to help standardise your perspective when undertaking credit rating.

Vetting

Vetting is a peer review process and should not be considered as a second credit rating exercise. It is an important aspect of our methodology where the vetter reviews and confirms the output and justification provided by the rater. It is important that you record your discussions and how you resolved any disagreements on the credit rating form in the section headed 'Unit Review'.

Standardisation

Standardisation can take a number of formats, the most common being for participants to reconvene at a standardisation event. This ensures that participants have approached credit rating consistently and gives them the opportunity to moderate their decisions.

It is good practice to record issues highlighted at standardisation and how these were resolved. This evidence should be included in the documentation submitted for approval as it provides evidence that standardisation has taken place.

> *At all points in the process of credit rating for the SCQF you should liaise with your appointed Accreditation Manager.*

Section 3: How to level

We recommend that when undertaking SCQF credit rating that you start with levelling. To assist with the continuity of your decision making, experience has shown that it is best to level all your units before moving on to calculation of credit.

In order to establish the overall level of a qualification you need to start by levelling the individual units. This will then inform the overall level of your qualification(s).

How to use the SCQF level descriptors

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. As some of the characteristics may not be relevant, it is not necessary that they are all met.

When deciding on 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'. Also, 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.

The level descriptors identify the characteristics of qualifications under five broad headings.

Characteristic 1: Knowledge and understanding

This characteristic is about the complexity and breadth of knowledge and understanding required to underpin the achievement of skills and competence. Individuals will start with a basic knowledge of facts and will progress to a point where they will reflect on that body of knowledge, and reason why it is correct or incorrect and then adapt their knowledge accordingly.

Characteristic 2: Practice: Applied knowledge skills and understanding

Competent practice and the development and use of skills comes through the application of knowledge and understanding. It requires an individual to contextualise and understand their knowledge of something so that this knowledge can then be applied in a variety of different situations and practices. Individuals will progress from relating knowledge to a few simple everyday contexts, to using a range of complex skills, techniques, practices and demonstrating originality and creativity in the development and application of new knowledge, understanding and practices.

Characteristic 3: Generic cognitive skills

Cognitive skills involve the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding, through thought, experience, and the senses. They include skills such as problem solving, creativity and innovation, ability to respond to change and to monitor, evaluate and promote continuous improvement. Cognitive skills tend to be transferable, ie once an individual has developed the techniques they can apply them to different situations and job roles. Within any area of cognitive skill there are degrees of understanding and complexity. For example,

cognitive skills required for problem solving could be broken down into the following stages: identify problem solving situations; follow problem solving procedures; apply problem solving principles; resolve problem solving situations/theories/concepts.

Characteristic 4: Communication, numeracy and IT skills

Skills in communication, numeracy and IT are essential for effective practice, and underpin many roles or tasks that individuals perform. It is not necessarily important in every job role for an individual to have skills in all three areas, nor is it necessarily a requirement for that individual to have an equal level of skill in all three areas. Although some roles will have specific communication, numeracy and IT requirements, many of these skills are generic and can be transferred across different roles, companies or fields of work.

Characteristic 5: Autonomy, accountability and working with others

This characteristic is about the ways in which individuals work, and the impact of this on their job role and other individuals. As an individual becomes more competent there is often, although not always, a tendency for that individual to become increasingly autonomous and accountable within their role. The individual's working relationship with others can also change, generally becoming either more independent or more management and leadership focused. This characteristic also involves individuals in reflective practice — as they progress they would be expected to develop their skills in identifying strengths and weaknesses and means of improvement.

Taking characteristic 5 as an example, the table on the next page illustrates how it is expressed in four different SCQF levels.

Characteristic 5	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Level 2	Work alone or with others on simple, routine, familiar tasks under frequent and directive supervision. Identify, given simple criteria, some strengths and/or weaknesses of the work.
Level 5	Work alone or with others on tasks with minimum directive supervision. Agree goals and responsibilities for self and/or work team. Take lead responsibility for some tasks. Show an awareness of own and/or others' roles, responsibilities and requirements in carrying out work, and contribute to the evaluation and improvement of practices and processes.
Level 8	Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level in practice or in a subject/discipline/sector. Exercise managerial responsibility for the work of others within a defined structure. Manage resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead on planning in familiar or defined contexts. Practice in ways that show awareness of own and others' roles, responsibilities and contributions when carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work, under guidance with others to acquire an understanding of current professional practice. Manage, under guidance, ethical and professional issues in accordance with current professional and/or ethical codes of practice.
Level 12	Demonstrate substantial autonomy and initiative in professional and equivalent activities. Take responsibility for own work and/or significant responsibility for the work of others. Take significant responsibility for a range of resources. Demonstrate leadership and/or originality in tackling and resolving problems and issues. Practice in ways which are reflective, self-critical and based on research/evidence. Manage complex ethical and professional issues and make informed judgements on new and emerging issues not addressed by current professional and/or ethical codes of practice.

