

An Introduction to Core Skills Presentation Guidance for Community Learning and Development / Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Introduction

This document is designed for presenters who are using the slides for the generic presentation *An Introduction to Core Skills*. The presentation itself is designed for delivery to CLD/ALN practitioners who are interested in certification particularly for candidates involved in Numeracy and Literacy programmes. Over the next few pages further detail and background will be provided which should help presenters flesh out their presentation content in line with the content of the slides. It is hoped this approach will allow presenters with the flexibility to tailor their presentation to match their own style of delivery, the needs and interests of the particular audience and the time available for the presentation.

There are three parts to the generic Core Skills presentation and the information given in this document will follow the same structure:

- What are Core Skills;
- Why should you offer Core Skills;
- How do you offer Core Skills.

In the first section we will concentrate on the titles, levels and certification arrangements for the Core Skills. In the second section we will go on to look at the benefits of delivering Core Skills both from a candidate's point of view and from the deliverer/assessors point of view. In the final section we will look at the practical implications of delivering Core Skills, focusing on approval, assessment and general administration.

What are Core Skills?

The Core Skills are a group of five skills that are key to learning and working in today's world. Employers have identified these skills as those that are most likely to be needed in any work environment. This does not mean that every job will need people who are proficient in all five Core Skills but it does mean that every job will require some level of ability in some or all of these skills. Likewise, candidates may need to improve on certain skills if they want to take full advantage of learning opportunities that may be available to them either now or in the future.

The five Core Skills are:

