



**Arrangements for:**  
**Professional Development Award in**  
**Mental Health Peer Support at**  
**SCQF level 7**  
**Group Award Codes: G9WA 47**

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## **Acknowledgement**

SQA acknowledges the valuable contribution that Scotland's colleges have made to the development of Higher National qualifications.

## History of changes

It is anticipated that changes will take place during the life of the qualification, and this section will record these changes. This document is the latest version and incorporates the changes summarised below.

Version number	Description	Date	Authorised by
02	Unit specs updated to current template. Candidate changed to learner. Updated language, legislation, assessment guidance and references within guidance section.	01/01/2024	

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# 1 Introduction

This is the Arrangements document for the following Group Award:  
*Professional Development Award (PDA) in Mental Health Peer Support at Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) level 7.*

This award has been designed to meet the needs of peer support workers in Scotland and provide them with a robust accredited award which will not only serve to set standards but also contribute to the creation of a recognised employment and career pathway.

This document includes background information on the development of the award, its aims, guidance on access, delivery, assessment, verification and details of the award structure.

## 2 Rationale for the development of the Group Award

This Professional Development Award originated from approaches made by the Scottish Recovery Network to the Scottish Qualifications Authority with a view to developing an accredited award for peer support workers in the field of mental health recovery. Initial discussions led to an agreement to work in partnership towards this end and a Qualifications Design Team was established and charged with this task. This section is intended to illustrate the rationale behind the development of this award.

The Scottish Recovery Network (SRN) is funded by the Scottish Government to:

- ◆ Raise awareness of recovery from mental health challenges
- ◆ To learn more about the factors which help and hinder recovery
- ◆ To build capacity for recovery by supporting and encouraging national and local action

Some key aspects of work include a major narrative research project, regular events, training and the development of local recovery groups. The SRN support a wide network of interest with 6000 contacts on their mailing list. They also work extensively to support the development of mental health service policy and practice. In the last few years ideas related to recovery have become central to mental health dialogue in Scotland and the work in this country is being increasingly recognised internationally.

The Scottish Government is committed to supporting the development of qualifications and learning materials in relation to recovery and peer support as detailed in The Mental Health Strategy 2017 – 2027 Available for download

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2017/03/mental-health-strategy-2017-2027/documents/00516047-pdf/00516047-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00516047.pdf>

Such materials should be available to anyone with an experience of mental health challenges and who has an interest in learning more about the recovery process.

This would support people to take more control over their wellbeing and recovery, enabling people to live a more fulfilled life. It was also envisaged that learning materials could enable people to move towards greater engagement in meaningful activity including paid employment.

Peer Support Workers are people with personal experience of mental health challenges who are trained and then employed to complement and enhance existing mental health services. They offer a high degree of empathy and mutuality and work in a way which is strongly oriented around the recovery experience. Hope and self direction are central components of this approach. It requires peer workers to be confident and competent in relation to the use of certain professional skills such as boundary setting, confidentiality and disclosure. This role is now well established in Scotland and abroad.

SRN has been actively involved in the development and implementation of the peer support work in Scotland. [https://www.scottishrecovery.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Scottish Recovery Network Strategic Plan 2021 24.pdf](https://www.scottishrecovery.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Scottish_Recovery_Network_Strategic_Plan_2021_24.pdf)

The peer support approach was introduced in Scotland in 2004 and developments in this area have attracted international attention since then. There is an internationally growing trend to adopt Peer Support Services within addiction and mental health services, and despite the ongoing challenges, large sections of the current literature support the inclusion of peer support workers in the mental health care workforce. The feasibility and maintenance of a robust Peer Support Services in health care would only be possible through collaborative efforts and ongoing support and engagement from all health care practitioners, managers, and other stakeholders <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7312261/>.

The promotion of peer support working in Scotland has improved recovery outcomes in mental health services and has promoted the inclusion and empowerment of people with experience of mental health challenges. It is known, for example, that the largest group of Incapacity Benefit claimants are people with experience of mental health challenges and it is also well documented that the same people can experience significant stigma and discrimination in the jobs market. Peer support working acknowledges and harnesses the personal experience of mental health problems offering new opportunities for people who may be considered 'experts by experience.'

