

Benchmarking of the SQA Advanced Certificate and Diploma in the New Zealand Education System

SUMMARY REPORT



The SQA Advanced Certificate is considered comparable to the New Zealand Level 5 Diploma. The SQA Advanced Diploma is considered comparable to the New Zealand Level 6 Diploma.

1. Overview of the SQA Advanced Certificate and Diplomas

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Advanced Certificate and Advanced Diploma¹ are higher education qualifications developed in partnership with colleges, universities and industry. The SQA Advanced qualifications are offered internationally in a range of subjects including but not limited to: accounting, architectural technology, art and design, business, chemical engineering, computing (with various specialisations), construction management, electronics, hospitality, hospitality management, mechanical engineering, quantity surveying, retail and retail management and travel and tourism.

This report is designed to provide guidance on the comparable academic standing of the two awards in the context of the New Zealand education system.

Entry and duration

The SQA Advanced Certificate is a one-year programme, allocated 96 SCQF Points (960 notional learning hours). Entry requirements are set at the discretion of individual centres but may include National/Scottish Vocational Qualifications (N/SVQ 2 or 3), other qualifications at Level 5 or 6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), comparable work experience, or a centre-devised test. Programmes are assessed in English and as such entrants who are non-native speakers will typically also need an ESOL certificate at SCQF level 5 or an IELTS band 5.5 for admission.

Entry into an SQA Advanced Diploma course, which typically consists of two years of study², is the same as the entry requirements specified above. The first year comprises 1200 notional learning hours, with the total Diploma worth 240 SCQF Credit Points (2400 notional learning hours). Those already holding the SQA Advanced Certificate may enter the second year of the SQA Advanced Diploma programme.

¹ Previously known as the SQA Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND).

² Scottish Qualifications Authority, "Guide to SQA Advanced Qualifications," 3.

Structure and content

The SQA Advanced qualifications have a unit-based structure³. Each subject has mandatory units, taken by all students, and a range of optional units allowing students to specialise in a particular area. For example, those undertaking the SQA Advanced Certificate in Hospitality would be expected to develop a general understanding of the hospitality industry and then specialise in hospitality management, professional cookery or events. Similarly those taking an SQA Advanced Certificate or Diploma in Business would have the opportunity to specialise in aspects of accounting and finance, business culture, communication – research skills, customer service, e-commerce, economics, enterprise and employability, financial services, human resource management, information technology, international business, legal, management skills, marketing/sales, mathematics and statistics, office skills, personal and social development, public administration, supply chain management or sustainability.

Aims and learning outcomes

Aims are generally stated for each subject group, and can be broadly summarised as follows:

- To ensure students will be prepared for employment
- To develop study and research skills
- To develop transferable skills including Core Skills for employment: communication, numeracy, information and communication technology, problem solving and working with others.

Specific aims are also set for each award, detailing the subject-specific knowledge and skills that should be developed.

The SQA Advanced Certificate is placed at Level 7 of the SCQF, and the SQA Advanced Diploma at Level 8, where students at these levels should be able to demonstrate knowledge and skills such as the following:

	Indicators of SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Certificate)	Indicators of SCQF Level 8 (Advanced Diploma)
Knowledge and understanding	Demonstrate and/or work with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An overall appreciation of the body of knowledge that constitutes a subject/discipline/sector. • Knowledge that is embedded in the main theories, concepts and principles of the subject / discipline / sector. • An awareness of the dynamic nature of knowledge and understanding. • An understanding of the difference between explanations based on evidence and/or research and other sources, and of the importance of this difference. 	Demonstrate and/or work with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A knowledge of the scope, defining features, and main areas of the subject / discipline / sector. • Specialist knowledge in some areas. • A discerning understanding of a defined range of core theories, concepts, principles and terminology. • Awareness and understanding of some major current issues and specialisms. • Awareness and understanding of research and equivalent scholarly/academic processes.
Practice: Applied knowledge, skills and understanding	Apply knowledge, skills and understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In practical contexts. • In using some of the basic and routine professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector. • To practise these in both routine and non-routine contexts. 	Apply knowledge, skills and understanding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In using a range of professional skills, techniques, practices and/or materials associated with the subject/discipline/sector, a few of which are advanced and/or complex. • In carrying out routine lines of enquiry, development or investigation into professional level problems and issues. • To adapt routine practices within accepted standards.