Benchmarking

Benchmarking is a means of establishing a starting point for your credit rating. It may not always be possible to find an obvious benchmark for your unit or qualification.

You must start by reading each unit in full. Do not assume you know the content of the unit descriptor/specification.

Once you have fully read the unit descriptor/specification, try to identify the distinguishing features between levels in areas such as 'familiar/unfamiliar situations', and 'supervised/independent working'. The range of knowledge, understanding and skills can also be a useful indicator — learning at a lower level often involves a limited range, whereas learning at a higher level requires a wide range. Think about the objectives for the unit. This could include:

♦ What is being asked of the individual?
♦ What is the unit trying to achieve?
♦ Is the unit mainly knowledge based, or practice based?
♦ What are the outcomes of the unit?
♦ Do the words used suggest a level of skill?
♦ Are there other indicators of complexity in the component?
♦ Does the assessment/evidence requirement indicate a specific level?

Words like analyse, interpret, describe, identify and so on will help to indicate the level of demand on the learner.

There are a number of approaches to benchmarking:

♦ Review the characteristics for each SCQF level descriptor — they provide an overview of each SCQF level.
♦ Identify an existing SCQF levelled unit with which you may be familiar and which you think is around the same level as the unit that you are about to allocate an SCQF level to.
♦ Consider the job role of individuals for whom the qualification is designed — for example, is the job competence at technician, practitioner, supervisor or manager level? What level of autonomy is the person expected to exercise? Compare this to the SCQF level descriptor for autonomy and working with others.
♦ Look at entry requirements and/or the expected exit point, eg does the qualification prepare learners for another component/ unit/qualification which already has an SCQF level?

If you have been unable to identify a benchmark then you will need to work through the SCQF level descriptors to establish your starting point.

Having established a rough level for the unit, look in more detail at the SCQF level descriptors for the closest levels, ie if you think the qualification may be around SCQF level 7, start at that level. The next thing to do is to test this view by looking at the SCQF level descriptors for the levels immediately above and immediately below the level of your initial

decision. Ask why it is not at these levels. This will assist you in confirming whether you have selected the most appropriate SCQF level descriptor for the unit.

If you have a number of units to be levelled where the learning outcomes are repeated, you may find it useful to map a few key components and use them to create your own benchmarks. This could equally apply to elements which are repeated within the unit descriptor/specification.

Levelling units using SCQF level descriptors

You should look for the 'best fit' between the unit and the SCQF level descriptors for the characteristics. You shouldn't use the level descriptors as a checklist, expecting to find all the examples given in the level descriptors in your unit. Instead, you should match examples from the unit to the relevant characteristics. Not all characteristics will be relevant to every unit.

♦ Take time to look at the SCQF level descriptors to get a feel for some of the differences between the levels.
♦ They are indicative, not prescriptive.
♦ They give examples of the different levels of demand across the five characteristics.
♦ Don't expect everything in the level descriptors to be relevant to your unit.

The SCQF level descriptors 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.

The Ready Reckoner (SCQF postcard) indicates where the notional levels for qualifications sit within the SCQF. This can be a benchmark point when allocating an SCQF level to an individual qualification.

Credit rating form Part 1

This is the levelling part of our credit rating form. You should use this to record your rationale and your recommendation.

SQA Accreditation General information			
Qualification title:			
Unit title:			
Unit number (if applicable):			
Rater name and organisation:			
Recommended SCQF level		Recommended SCQF credit points	

Unit review		
Reviewer name and organisation:		
Did reviewer agree with rater?	☐ Yes ☐ No	
If 'No' please explain and summarise changes: (Expand section as required)		

Part 1 — Unit level recommendation

SCQF characteristics	Best-fit level	Comments
Knowledge and understanding		
Practice: Applied knowledge, skills and understanding		
Generic cognitive skills		
Communication, numeracy and ICT skills		
Autonomy, accountability and working with others		
Estimated level (best fit)		
Summary of rationale for recommended unit 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)		

Notes on approach used plus who was consulted, discussions points, issues raised, etc.

> *It is important to ensure that any qualification, unit titles and reference numbers are recorded correctly on the form. Please don't abbreviate.*

Deciding the best-fit SCQF level for the unit

Take each characteristic in turn and, using the comments box to explain the justification for each, allocate a level to each of the five characteristics. Where the characteristic is not reflected in the unit, please state this in the comments box.

Example 1

The five SCQF characteristics in a unit may have a range of SCQF levels, for example:

SCQF characteristics	Best-fit level
Knowledge and understanding	6
Practice: Applied knowledge, skills and understanding	6
Generic cognitive skills	7
Communication, numeracy and ICT skills	5
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	6
Estimated level (best fit)	6

The estimated level (best fit) has been allocated at SCQF level 6 because three of the five characteristics sit at this level.