**Peer Support is a system of giving and receiving help founded on the key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and a mutual agreement of what is helpful.**

**- Mead et al (2001)**

Peer Support is a way of sharing our common humanity. As the quotation shows, the important words are 'respect' 'responsibility' and 'mutual'. These are all values we share, not things we do on our own. This is not a new concept; people in recovery from mental health problems have always shared their experience of recovery and mental health to offer mutual support and learning.

***Initial discussions between SRN and SQA and further subsequent discussions within the context of the Qualification Development Team led to the recognition that the best format for the type of training envisaged for peer support workers would be a Professional Development Award, and a substantial amount of work followed to decide on the format and SCQF level which would be most appropriate. We explored a variety of options and through a process of distillation and design centred around the needs of both the sector and prospective candidates, arrived at our final design of a PDA in Mental Health Peer Support at SCQF level 7 comprising two mandatory Units, which are***

***Mental Health Peer Support: Recovery Context  
Mental Health Peer Support: Developing Practice***

These Units have been designed to be complementary and in a very general sense the first unit serves to introduce concepts and approaches and the second demonstrates the application of these approaches in practice.

### **3 Aims of the Group Award(s)**

#### **3.1 General aims of the Group Award**

The overall aim of the award is to facilitate candidates to undertake the role of peer support worker. The PDA in Mental Health Peer Support at SCQF level 7 will equip candidates with the knowledge skills and values which are necessary to carry out this role.

#### **3.2 Specific aims of the Group Award**

The specific aims of the award relate to the outcomes identified below. Candidates who successfully complete the award will:

- ◆ Explore the development of the recovery approach in mental health
- ◆ Define and understand peer support and its role in recovery
- ◆ Describe and explain the key concepts of formalised peer support
- ◆ Apply a range of theories and concepts in the peer support role
- ◆ Develop relationships based on peer support principles
- ◆ Understand perspectives of the work role

These Outcomes relate to the characteristic outcomes of learning at SCQF level 7 which include the following:

**Knowledge and Understanding:** Candidates will be able to demonstrate a broad knowledge of the subject in general, be aware of the main theories and concepts and be aware of the evolving nature of knowledge and understanding.

**Practice: Applied Knowledge and Understanding:** Candidates will be able to use some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques and practices associated with the discipline and apply these in routine and non routine contexts.

**Generic Cognitive Skills:** Candidates will present and evaluate arguments and ideas which are routine to the discipline.

**Communication Skills:** Candidates will use a wide range of communication skills and some advanced skills associated with the discipline such as conveying complex ideas in well structured and coherent forms and communicating effectively in both familiar and new contexts.

**Autonomy, Accountability and Working with Others:** Candidates will exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level and also work with others in support of professional practice under guidance.

It will be seen from these Outcomes, that as well as meeting its primary aim of equipping individuals to become effective peer support workers, the award has additional benefits to candidates which can substantially contribute to professional and personal development in terms of building competence and confidence.

### **3.3 Target groups**

This award is aimed primarily at candidates who wish to develop their skills in mental health peer support. The primary target group consists of individuals who have personal experience of mental health problems and who wish to take on the role of peer support workers. This is a growth area in this field of work and this award is designed to be the primary qualification which will equip people to undertake this role. The award has been designed in a way which might serve a dual purpose of assisting individuals to enter an educational setting which will benefit them by building competence and confidence as well as opening employment opportunities. A secondary group may be existing practitioners, or those with a personal interest in mental health issues, who wish to find out more about this approach who may benefit from doing the first Unit in the award as a means of helping them understand the issues involved.

### **3.4 Continuous Professional Development**

This award is also considered suitable for candidates who may wish to use it as part of a continuing professional development programme. It may be particularly relevant to existing practitioners in the field of mental health work who wish to develop their skills in peer support. It is preferred that the individual providing the peer support has a personal experience of mental health problems and recovery. Either unit may be of use on its own for those wishing to merely develop their understanding of this approach and as such could be used as a single CPD unit for this purpose.



## 4 Access to Group Award

Candidates wishing to undertake this award should be able to demonstrate awareness of and active involvement in mental health support either in the capacity of paid employment or as a volunteer. It is preferred that the individual providing peer support has a personal experience of mental health problems.