³ There is a fixed and a non-fixed framework for some of the SQA Advanced qualifications. Both frameworks have the same credit requirements; however the construction of the latter is more flexible and individual centres can choose to create their own content and structure, using guidelines provided by SQA.

	Indicators of SCQF Level 7 (Advanced Certificate)	Indicators of SCQF Level 8 (Advanced Diploma)
Generic cognitive skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present and evaluate arguments, information and ideas that are routine to a subject/discipline/sector. Use a range of approaches to address defined and/or routine problems and issues within familiar contexts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake critical analysis, evaluation and/or synthesis of ideas, concepts, information and issues that are within the common understandings in a subject/discipline/sector. Use a range of approaches to formulate and critically evaluate evidence-based solutions/responses to defined and/or routine problems and issues.
Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	<p>Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced skills associated with a subject/discipline/sector, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convey complex ideas in well-structured and coherent form. Use a range of forms of communication effectively in both familiar and unfamiliar contexts. Select and use standard ICT applications to process and obtain a variety of information and data. Use a range of numerical and graphical skills in combination. Use numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets. 	<p>Use a wide range of routine skills and some advanced and specialised skills associated with a subject/discipline/sector, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Convey complex information to a range of audiences and for a range of purposes. Use a range of standard ICT applications to process and obtain data. Use and evaluate numerical and graphical data to measure progress and achieve goals/targets.
Autonomy, accountability and working with others	<p>Exercise some initiative and independence in carrying out defined activities at a professional level in practice or in a subject/discipline/sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accept supervision in less familiar areas of work. Exercise some managerial or supervisory responsibility for the work of others within a defined and supervised structure. Manage limited resources within defined areas of work. Take the lead in implementing agreed plans in familiar or defined contexts. Take account of own and others' roles and responsibilities when carrying out and evaluating tasks. Work, under guidance, with others to acquire an understanding of current professional practice. 	<p>Exercise autonomy and initiative in some activities at a professional level in practice or in a subject/discipline/sector.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Practise 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 or practices

Assessment and grading

The methods of assessment vary by subject and by centre; however these may include open-book assessments such as case studies, practical exercises and observations, written projects, portfolios, and oral presentations. SQA provides clear guidance to centres on designing valid and reliable assessments. For example, the Business Graded Unit 1, taken in both the SQA Advanced Certificate and Diploma, is assessed by a three hour closed-book examination consisting of two papers based on a previously seen case study. The Business Graded Unit 2, done towards the end of the SQA Advanced Diploma course is a project where candidates are given a real or simulated business problem to evaluate.

Students receive a final certificate and accompanying transcript detailing the units undertaken. Generally, units are graded on a pass or fail basis, with the exception of graded units which are marked out of 100 and are given a letter grade; C (50%) is the minimum pass grade.⁴

Certification and progression

On successful completion, candidates are awarded an SQA Advanced Certificate or an Advanced Diploma in their field of study. SQA Advanced Certificate holders may advance to further study, including to the