Example 2

You may find that the best match for a characteristic is split over two SCQF level descriptors and that there is no clear match to one SCQF level:

SCQF characteristics	Best-fit level
Knowledge and understanding	5
Practice: Applied knowledge, skills and understanding	5
Generic cognitive skills	6
Communication, numeracy and ICT skills	6
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	5/6
Estimated level (best fit)	

In the case of 'Autonomy, accountability and working with others' above, you can indicate that you believe that it has aspects of both levels. As the credit rater you will be expected to decide on one level or the other. The SCQF does not allow for split levels to be recorded so you should select one level as your final best fit before submitting the form. Please ensure you record your rationale for this selection in the 'Summary of rationale' section on your form.

You should try to find the level that has the greatest proportion of its descriptors reflected in the unit. The level of the unit will normally be the most common level — the estimated best fit in the example above would be decided by the best-fit level you finally select for Autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Example 3

If the above processes do not lead to a conclusive result, you should rank the characteristics in order of importance — this is the only time ranking should be used. In the following example, the two most important aspects have been identified as Knowledge and understanding and Autonomy/working with others. These characteristics have been mapped to the SCQF level descriptors for level 7. Although SCQF levels 5 and 6 have been allocated to the other characteristics, these are less important to the unit as a whole. Using this methodology, the best fit for this unit would be SCQF level 7.

SCQF characteristics	Best-fit level	Rank order
Knowledge and understanding	7	1
Practice: applied knowledge, skills and understanding	6	3
Generic cognitive skills	6	5
Communication, numeracy and ICT skills	5	4
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	7	2
Estimated level (best fit)	7	

If you have used the ranking method to allocate an SCQF level to the unit then you must clearly indicate this in the 'Notes to approach' section of your form.

> *Please do not add up the five levels assigned to the characteristics and divide by five.*
> *This process is not about finding the mean SCQF level for the unit.*

Rationale for the SCQF level of a unit

Determining level against the SCQF level descriptors involves interpretation — in other words, it is a subjective decision and requires your professional judgement. This means it is important to explain and record how you made your decision. This will also assist in any audit process.

You should:

♦ use quotes from the SCQF level descriptor to justify your selection
♦ justify your choice with reference to levels above and below
♦ record your reasons for selecting the final level

Credit raters often find it useful to use the comments box against each of the characteristics to record their thinking process before summarising this for the whole unit in the Summary of rationale section of the credit rating form. If you make use of the comments boxes, you will require less explanation under the summary of your rationale.

In the next section is a sample form where the credit rater has made good use of the characteristic comments boxes.

Examples

This is an example of a complete Part 1 of the credit rating form. This will give you an idea of the level of detail that should be included to justify your recommendation.

SQA Accreditation General information			
Qualification title:	Diploma in Credit Rating		
Unit title:	Sales Support in Credit Rating		
Unit number (if applicable):	WMA1		
Rater name and organisation:	Alan Munro, Federation of Credit Raters		
Recommended SCQF level	6	Recommended SCQF credit points	8
Unit review			
Reviewer name and organisation:	Kate McLeod, Institution of Credit Raters		
Did reviewer agree with rater?	☒ Yes ☐ No		
If 'No' please explain and summarise changes: There was consensus in the overall level and credit volume but it was agreed that further time should be allocated to assessment planning and completion of the assessment task.			
Part 1 — unit level recommendation			

SCQF characteristics	Best-fit level	Comments
Knowledge and understanding	6	The Unit requires learners to know about the organisational procedures relating to verification of documentation and the application of various pieces of legislation (K4, K5) as they impact on this work. As such, this goes beyond the basic knowledge and simple facts of level 5. It does not, however, require learners to differentiate between evidence and research and have an understanding of the dynamic nature of the knowledge which would be seen at level 7.
Practice: Applied knowledge, skills and understanding	7	The application of knowledge requires learners to make adaptations and address how they will use their knowledge, in particular to verify documentation (P1) and identify and abstract information (P3). They will also have to work with non-routine elements as they identify actions to be taken based on the information provided (P4). This goes beyond the application of level 6 as it fits better with the non-routine elements as defined in level 7.
Generic cognitive skills	6	To undertake relevant planning effectively in a contemporary business context, candidates are required to gather information, draw conclusions and make suggestions within their immediate working area, with a degree of repetition and within clearly defined limits.