Candidates should have good written and oral communication skills which can be evidenced by a qualification at SCQF level 5 or above. The skills to undertake this Unit could also be demonstrated by the process of application and interview in the absence of certificated learning.

## 5 Group Award(s) structure

The award is achieved on the successful attainment of both mandatory Units which are listed in the table in 5.2. The award comprises a total of two SQA credits making up 16 credits points at SCQF level 7.

### 5.1 Framework

<b>Mandatory Unit Title</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>SCQF credit points</b>	<b>SCQF level</b>	<b>SQA credit value</b>
Mental Health Peer Support: Recovery Context	F9DW 34	8	7	1
Mental Health Peer Support: Developing Practice	F9DV 34	8	7	1
<b>Total Credits</b>		<b>6</b>		<b>2</b>

## 5.2 Mapping information

The table below shows the location of this new award in the scheme of social care qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework. This shows the range of possible progression opportunities for successful candidates. In addition, other opportunities will exist within specialist recovery and mental health qualifications.

SCQF	'Academic Awards' Develop Capacity	'Vocational Awards' Assess Competence
11	Masters Degree in Social Work	
10	MA (Hons) Degree in Social Work	SVQ Leadership and Management for Care Services at level 4
9	BA Education and Social Services	SVQ Health and Social Care at level 4
8	HND Social Services PDA in Care Services Management	
7	HNC Social Care PDA Health and Social Care Supervision <b>PDA Mental Health Peer Support</b>	SVQ Health and Social Care at level 3
6	NQ Awards in Care SfW Health and Social Care	
5		SVQ Health and Social Care at level 2

## 5.3 Articulation, professional recognition and credit transfer

It is expected that centres delivering the award implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms and policies. The document entitled *Recognition of Prior Informal Learning (PPL): guidance and resources for mentors and learners, SSSC 2007* provides guidance on the mechanisms, policies and support. Implementation of the guidelines helps ensure consistent RPL policies across Scotland. The purpose of the guidelines is to assist providers in developing and operating processes of recognising prior learning within the suite of Health and Social Care Qualifications.

## **6 Approaches to delivery and assessment**

### **6.1 Delivery**

It is envisaged that the PDA in Mental Health Peer Support at SCQF level 7 will be delivered by a range of training providers and centres who will require to obtain specific approval to offer the award. The ideal organisations to deliver the award will be those who are:

- ◆ involved in the delivery of services and training in the mental health field,
- ◆ committed to the provision of peer support and recovery focused services,
- ◆ able to include people with experience of mental health problems and recovery in delivery.

Where such organisations may not have a current capacity to deliver this award in terms of experienced and competent teaching practitioners, an ideal solution would be the development of a collaborative partnership with an existing educational provider. Centres who have experienced and competent practitioners but are not familiar with the delivery of mental health peer support, or who are unable to include people with lived experience in delivery, a similar model is recommended. In this way, local organisations might develop partnerships with local training providers or further education colleges with all the attendant benefits that such collaborations can bring to candidates.

Centres applying for approval to deliver the award should be aware that this will be one of the factors considered in the approval process unless they were able to meet the condition of having individuals with both personal experience of peer support and recovery focused services as part of their delivery team.

### **6.2 Learning materials**

Centres may wish to develop Teaching and Learning Packs for each of the Units. This will help to ensure that centres delivering the award will have access to learning materials developed specifically to meet the requirements of candidates on this award. Centres may wish to consider developing packs that are jointly written by several experts in this area and will reflect the best practice and developments in this area. It is recognised that there is a body of existing knowledge and research in the field of peer support, much of which is international, and candidates will also be guided to access this through internet, research papers and journals.

### **6.3 Assessment**

Each Unit Specification contains general guidance concerning assessment of evidence requirements. In order to further facilitate this process centres need to produce comprehensive Instrument of Assessment documents for each Unit. These will offer full guidance on assessment and their use will also help ensure standardisation throughout the country.

Each Assessment Instrument document will contain advice on assessment strategy, suggested assessment schemes, sample answers and marking schemes.

In general terms, the emphasis will be on promoting assessment which adopts an integrated and holistic approach and thus assists candidates to integrate their learning and demonstrate its application in real work settings. This is an example of assessments for these units.