⁴ Scottish Qualifications Authority, "SQA Advanced Certificate in Business (GM8A 47) SQA Advanced Diploma in Business (GM8Y 48)," 30.
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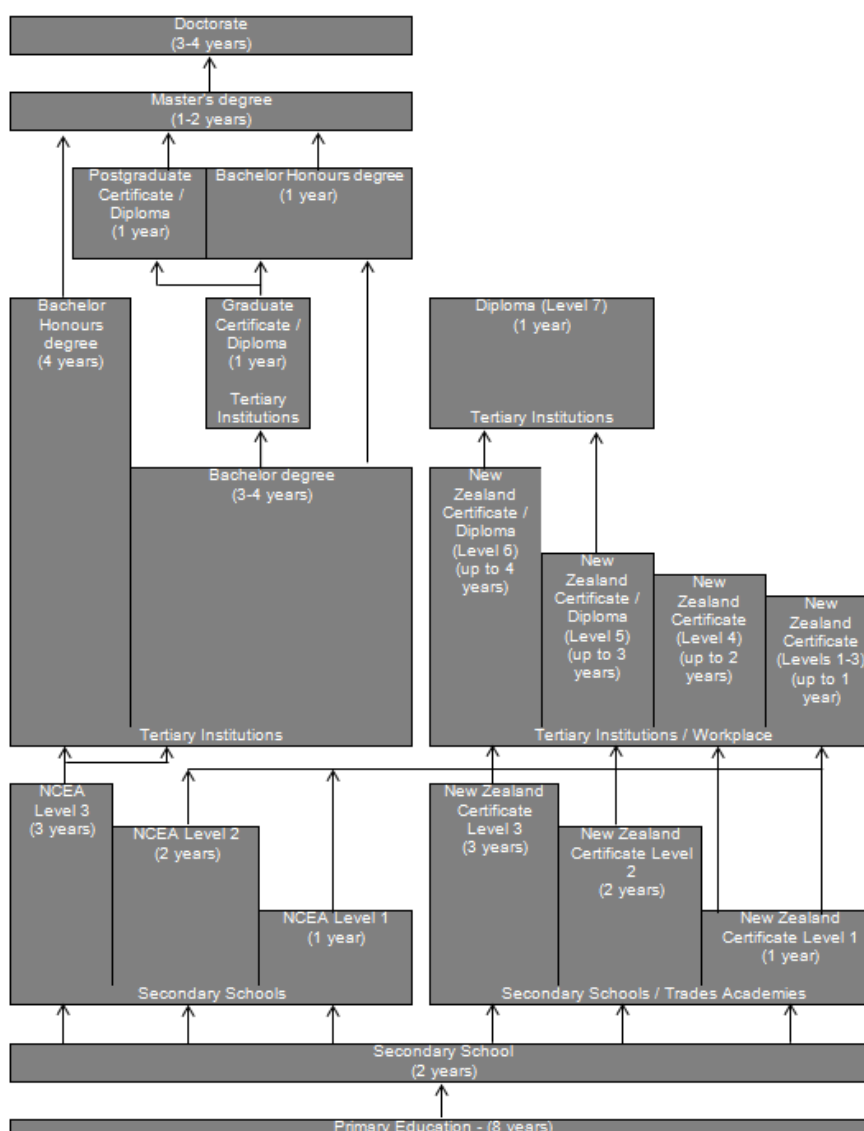
second year of an SQA Advanced Diploma. SQA has a Diploma to Degree programme⁵ to support progression for holders of the SQA Advanced Diploma to the second or third year of study at an SQA Progression Partner university.

2. Comparative analysis with the New Zealand education system

The education system for schools in New Zealand is made up of 13 years and schooling is compulsory from age six to sixteen. Primary education starts at Year 1 and goes to Year 8 (around 5-12 years of age) subsequently followed by secondary education. Education at secondary level is split into two; junior secondary followed by senior secondary where students may begin to specialise in vocational learning through the trades academy or non-trades academy pathways.

The school year begins in late January or early February and ends in December. The academic year at universities and other tertiary education organisations typically runs from late January or early February to November or December.

Education at all levels is overseen by the Ministry of Education. Secondary school assessment and quality assurance of non-university education providers is the responsibility of the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA); and performance for higher education is monitored by the Tertiary Education Commission. The overall structure of the education system can be seen below:



⁵ <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/79553.html>
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The education system structure is also reflected in the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF), which comprises ten levels, as seen in the table below.