Communication, numeracy and ICT skills	6	The learner will be using standardised but detailed documentation/ICT applications as they confirm accuracy of data received and identify/abstract information (P1 and P3). They will be required to use oral communication when interacting with the agencies in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. This goes beyond level 5 where the focus is on familiar contexts. Level 7 does not apply level of oral communication is limited and not complex.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	6	The learner takes responsibility for carrying out a range of activities under non-directive supervision as they work through the review of documentation and information from agencies and the actions required to ensure compliance with organisational requirements. This goes beyond level 5 where the focus is on only leading on some tasks. Level 7 does not apply as there are no supervisory/managerial responsibilities, no resource management responsibilities or scope for exercising initiative.
Estimated level (best fit)	6	Level 6 is the predominant level across characteristics.

Summary of rationale for recommended unit 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.

This SVQ unit is deemed to be level 6 for the following reasons:

Learners will have to apply a range of knowledge as they follow routine practices, and draw conclusions about the validity of documentation and information submitted. They may well, during escalation, suggest solutions, but they will not take the decisions to vary from prescribed ways of working.

They do have to take on board some responsibility for ensuring they deliver the outputs with the minimum supervision.

Level 5 does not apply as the learner is working beyond the level of basic knowledge and will deal with unfamiliar, less straightforward situations in their work. Level 7 is not appropriate as the learner is not adapting learning, delivering complex communications or managing others/resources.

The unit was benchmarked against Management SVQ units and a comparable professional qualification.

Notes on approach used plus who was consulted, discussions points, issues raised, etc

Practitioners at Credit Rating World Training and Credits-R-Us were consulted to discuss technical points related to sales support. They supported the recommended credit rating as appropriate.

The examples which follow are further illustrations of the 'Summary of rationale'. This section should be more than just a couple of statements and should give a clear description of how you have reached your decision. These examples are for guidance but do cover the types of rationale SQA Accreditation would expect to see as justification for the SCQF level that has been allocated.

Example 1

This unit is judged to be at SCQF level 6 for the following reasons:

1   Factual and theoretical knowledge is required.

2   The learner is applying skills and knowledge in familiar situations but is able to deal with limited unpredictability.

3   The learner carries out unsupervised but clearly directed work.

This unit goes beyond SCQF level 5, which does not require theoretical knowledge, but does require work to have minimum supervision and for the learner to be operating within a familiar situation. However, it does not match the level descriptor for SCQF level 7, which requires embedded theoretical knowledge, ability to deal with routine and non-routine situations, and initiative and independence are expected in work. The unit was benchmarked with the unit xxxxxx, which had a similar content.

Example 2

This unit is deemed to be at SCQF level 7 because it is a competence unit where the key task is to undertake mainly unsupervised work with clients. The unit also requires a good level of knowledge and understanding of the principles that underpin practice. Learners are expected to apply knowledge in a number of situations that are both familiar and unfamiliar.

This unit goes beyond SCQF level 6, which suggests closer supervision of work and application of knowledge in familiar situations. This unit does not match the SCQF level 8 descriptor, which demands high levels of knowledge and application and adaptation of complex knowledge in practical situations.

Example 3

SCQF level 8 should be assigned to this unit because the knowledge and understanding covers a range of theories that are applied and adapted to a number of key social areas. The assessment demands analysis, a synthesis of knowledge, and a high level of written work. The entry level to this unit is xxxxxx, which has been levelled at SCQF level 7.

This unit goes beyond the demands of SCQF level 7 in that it requires the learner to know a range of theories that must be applied and adapted to a number of areas. However, it does not match level descriptors for SCQF level 9 as it does not demand specialist knowledge of forefront developments and learners are not required to apply professional judgements. There were no benchmark units for this unit.

Section 4: Average learner

Before calculating the credit for a unit it is important to establish a profile for the average learner. SCQF credit points are arrived at by estimating the amount of time required by the average learner to achieve the outcomes at a particular level.

Defining the average learner is about finding the learner in the middle, not the high performing learner who completes the qualification quickly, and not the learner who requires additional time to complete. It is mainly about the average capability of a learner at a given level. The average learner is the person who undertakes the qualification at an average pace. It is about reviewing the learners who have taken or are undertaking the qualification and working out the profile of the average learner.

If the credit rating is for a new qualification then it may be more complex to work out the SCQF credit points. It will be important to benchmark against similar qualifications and also to investigate, via the awarding body experts, how long they would estimate it would take to achieve the qualification.

Average learner profile

To assist you in this task we have provided the following list of points to consider when producing an average learner profile.

Type of person
Skills/qualifications
Likely age range
Previous knowledge and understanding
Entry requirements
Work-based
College
Training provider
Any regulatory or legislative requirements
Organisation's definition of a learner undertaking the qualification (if available)

You can use the list to help build up a profile of the average learner undertaking the qualification, by looking at the full range of learners and considering their key characteristics.

This could be an amalgam of the different types of learner who undertake the qualification. For Plumbing, in Scotland the average learner will be a school leaver undertaking an apprenticeship. For Business Administration, the average learner will be more difficult to define because of the diverse range of learners and settings in which this qualification can be delivered. Participants still need to agree the profile overall for the average learner.

