

# Guide to Higher National Qualifications



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## Higher National (HN) qualifications

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are specifically designed to meet the needs of employers. These short-cycle higher education qualifications provide learners with practical working skills and the theoretical knowledge employers need.

HN qualifications are delivered by colleges, training providers, and some universities. They can give learners access to second or third-year entry at university, and to professional membership bodies.

Developed in partnership with colleges, universities, and industry, HNC and HND qualifications are available in a wide range of subjects, including business administration, computing, engineering, health and social care, and social sciences.

Find out more about HNs a [www.sqa.org.uk/hn](http://www.sqa.org.uk/hn)



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## Who are HNs for?

HN qualifications provide employees with both the practical skills needed to do a job and the theoretical knowledge an employer will expect them to have.

Typically, an **HNC takes one year to complete** and an **HND takes two years to complete**. (Part-time study options may also be available).

HNs are suitable for a wide range of learners including:

- school leavers
- adult returners to education
- employees who wish to enhance their career prospects
- people who wish to start their own business

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## Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

The SCQF helps make the relationships between qualifications clearer. Qualifications in the SCQF are compared using two measures: level and credit. The level of a qualification shows how difficult the learning is, and the amount of credit shows the length of time it takes to complete a qualification.

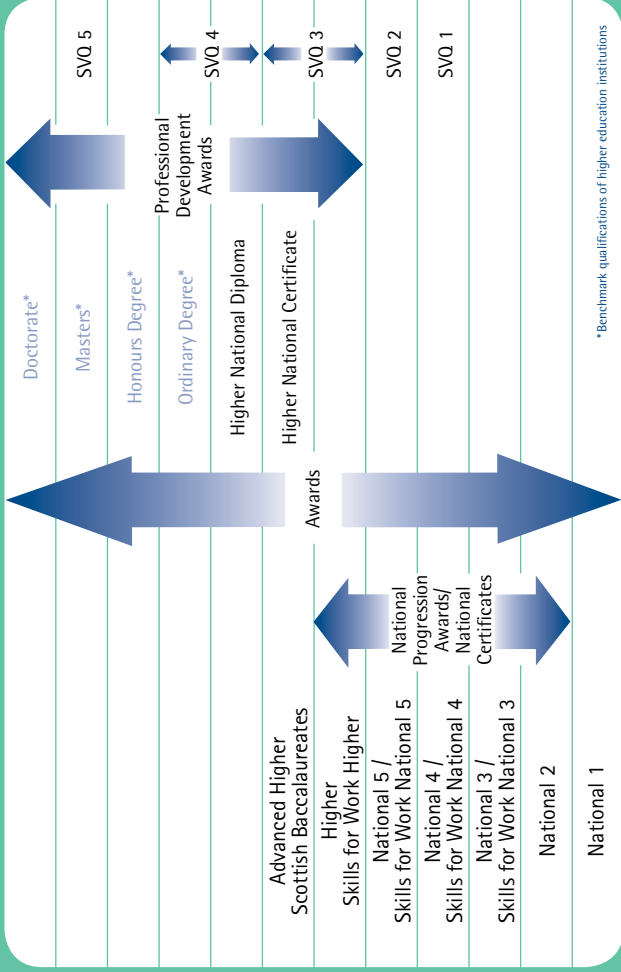
- HNCs are at SCQF level 7 and usually take one year to complete (96 SCQF credit points)
- HNDs are at SCQF level 8, and usually take two years to complete (240 SCQF credit points)



# SQA Qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SCQF  
Levels

SCQF  
Levels



\*Benchmark qualifications of higher education institutions



# Ready Reckoner for SQA Qualifications in the SCOF

Customer Contact Centre 0345 279 1000 [customer@sqa.org.uk](mailto:customer@sqa.org.uk)

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) helps people to understand and compare different qualifications in Scotland.

It does this by using two measures:

Levels (1–12) show how complex the learning of a qualification is. Credit points indicate the volume of learning required to achieve a qualification.

One SCQF credit point represents 10 notional learning hours.