Communication

Numeracy

Information and Communication Technology

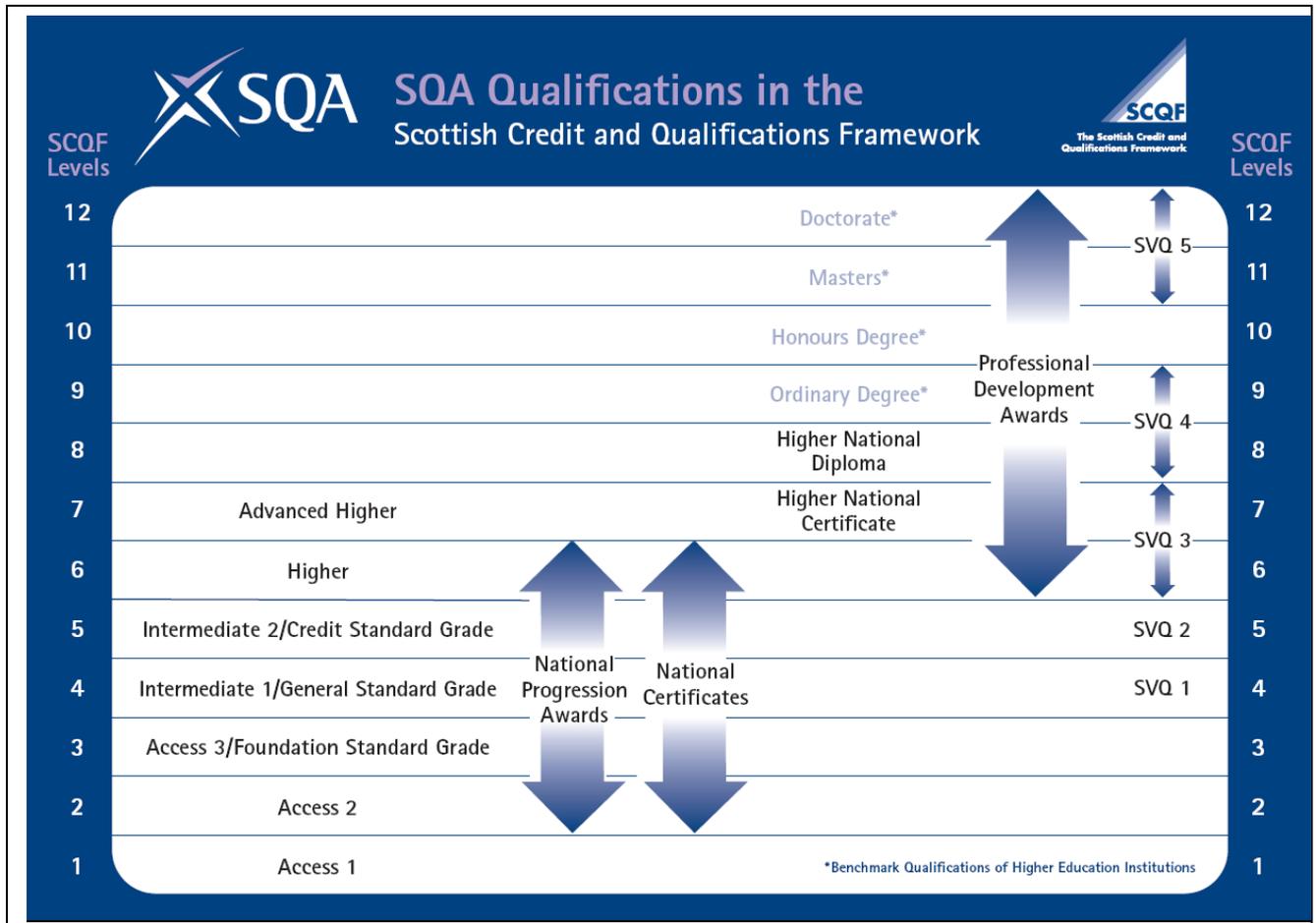
Problem Solving

Working with Others

Levels

Each Core Skill is available at levels 2 to 6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

The following graphic helps explain the 12 different levels within the SCQF framework by relating each level to types of qualification.



If your audience is unfamiliar with the SCQF levels and what they mean, it might help you explain if you use particular types of qualification to give comparative examples of different levels. For example, you could explain that a Standard Grade achieved at Foundation level equates to level 3 on the SCQF, a Standard Grade achieved at Credit level equates to level 5 on the SCQF and a Higher equates to level 6 on the SCQF.

Size

Most of the Core Skills Units are designed to be of the traditional 40 hour length. The 40 hours is a notional length, intended to give an indication of how long it might take to deliver the Unit. However, the actual time required for delivery may vary from one candidate to the next depending on their previous knowledge, their normal pace of learning and the level of Unit they are attempting.

New Core Skills Units were introduced in Aug 2008 which include a group of smaller, Units in Numeracy and Communication at SCQF levels 2 and 3, alongside the 40 hour versions. These smaller Units have a notional length of 10 or 20 hours and they are aimed at candidates who:

- would be motivated by the achievement of formal certification at the earliest opportunity as a confidence builder, this might be particularly important for adult returners with a low level certificated achievement from school;
- may not be capable of achieving all of the requirements of the 40 hour Unit but could achieve part of the full Core Skill Unit.

These 10 and 20 hour Units may be of particular interest to Community Learning and Development centres.

Why should you offer Core Skills?

A social practice approach to literacies learning focuses on the skills, knowledge and understanding that enable people to do what they want in their private, family, community and working lives. Offering Core Skills units fits with this as developing and improving ability in the five Core Skills can have several benefits for your candidates:

- ◆ Core Skills can enhance a candidate's CV;
- ◆ improving Core Skills will show prospective employers that the candidate has a commitment to learning;
- ◆ Core Skills are often included in larger qualifications such as National Qualification Group Awards and Modern Apprenticeships, so if a candidate achieves Core Skills now they could be contributing to the potential achievement of further qualifications in the future;
- ◆ Core Skills can provide a focus for learning and a way of identifying gaps in a candidate's skills that may need further development;
- ◆ Core Skills can improve a candidate's confidence and his/her independence.

The achievement of Core Skills should enhance a candidate's employment prospects. As already stated, the Core Skills subjects are deemed by employers to be of particular importance to the modern worker. If one of the candidate's goals is to find employment or to improve their employment situation then it may be worth taking time to establish what type of job opportunities they are considering and which of the Core Skills might be the most important in the given job opportunities.

Core Skills can be a starting point which will allow candidates entry into further learning opportunities. In some cases, the Core Skills Units may form part of a larger qualification. A candidate may set out with the goal of achieving particular qualifications in future, with the Core Skills providing a pathway to reaching that target. However, where a candidate completes Core Skills Units as a goal in themselves, it should be pointed out to them what further qualifications may be available to them.

The Core Skills are important for the modern workplace but they are also important for modern life. More and more services and are being made available to people through the internet which obviously requires individuals to have adequate skills in ICT and communication. The importance of numeracy skills particularly to manage household budgets has come to the fore in recent months but numeracy is also important for a variety of household tasks, such as: shopping; DIY; cooking; timekeeping; etc.

How do you offer Core Skills?