> *It is good practice to work from the perspective of a learner who has met the typical entry requirements for the qualification (if applicable). For lower levels of qualification, learners may have no previous knowledge. For higher levels, learners may enter with prior experience or qualifications.*
>
> *Remember this process is not a science — it is about applying your professional judgement and knowledge in relation to the qualification.*

Collect and make full use of available information to guide your estimation.

The calculation of credit is based on the amount of time that your agreed average learner (at a specified level) might expect to take to achieve the outcomes of the qualification — ie to prove their competence. At all times the calculation of SCQF credit points is about the time taken for the agreed average learner to prove their competence.

This, in turn, will assist you in allocating notional learning hours and credit points.

♦ The agreed description of the 'average' learner must be used when calculating the notional learning time.
♦ Base your estimates only on the content of the qualification. How long would you estimate it would take to achieve competence in the areas it describes based on the agreed 'average' learner?
♦ Once you have calculated the notional learning time, ask yourself whether it feels the right amount of hours for the agreed 'average' learner to achieve this Unit. Use the benchmarks to moderate your first calculation.
♦ It is essential that you record your determinations. This will provide the evidence to support the credit value you allocate to the Unit.

Examples

The average learner profiles below give you an opportunity to view previous profiles — however, they are not exclusive. Each qualification which is being credit rated should be looked at individually. Please note that you are free to decide on the style and format of your average learner profile.

Example 1

SVQ 3 in Customer Service

♦ Technical skills
♦ Customer service skills
♦ Autonomy
♦ More non-routine on the technical side
♦ Problem solving

♦ Mature enough to take on responsibility
♦ Confidence to make decisions
♦ Demonstrate experience
♦ Career advancement
♦ Not necessarily a level 2 learner

Example 2

SVQ 2 in Child Care Learning and Development

- Disclosure Scotland
- SSC codes of practice
- Little experience in occupational area
- Always under supervision

- No entry requirements
- Employed or a volunteer in a child care setting
- Have people skills
- Want to work with children

Example 3

Diploma in Creative and Digital Media

SCQF credit rating	Average learner profile
Qualification title	Creative and Digital Media
Organisation, eg SSC	Creative Skillset
Type of person	School/college leaver Some cohorts are 16–18 There are existing learners <31 years old, but no apprentices have university level qualifications. Some apprentices will have felt disenfranchised by formal education.
	MA Candidate
Skills/qualifications	- Numeracy, Communication and ICT at SCQF 4 or above - National Certificates / National Progression Awards - Interest in digital media - Creative and/or craft skills - Drawing skills - Use of digital technologies - Use of social media - Use of games - Taking/ uploading/editing images - Writing blogs / Creative writing - Editing skills
Previous knowledge and understanding	Apprentices will come with a range of previous knowledge and understanding. Unlikely to understand the realities of the creative industries or job roles within them.
Entry requirements	No specific entry requirements but recruitment involves: - College — Initial Core Skills assessment (minimum SCQF level 4) - Employer interview to assess interest and suitability
Work based	Qualification competence delivery/assessment will be based in the workplace with support from mentors.
College	Qualification knowledge delivery/assessment will be based at the workplace and delivered one day a week by the college. There will be support materials/assessments online as well.

Section 5: Calculating SCQF credit points

Once the average learner has been established, you should refer to this when calculating SCQF credit points. To assist with the continuity of your conclusions, experience has shown that it is best to calculate credit for all your units after you have levelled them.

> *To refresh your memory, before calculating credit, you must start by reading each unit in full. Do not assume you know the content of the unit descriptor/specification.*

SCQF credit points

The size of a qualification in the SCQF is indicated by the number of SCQF credit points. SCQF credit points are used to quantify units and qualifications and give them a value. SCQF credit points can be used by interested parties (eg learners, employers, other qualification providers) to give them an idea of how much learning has taken place and to compare this with other qualifications. SCQF credit points are arrived at by estimating the amount of time required by the average learner to achieve the outcomes at a particular level. The number of credits will differ greatly from unit to unit and qualification to qualification, within levels and between levels. A qualification can have two credit points at SCQF level 6 and a qualification can have 20 credit points and also be at SCQF level 6.

> *One credit point equates to a notional 10 hours of 'notional learning time'. Credit points must always be expressed as a whole number.*

Learning time has been defined as a judgement of the time 'required by an average learner at a particular level to achieve defined learning outcomes'. Using the term 'average' recognises that the amount of time actually taken by individuals to achieve these learning outcomes will vary — for example, with motivation, experience and ability.

> *It is good practice to work from the perspective of a learner who has met the entry requirements for the qualification (if applicable).*
>
> *For lower levels of qualification, learners may have no previous knowledge.*
>
> *For higher levels, learners may enter with prior experience or qualifications.*

Notional learning time

One SCQF credit point represents a notional 10 hours of learning and this is the minimum credit value that can be allocated.