SQA qualifications are developed using SCQF level and credit points. This information is shown on the Scottish Qualifications Certificate. The Ready Reckoner shows the level and credit points for SQA Units, Courses and Group Awards.

scqf

scottish credit and  
qualifications framework

[www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

Units	
Type	SCQF credit points
Higher National Units SCQF levels 5–12	8
National Units SCQF level 7	8
National Units SCQF levels 1–6	6
SVA Units SCQF levels 4–12	varies

National qualifications		
	SCQF level	SCQF credit points
Advanced Higher	7	32
Higher	6	24
Higher	6	24
National 5	5	24
National 4	4	24
National 3	3	18
National 2	2	18
National 1	1	6

Group Awards		
	SCQF level	SCQF credit points
Higher National Diploma	8	240
Higher National Certificate	7	96
National Certificate	4–6	72
National Certificate	2–3	54
Awards <sup>1</sup>	1–12	varies
Professional Development Awards <sup>1</sup>	6–12	varies
National Progression Awards <sup>1</sup>	2–6	varies

Scottish Vocational Qualifications <sup>2</sup>	
	SCQF level
SVA 5	11
SVA 4	8–9
SVA 3	6–7
SVA 2	5
SVA 1	4

<sup>1</sup> These are Flexible Group Awards. SCQF credit points will vary according to the number of credits that they are made up of.

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to SQA's website for information on SVAs. The allocation of SCQF credit points and levels to SVAs will be undertaken as and when they are revised.

More information on the SCQF, and SQA's interactive ready reckoner, can be found at [www.sqa.org.uk/scqf](http://www.sqa.org.uk/scqf)

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## How HNs work

All HN qualifications are made up of Higher National Unit credits (one credit represents roughly 40 hours of timetabled learning and 40 hours of self-guided learning and study).

- HNCs are made up of 12 credits and **usually take one year to complete** (some centres may offer 15 credits).
- HNDs are made of up to 30 credits and **usually take two years to complete.**
- Part-time study options may also be available to learners.

HNC or HND graduates can also gain entry to a number of professional bodies or to a related undergraduate degree. Whether an individual wants to go straight into a job, or continue their studies, getting an HN qualification is a good place to start.

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## HNs for learners

HNs are developed by SQA in partnership with colleges, universities and industry. As well as covering theoretical study elements, HNs develop a learner's practical skills. Assessment is ongoing during the course and may include questioning, essays, presentations, and projects.

### Starting an HNC or HND

Acceptance on a course is down to each individual college, university or training centre. Recommended entry is by formal qualifications or relevant work experience.

The recommended qualification for entry to an HNC or HND course is one of the following:

- a programme of national units appropriate to the course you want to study
- two passes at Higher or above
- an equivalent qualification

Many colleges and training providers provide flexible ways to study for HNCs and HNDs. This may include day release, part-time, evening or distance learning.

You can also browse SQA HNs online at [www.sqa.org.uk/hn](http://www.sqa.org.uk/hn)



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## **HNs — a pathway to university and further study**

HNs don't just qualify learners for work. They are higher education qualifications, and can support learners to gain advanced entry into many undergraduate degree programmes in universities and higher education institutions around the world.

Some HNCs allow direct entry into the second year of a degree programme, and some HNDs allow direct entry into the third year.

Learners may have to articulate to university degree programmes. Contact student advisors or university external engagement staff for more information.

### **Recognition of HNDs by professional bodies**

Many professional bodies recognise the quality and value of an SQA HND qualification.

This has led a high number of professional bodies to enter into agreements with SQA, in which they recognise the value of HNDs by way of articulation and professional recognition:

- HND graduates may be exempt (partially or fully) from professional body exams
- HNDs may be accepted as a membership entry requirement

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## HN information for employers

HN qualifications provide learners with a strong mix of knowledge and hands-on experience, and the right balance of the analytical, practical, and methodical skills which will make them an asset to an organisation.

### **Based on standards and professionally recognised**

The qualifications are based on industry standards, which means employers can have professional peace of mind employing HN graduates. In many areas, HN graduates can then gain entry to relevant industry bodies.

HN graduates have specific occupational knowledge along with employability skills, giving them a better understanding of the workplace.

### **What are the advantages of employing an HN graduate?**

- They are more rounded, and arrive ready to hit the ground running
- They understand the practical side of the job
- They can demonstrate analytical, logical, and methodical skills

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## Get in touch

To find out more about SQA Higher National qualifications and employing an HN graduate, speak to our Business Development team today.

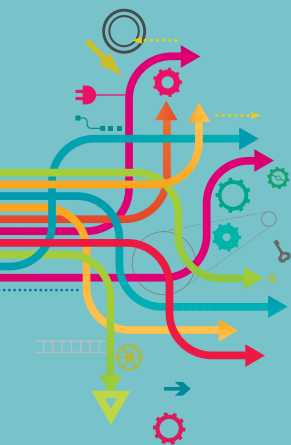
Web: [www.sqa.org.uk/businessdevelopment](http://www.sqa.org.uk/businessdevelopment)

Tel: [0303 333 0330](tel:03033330330)

Email: [mycentre@sqa.org.uk](mailto:mycentre@sqa.org.uk)

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