The first step to be considered by organisations seeking to offer Core Skills is whether or not they have approval. Organisations must have SQA centre approval before they can register candidates and offer SQA qualifications.

Approval

There are two stages to SQA's approval process

- approval as an SQA centre
- approval to offer specific qualifications

During **centre approval**, SQA make sure that your centre has the management structure and quality assurance systems to support the delivery, assessment and internal verification of SQA qualifications.

To gain **approval to offer specific qualifications** you will need to show that your centre has:

- suitably qualified and/or experienced staff to deliver the qualifications;
- appropriate reference and learning materials for the specific qualifications;
- assessment materials as appropriate to the qualifications;
- the equipment and accommodation you will need to deliver and assess the specific qualifications;
- an internal verification system that meets SQA quality requirements.

For both types of approval, you must demonstrate your potential to meet SQA's approval criteria. You will also have to show that you are continuing to meet our criteria following approval as you deliver and assess qualifications.

To apply for approval, organisations must complete and submit the necessary approval forms: form CA1 for centre approval; and form SA1 for specific award approval. Both of these forms are available for download from the SQA website along with advice on their completion.

Partnership

Organisations involved in CLD should take time to consider whether they should seek approval themselves or team up with a partner organisation who may have more experience in delivery and/or assessment of SQA qualifications. Where a partnership is considered, it is important that an

agreement between the two organisations is drawn up that clearly details the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties.

Qualifications for Assessors

One question that is often asked with regard to the requirements for SQA approval is "what qualifications do I need to act as an assessor for Core Skills?" For the purposes of approval to offer Core Skills Units, a centre must show that they have staff who are:

- competent in the subject/occupational area to a level appropriate to the qualification;
- competent in assessment (or internal verification) of the type involved in the qualification;
- familiar with the procedures and documentation for the qualification.

It is not essential that staff have a qualification in assessment or in the subject they are teaching, however they must at least be able to show that they have competence through experience in the assessment process and in the subject they are assessing.

The easiest way to prove a member of staff is competent in assessment is if they can show they have an appropriate qualification, for example:

- a Scottish teaching qualification for secondary education or further education (**TQSE** or **TQFE**);
- a Unit or Units covering assessment and/or verification, such as the so called 'A' & 'V' Units required by SVQ assessors/verifiers, or one of the other Units covering the assessment process available through SQA.

The Units and ASPs

The new Core Skills Units are written in a different style than the old Core Skills Units. The new Unit descriptors are written for candidates rather than assessors, they use Plain English and they try to avoid the normal terms and jargon that have been associated with SQA Units in the past. The Unit descriptors do not list Outcomes, Performance Criteria or Evidence Requirements like other SQA Units, instead they list the Unit requirements as bullet points under the heading "*What do I need to do?*"

The new Units are intended to encourage centres to take a more flexible approach to the assessment of candidates. Assessors must collect and record evidence which matches all of the Unit requirements. It is hoped that the range and type of evidence that is collected will be more varied than in the past, with assessors trying to find suitable opportunities to collect naturally occurring evidence or to develop exercises or tasks that are in a context which is appropriate to the candidate.

With the old Core Skills Units, SQA produced a set of NAB (National Assessment Bank) materials for centres to use when assessing candidates. However, to help promote a more flexible approach to assessment for the

new Units, SQA has not produced new NABs but has tried to provide examples of the sort of opportunities or tasks that might be used to generate candidate evidence against particular requirements. Some assessment examples are given in the Unit descriptors and more are given in the Assessment Support Packs (ASPs) which have been developed for each of the Units.

Copies of the Unit descriptors are available for download from the Core Skills section of the SQA website (www.sqa.org.uk/coreskills). Care should be taken to view the NQ Core Skills Units rather than the workplace assessed Core Skills Units which are also available on the SQA website.

The Assessment Support Packs (ASPs) for each Unit are stored alongside the Units on the Core Skills section of the website. The ASPs are written for assessors and they provide advice and guidance on the delivery of the Core Skills Units. It is important that assessors read both the Units and the ASPs for each Unit as the ASPs help to clarify and exemplify the standard required. The ASPs also contain examples of checklists and planning sheets that can be used by centres to record and organise candidate evidence.

Other resources

There is a range of materials available which can be used to support delivery of the Core Skills Units. Most of the materials that have been developed over recent years are referenced against the old Core Skills Units. It should be pointed out that although these materials are matched against the old Units, most of the material will still be valid and can be used in relation to the new Units. However, where materials are being used as a basis for developing assessment tasks or activities, the assessors should be careful to match any evidence collected against the requirements stated in the new Units.