The notional learning hours encompass both contact time and self-directed learning undertaken by the learner. The proportion of contact time varies from qualification to qualification.

School qualifications are mostly classroom based with a very high proportion of contact time and delivered within a set academic year. Further and higher education qualifications, while still bound by the academic year are more flexible in terms of contact time and learning, with much more emphasis on self-directed learning. Competence qualifications, such as SVQs, have even more flexible parameters. There are no rigid design rules and they do not have to be completed within a set period of time.

To determine the SCQF credit value of individual qualifications, a number of factors need to be considered, in addition to the time that a learner spends with a trainer or assessor.

In addition to participating in formal learning/training sessions, learners could be expected to spend time on other learning activities such as:

♦ personal and informal learning
♦ research and study time
♦ practical work and work experience
♦ preparation for training, mentoring
♦ assessment

The following extract of Guideline 3.3 from the *SCQF Handbook: User Guide* (2009) provides examples of appropriate learning activities that might be included in estimating the notional learning hours.

"3.3 Notional learning hours

One SCQF credit point represents a notional 10 hours of learning. This is notional because it is based on the time judged to be required for an 'average' learner at a specified SCQF level to achieve the learning outcomes and does not measure the time actually taken by any individual learner. The amount of time actually taken by individuals will vary, but this does not affect the number of SCQF credit points that are awarded.

Notional learning hours should include all learning activities required for the achievement of the learning outcomes. It is made up of formal activities that involve teaching and tutor contact time; self-directed activities that involve study, research, applied learning, developing practice, reflection and review; and assessment activities that involve planning and completing assessment tasks. The mix of learning activities may vary according to the requirements of the qualification or learning programme. The following examples describe some appropriate learning activities that might be included in estimating the notional learning hours:

- attending formal teaching sessions, such as lectures, classes, training sessions, coaching, seminars and tutorials
- involvement in informal learning such as community groups, community-based workshops, youth groups, outdoor activities, trade unions, church activities, playgroups, political parties
- practical work in laboratories and other locations
- relevant ICT activities
- using libraries or learning resource centres for reading and research
- expected private study, revision and remedial work
- practice through gaining, using and refining skills in the workplace
- personal programme planning
- being counselled or mentored
- work-based learning
- self-directed study using online or text-based open learning materials
- reflection
- being assessed

The need to undertake any or all of these learning activities will be considered when credit is allocated to a qualification or learning programme. The mix of learning activities will vary from qualification to qualification and programme to programme. For example, in school, the learning might be mostly classroom based; in further and higher education much of the learning time is spent outside of formal lectures and tutorials; in vocational learning, much of the learning will be work based; and informal learning can take place in a wide variety of settings, for example in community and voluntary sector contexts.

The mix of activities may vary — for example, a very practical qualification may require considerable time allocated to work experience/developing practice before the person could be expected to achieve the required 'outcome'. At the higher levels, learners are likely to undertake individual study, research and application of skills well beyond the amount of time available through formal classes."

Credit rating form Part 2

This is the credit part of our credit rating form. You should use this to record your rationale and your recommendation.

Part 2 — Credit point recommendation				
Unit breakdown (if relevant), eg topics/sections from the Unit	Formal input (eg contact time with tutor, acquisition of knowledge/ understanding) (hours). Off the job time	Additional activities (eg developing practice, reflection, research/study time) (hours). On the job time	Assessment (eg planning, completion of assessment tasks) (hours)	Total time
Total hours				
			Credit points (hours/10)	
Notes on approach				

The form for recording SCQF credit points is divided into five columns. Each of these columns provides you with the opportunity to record your decision.

Column 1 — Unit breakdown

This column is designed to assist you in breaking down the unit into topics or sections to assist you in attributing SCQF credit points. This section is most commonly completed by using the following headings:

♦ Knowledge and understanding
♦ Activity

These headings in the main sum up what the learner is required to do to achieve the unit. If for example, the unit you are credit rating is a knowledge-based unit, you may not attribute any time to the activity section.

The examples below are for column 1 — unit breakdown developed by Construction, Food Manufacture and Mechanical Engineering Services: Domestic Plumbing. These examples are provided to give you an opportunity to view previous examples and are not exclusive. Each unit should be looked at individually.