### **Unit — Mental Health Peer Support: Recovery Context**

**Outcome 1** You will be assessed by an assignment of approximately 1000 words presented in essay format which demonstrates your ability to meet the evidence requirements.

**Outcomes 2 and 3** You will produce a portfolio of evidence which covers the Evidence Requirements of both Outcomes. This portfolio should be no more than 1,500 words. Portfolio evidence should relate to real work activity and be authenticated by an appropriate person.

### **Unit — Mental Health Peer Support: Developing Practice**

**Outcomes 1, 2 and 3** You will be assessed holistically by presenting a portfolio of evidence using real work experience in which you undertake an analysis of your use of theories and concepts to support people to identify their desired outcomes, set their own goals and recognise their own expertise. You are asked to relate learning to real work practice and are expected to produce evidence relating to the role and function of peer support. The total word count of this portfolio should not exceed 2, 500 words.

## **6.4 Open learning/online learning**

While it is hoped that candidates will be supported to use online methods to support their learning such as using discussion forums and internet research, the nature of this award means that it is not suitable for delivery by an open learning platform alone. Some elements of blended learning would be possible, within the context of a wider approach which included the necessary amount of face to face interaction, for example through placements.

## **7 Development of core/transferable skills**

There is no automatic certification of core skills or core skills components in the Units in the PDA Mental Health Peer Support at SCQF level 7. There may be opportunities in the award to gather evidence up to the maximum level of SQA accreditation at SCQF level 6 for each of the core skills of Communication, Working with Others and Problem Solving. Candidates participating in the award will develop a range of core and transferable skills to improve professional competencies, confidence, and performance in the role of peer support workers. It is envisaged that as candidates progress through the award they will have the opportunity to develop specific core skills as outlined below.

**Communication** — This can be evidenced through written and oral presentation of assessments and observed practice. An emphasis on effective listening, mutually empowering dialogue, and the appropriate telling of ‘your story’ is an integral part of peer support work.

**Working With Others** –This is a key element to the role of peer support. This can be evidenced through observation of mutuality with individuals.

**Problem Solving** — This can be evidenced through planning, critical thinking, and evaluation of issues as they arise within the peer support role.

## 8 General information for centres

### **Candidates with disabilities and/or additional support needs**

The additional support needs of individual candidates should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment instruments, or considering alternative Outcomes for Units. Further advice can be found in the SQA document *Guidance on Assessment Arrangements for Candidates with Disabilities and/or Additional Support Needs* ([www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)).

### **Internal and external verification**

All instruments of assessment used within this Group Award 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](http://www.sqa.org.uk)).

## 9 General information for candidates

### **Professional Development Award in Mental Health Peer Support at SCQF level 7**

This PDA is awarded on the successful completion of the two Units:  
*Mental Health Peer Support: Recovery Context*  
*Mental Health Peer Support: Developing Practice*

This information is intended to give potential candidates a brief overview of the main aspects of this award. For further information, please do not hesitate to contact your approved learning provider or SQA direct.

<b>Mandatory Unit Title</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>SCQF credit points</b>	<b>SCQF level</b>	<b>SQA credit value</b>
Mental Health Peer Support: Recovery Context	F9DW 34	8	7	1
Mental Health Peer Support: Developing Practice	F9DV 34	8	7	1
<b>Total Credits</b>		<b>16</b>		<b>2</b>

### **Who is this award for?**

The Professional Development Award in Mental Health Peer Support at SCQF level 7 has been developed to facilitate learning for individuals who wish to act in the role of peer support workers either in a voluntary or paid capacity. As such, it is intended to become the primary qualification for people working in this role.

### **Who can undertake this award?**

The award may be undertaken by anyone wishing to develop their skills in this area. The only conditions of entry are that candidates should have personal experience of mental health problems and be able to provide evidence of good written and oral communication skills which they can do either in an interview situation, recruitment process or through production of relevant qualifications.

### **What can this award lead to?**

Successful completion of this award may lead to opportunities for employment as a peer support worker. It may also lead to you being able to gain access to a range of other related mental health and social service qualifications. In personal terms, successful completion of a course such as this can lead to increased self confidence and personal and professional competence.