Materials are available from, for example:

- the Core Skills section of the SQA website;
- resources provided by Learning Connections;
- the Learning Teaching Scotland (LTS) website
www.ltscotland.org.uk/nq

SQA intends to develop more materials in the form of assessment exemplars. Information regarding any such new materials will be made available on the Core Skills section of the SQA website as they become available.

Data Management

As part of the approval process, centres must identify an individual within their organisation who will act as the SQA Co-ordinator and all communication between SQA and the centre should be channelled through that individual. That individual will also be responsible for transferring data to SQA with regard to registering candidates, entering candidates for specific qualifications and submitting results to SQA in relation to those candidate entries.

Advice and guidance on the process and procedure for data management and data transfer can be provided by SQA's Centre Support Team.

Costs

- The cost for centre approval and the first approval for specific qualifications is £450.
- The cost of each Unit is currently £7.25 each regardless of Unit length. In other words each 10 hour Units is the same price as a 20 or 40 hour Unit.
- There are no additional charges for candidate registration or for certification.

Certification

There are two ways in which the achievement of Core Skills can be recognised on a candidate's Scottish Qualifications Certificate (SQC):

1. through achievement of specific Core Skills Units;
2. through achievement of embedded Core Skills.

Where a candidate achieves a particular Core Skills Unit, the Unit title and SCQF level will be listed on the certificate they receive from SQA (the SQC), alongside any other Units they may have achieved covering other subjects.

For example, here is a page from a sample certificate showing the way in which Units are listed:

Sam Scholar			
SCN: 007119798			
Summary of attainment up to August 2009			
Qualification	Grade	Date	Level
National Courses			
Higher English	A	08/2009	6
Higher Business Management	B	08/2009	6
Higher Mathematics	C	08/2009	6
Higher Physics	D	08/2009	6
Standard Grade Business Management	1	08/2008	5
Standard Grade English	1	08/2008	5
Standard Grade Drama	2	08/2008	5
Standard Grade French	2	08/2008	5
Standard Grade Mathematics	2	08/2008	5
Standard Grade Physics	2	08/2008	5
National Units			
Drama External Assessment	B	08/2009	6
French: Extended Reading/Viewing		08/2009	6
French: Language		08/2009	6
Investigative Drama		08/2009	6
Study of a Text in its Theatrical Context		08/2009	6
Work Experience		08/2008	3

Core Skills can also be achieved where they are embedded in SQA qualifications other than the Core Skills Units. For example, a candidate who achieves Standard Grade English at General level (SCQF level 4), is deemed to have achieved the requirements for the Core Skill in Communication at SCQF level 4.

As Core Skills could be embedded in any qualification a candidate may have done, it is not always be clear when you look at the list of Units and Courses they have achieved, which Core Skills they might have. To help with this, each SQC issued by SQA contains a Core Skills Profile. The Core Skills Profile identifies what level of attainment the candidate has against each of the Core Skills subjects from all qualifications they have achieved.

The Core Skills Profile breaks each Core Skill down into components, for example the Communication Core Skill has two components: Oral Communication and Written Communication. Here is an example of a full Core Skills Profile taken for a sample candidate certificate, which shows the level of each Core Skill component the candidate has based on the qualifications they have achieved.

Sam Scholar		
SCN: 007119798		
Profiles up to August 2009		
Core Skills	Level	Date
Core Skill - Communication		
Oral Communication	5	08/2008
Written Communication	6	08/2009
Core Skill - Numeracy		
Using Graphical Information	6	08/2009
Using Number	6	08/2009
Core Skill - Information and Communication Technology		
Accessing Information	4	08/2008
Providing/Creating Information	4	08/2008
Core Skill - Problem Solving		
Critical Thinking	6	08/2009
Planning and Organising	6	08/2009
Reviewing and Evaluating	6	08/2009
Core Skill - Working with Others		
Working Co-operatively with Others	6	08/2009
Reviewing Co-operative Contribution	6	08/2009
Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework	Level	Date
Credit Points		
126	6	08/2009
144	5	08/2008
6	3	08/2008

It is important that you understand the way in which Core Skills certification and profiling operates so that you will be able to identify what level of Core Skills your candidates may already have before embarking on delivery of the Core Skills Units.