Example 1: Construction

Unit breakdown (if relevant), eg topics/sections from the Unit	Formal input (eg contact time with tutor, acquisition of knowledge/ understanding) (hours). Off the job time	Additional activities (eg developing practice, reflection, research/study time) (hours). On the job time	Assessment (eg planning, completion of assessment tasks) (hours)	Total time
Knowledge and understanding				
Activity				
Total hours				

Example 2: Food Manufacture

Unit breakdown (if relevant), eg topics/sections from the Unit	Formal input (eg contact time with tutor, acquisition of knowledge/ understanding) (hours). Off the job time	Additional activities (eg developing practice, reflection, research/study time) (hours). On the job time	Assessment (eg planning, completion of assessment tasks) (hours)	Total time
Knowledge and understanding				
Activity				
Craft skills (where applicable)				
Total hours				

Example 3: Mechanical Engineering Services: Domestic Plumbing

Unit breakdown (if relevant), eg topics/sections from the Unit	Formal input (eg contact time with tutor, acquisition of knowledge/ understanding) (hours). Off the job time	Additional activities (eg developing practice, reflection, research/study time) (hours). On the job time	Assessment (eg planning, completion of assessment tasks) (hours)	Total time
Knowledge and understanding (theory) Direct learning Work-based learning				
Practice/ experience (practical)				
Planning, evaluation tutorial				
Portfolio/ logbook				
Total hours				

Column 2 — Formal input

This column is about contact time with tutor, lecturer, trainer, acquisition of knowledge and/or understanding. This time would normally be off the job, classroom, training room, etc.

Column 3 — Additional activities

This column is about the time spent developing practice, reflection, research/study time, etc. This time would normally be on the job.

Column 4 — Assessment

This column is about the time spent on planning, completion of assessment tasks, assessment time, portfolio building, etc.

Column 5 — Total time

This column is for recording the overall time for each of the columns.

Calculating SCQF credit points

It is important that you re-read the content of the unit before undertaking any credit rating activity. The agreed description of the average learner must be used when calculating the credit. You should consider how long it would take your agreed average learner to achieve the unit.

Make use of all available information to guide your calculation of credit. For example, this information can clarify the number of times a task has to be demonstrated, if there is a multiple choice to complete, etc:

♦ syllabus
♦ training materials
♦ assessment guidance
♦ assessment strategy/principles
♦ learner portfolios
♦ learner support packs
♦ qualification structures

In order to calculate credit, you need to break down the unit. Based on your knowledge and experience of the unit, decide on whether it is appropriate to section the unit by the outcomes, knowledge and understanding, tasks, etc or if it is best looked at holistically. You must always, as a minimum, break the unit down into the activities identified in the columns two, three and four in Part 2 of the credit rating form. You may wish to break the unit down further than this, and you should adapt Part 2 of the credit rating form accordingly, then assign notional learning hours to each of your sections. This in turn will provide you with notional learning hours for this unit.

Once this task is complete, review your calculation and consider:

♦ if the number of hours is realistic for the agreed average learner to complete the unit successfully
♦ using benchmarks, such as any other similar SCQF credit rated provision, to moderate your first calculation
♦ if you are able to, discussing your calculations with centres currently offering the unit or qualification
♦ if you are able to, discussing your calculations with other subject experts
♦ if you have a sound rationale to support your calculation

Individual units need not be the same size. For example, one unit may be very demanding in terms of both skills and knowledge, whilst another may be less demanding and hence take less time for the average learner to achieve.

Remember that 1 credit point equates to 10 hours of learning. Fractions of hours should be rounded up or down as appropriate, for example:

♦ 44 hours would be 4 SCQF credit points
♦ 57 hours would be 6 SCQF credit points
♦ 65 hours would be 7 SCQF credit points

You must record your determinations so that there is evidence to support the credit value you allocate to the Unit. This can include, for example, explanation of the number of hours per day spent on the unit; number of days spent on training courses; and the number of times competency needs to be demonstrated.

Credit sense check

There are a couple of benchmarks which can assist in ensuring your calculations for SCQF credit reflect the number of hours available to any learner in a given year.

We have calculated the typical number of hours available to a learner in a year. The notional learning hours shouldn't exceed this total, but can be less. Not all the hours available will be used for learning; many learners will also be in employment.

220 working days a year (Monday to Friday)
220 days at 7 hours a day = 1540 hours
If you divide 220 by 5 (5 days Monday to Friday) it gives you 44 weeks

Another benchmark is the 120 credit points (1,200 hours) allocated for one year of full time academic study.

Examples

These are examples of a completed Part 2 of the credit rating form. They will give you an idea of the minimum level of detail that should be included to justify your recommendation. The first example shows in column one where the credit rater considered the unit as breaking down into knowledge and understanding and activity.