### **How long will it take?**

The award is made of two Units each of which requires about forty hours of study. This will mainly be undertaken in group learning sessions (such as lectures and tutorials) and individual research and study. In addition, you should also be prepared to make a commitment to studying in your own time as well as the time you spend 'in class'.

### **I haven't studied for a long time; will I get help?**

Candidates who are 'returning to study' will receive substantial support to help them get up to speed and will have continuing academic guidance as required.

### **How do I achieve the Units?**

The PDA takes a holistic approach to assessment with an emphasis on assessing the whole Outcome or a combination of outcomes across one or both Units. Your Tutor will use a variety of methods to ensure you understand these Learning Outcomes. This will include presentation of knowledge, use of case study material, individual and group work activities.

You will be assessed by a range of different methods including an assignment, a portfolio of evidence that is based on learning or real work activities authenticated by a Workplace supervisor or mentor. Your centre will provide you with details with regard to the particular assessments for each of the units.

## **10 Glossary of terms**

**Candidate** The person undertaking the PDA.

**Case Study** An assignment in which you give an account of work you have undertaken based on real work practice in which you identify and explain the knowledge used through the use of reference to bibliography and research.

**Evidence Requirements** Details of specific evidence that is required for a Unit in the award for a candidate to meet the Outcomes. Evidence Requirements are mandatory.

**Mental health problems** This term includes experiences and symptoms that can interfere with emotional, cognitive, or social function. Examples include more commonly diagnosed mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety, and those which may be longer term such as schizophrenia and bi-polar disorder. We recognise that mental health challenges and their description can be contested. We have used the descriptions 'mental health challenges', and at times 'mental health issues', as we believe they best reflect the intent of these awards.

**Outcome** The description of an Outcome to be achieved by candidates in an SQA Unit

**PDA** Professional Development Award, a vocational qualification contributing to continuous professional development for employed participants.

**Peer Support** The process whereby people give and receive support, based on shared experiences.

**Peer Support Worker** People with personal experience of mental health problems, who are trained to work in support of other people's recovery. Peer Support Workers can be described as *modelling recovery*, offering a lived example of the possibility of progression and growth.

**Recovery** The Scottish Recovery Network describe recovery as follows:

*‘Recovery is being able to live a meaningful and satisfying life, as defined by each person, in the presence or absence of symptoms. It is about having control over and input into your own life. Everyone’s recovery, like his or her experience of the mental health challenges or illness, is a unique and deeply personal process.’*

**RPL** Recognition of Prior Learning

**SCQF** 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 please visit [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

**SCQF credits** One SQA HN credit is equivalent to eight SCQF credit points. This applies to all HN Units, irrespective of their level.

**SCQF levels** The SCQF covers 12 levels of learning. PDA’s are available at SCQF levels 6 to 12 and will normally be made up of Units at SCQF levels 6 to 12.

**SSSC** Scottish Social Services Council

**Qualification Design Team (QDT)** The QDT works in conjunction with a Qualification Manager/Officer to steer the development of the PDA from its inception/revision through to validation. The group is made up of key stakeholders representing the interests of centres, employers, further education colleges, training providers and other relevant organisations.

**Unit** Units contain vocational/subject content and are designed to test a specific set of knowledge and skills.

## 11 Appendices

Appendix 1: Guidance on Occupational Competence for those involved in the delivery and assessment of the award.



## Appendix 1

The following is given as guidance for those involved in the delivery and assessment of this award. The very nature of peer support work requires that the individual worker has personal experience of mental health challenges. It is preferred therefore that those individuals involved in the delivery and assessment of this award should meet the same criteria. It is also expected that those delivering this material will be experienced in the delivery of teaching and training in this field, especially regarding having an insightful approach into some of the complexities of work in this area. An example might be awareness of when a process such as sharing experience through appropriate self disclosure might be beneficial and when the same process might be not only inappropriate but serve to disempower and alienate. Below are listed the basic experience levels and competencies expected.

- ◆ Personal experience of mental health challenges.
- ◆ Competence in delivering training and teaching in this area.

It is recognised that identification of individuals with attributes described above may not be a straightforward task, but the importance of getting this right is hard to understate.