Example 1

Part 2 — Credit point recommendation				
Unit breakdown (if relevant), eg topics/sections from the unit	**Formal input (eg contact time with tutor, acquisition of knowledge/ understanding) (hours). Off the job time**	**Additional activities (eg developing practice, reflection, research/study time) (hours). On the job time**	**Assessment (eg planning, completion of assessment tasks) (hours)**	**Total time**
Knowledge and understanding	11	22	3	36
Activity	4	30	3	37
Total hours	15	52	6	73
			Credit points (hours/10)	7
Notes on approach				
I broke down the unit in the way that I would teach it and estimated the guided teaching time that I would require, and I have also assumed 2 hours self-study for each hour of guided learning. ♦ K1–K6: 3 hours ♦ K7–K10: 2 hours ♦ K11–K15: 2 hours ♦ K16–K22: 2 hours ♦ K23–K29: 2 hours A visit to a number of premises that drill boreholes would help demonstrate the skills required. I set aside 4 hours for such visits. I also estimated 30 hours of on the job learning will be required to demonstrate consistent performance to cover the criteria. This unit requires the learner to be able to operate a range of different types of machinery and therefore requires a large amount of practice for them to become competent. One hour for knowledge assessment and 2 hours preparation/revision has been estimated, with a similar practical assessment. I consulted with xxxxx, a drilling and water purification expert at the Royal Society of Water Management, to confirm my recommended credit.				

Example 2

This shows where the credit rater considered an alternative approach of breaking the unit down by learning outcome (LO).

Part 2 — Credit point recommendation				
Unit breakdown (if relevant), eg topics/sections from the unit	Formal input (eg contact time with tutor, acquisition of knowledge/ understanding) (hours). Off the job time	Additional activities (eg developing practice, reflection, research/study time) (hours). On the job time	Assessment (eg planning, completion of assessment tasks) (hours)	Total time
LO1	2	21	14	83
LO2	2	21		
LO3	2	21		
Total hours	6	63	14	83
			Credit points (hours/10)	8
Notes on approach				
Learners will attend training sessions of approximately 2 hours for each learning outcome. The majority of the learning time will be 'on the job', ie assessing practice, making recommendations and working collaboratively in the workplace. Learners will be allocated a mentor or buddy to provide 'on the job' guidance on adapting processes as appropriate to the organisation and circumstances. The 'on the job' time has been estimated by assessing the likely demands of achieving the learning outcomes differentially (based on a 7 hour working day, the equivalent of 3 working days for each of the 3 learning outcomes). Learners will also be developing a portfolio of authentic evidence incrementally in the workplace to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. However, additional assessment time (equivalent to 2 working days) has been calculated to ensure the evidence is valid, sufficient and auditable by third parties. 83 hours of total learning time is rounded down to 8 credits.				

Allocating overall SCQF level to a qualification

Once you have allocated levels to the individual units within a qualification the submitting organisation will have to determine a level for the qualification as a whole. They should:

♦ justify the recommendation of the overall level
♦ use the evidence generated during the credit rating exercise to support the recommendation

The overall qualification level is a product of the levels of the units that make up the qualification and the amount of credit attached to the units.

The level for a qualification is normally the most common level of the units which make it up.

If all of your units have been allocated one SCQF level, then you can assume that the qualification will be at that level. A qualification with five mandatory units which sit at levels 6, 6, 7, 7 and 6 respectively, would normally be assigned to level 6 as three of the five units are at that level.

Example 1

Unit title	Mandatory/optional	SCQF level	SCQF credit points
Unit 1	M	6	10
Unit 2	M	6	10
Unit 3	M	7	20
Unit 4	M	7	20
Unit 5	M	6	10

However, it is important to also note the SCQF credit points attached to each of the units. In the example above, the learner would have 30 credit points at level 6 and 40 credit points at level 7. As the greatest volume of learning is at SCQF level 7, the qualification could be justified at SCQF level 7.

Impact of options

Normally the mandatory section would be considered as the most important as this is what all learners have to complete; however, it is also important to consider the impact of optional units. This is generally more relevant for qualifications where you have more generic, soft skill mandatory units and technical options which carry a lot more weight.

Example 2

Unit title	Mandatory/optional	SCQF level	SCQF credit points
Unit 1	M	6	10
Unit 2	M	6	10
Unit 3	M	6	10
Complete 4 optional units			
Unit 4	O	7	20
Unit 5	O	7	15
Unit 6	O	7	20
Unit 7	O	8	20
Unit 8	O	7	15

In this example, the mandatory section is 30 credit points at SCQF level 6. The minimum route through the optional section would be 70 credit points at SCQF level 7. The qualification could therefore be justified at SCQF level 7.

You should think about and record your rationale to support your recommendation for the overall level of the qualification. Your recommendations will be formally reviewed by SQA Accreditation, so it is important to include enough information so that someone who is not familiar with your qualification can make a judgement on whether they can confirm your recommendations. It is also important for us to be able to refer back to the rationale and justification in the event of anyone challenging your recommendations at a later date.

Information for submitting organisations is given in the document *Approval Process for Credit Rating and Levelling Accredited Qualifications*. Submitting organisations should ensure they receive a copy of this from their Accreditation Manager.