NZQF Level	Qualification Type
10	Doctoral degree
9	Master's degree
8	Postgraduate Diploma; Postgraduate Certificate; Bachelor Honours degree
7	Graduate Diploma; Graduate Certificate; Bachelor degree; Diploma
6	Diploma; Certificate
5	Diploma; Certificate
4	Certificate
3	Certificate
2	Certificate
1	Certificate

As shown in the chart, the New Zealand Certificate / Diploma (Level 5) and the New Zealand Certificate / Diploma (Level 6) are most similar in terms of entry requirements and progression routes to the SQA Advanced qualifications. These programmes are offered in a range of subjects including creative arts, early childhood education, social skills, business, tourism, information technology, English and social services.

Analysis found that the SQA Advanced Certificate and the New Zealand Diploma at Level 5 have similar entry requirements: completion of an NZQF Level 2 or Level 3 qualification which is considered comparable to SCQF Level 5 or 6. Similar to the SCQF, the NZQF is designed to aid with natural progression from one qualification to another; therefore successful completion of a Level 5 Diploma can provide access onto the Level 6 Diploma. As with the SQA Advanced qualifications, admission may also be granted to those with alternative formal and non-formal qualifications and there is an additional requirement for international students to provide proof of English language proficiency. Most institutes require a band 5.5 minimum in IELTS, with no band less than 5.0 for the NZ Diploma level 5 courses⁶ and a band 6.0 for the higher level qualification.⁷

Both the New Zealand National Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and SQA employ a similar approach to how clearly they outline the structure and content for their qualifications, utilising a unit based approach where students must complete the mandatory units stipulated for their chosen programme and select elective units to meet the minimum overall credit requirements for the qualification.

According to the NZQF 'one credit is equivalent to ten notional learning hours'⁸. The New Zealand Certificate (Level 5) comprises 40 credits at NZQF Level 5 and above. The New Zealand Diploma (Level 5) comprises a minimum of 120 credits, of which at least 72 must be from NZQF Level 5 and above, and the remainder must be at NZQF Level 4 and above. The duration of the New Zealand Certificate (Level 5) is 400 hours and the duration of the New Zealand Diploma (Level 5) is 1200 hours. The New Zealand Certificate (Level 6) comprises 40 credits at NZQF Level 6 and above. The New Zealand Diploma (Level 6) comprises a minimum of 120 credits from Level 5 and above, including 72 credits at Level 6 and above. The duration of the New Zealand Certificate (Level 6) is 400 hours and the duration of the New Zealand Diploma (Level 6) is 1200 hours. Similar to the SQA qualifications, a range of patterns can be used for the

⁶ Canterbury College New Zealand, "New Zealand Diploma in Business Level 5 (Leadership and Management)," 5; Newton College of Business and Technology, "Newton College of Business and Technology - Prospectus"; Southern Institute of Technology, "New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 5) (Administration and Technology Strand) | SIT (Southern Institute of Technology) NZ."

⁷ Canterbury College New Zealand, "New Zealand Diploma in Business Level 6 (Leadership and Management)," 6; Southern Institute of Technology, "New Zealand Diploma in Business (Level 6) (Accounting Strand) | SIT (Southern Institute of Technology) NZ," 6; Newton College of Business and Technology, "Newton College of Business and Technology - Prospectus."

⁸ New Zealand Qualifications Authority, "The New Zealand Qualifications Framework," 8.

delivery of the qualifications as they are offered on a full-time or part-time basis as well as online by some of the providers.

A range of assessment methods are used for the New Zealand qualifications, including examinations, case studies, oral tests, assignments and practical tasks. In terms of grading; scales can differ slightly between institutions however, they are primarily based on a letter scale with A as the highest grade and C being the lowest passing grade which is usually 50% or just above. Graded units in the SQA Advanced qualifications can be assessed via practical and theoretical methods such as case studies, performances, written portfolios, projects and/or examinations.

In terms of grading; scales can differ slightly between institutions however, they are primarily based on a letter scale with A as the highest grade and C being the lowest passing grade which is usually 50% or just above.⁹ An example of a typical grading system is below:

Letter	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-/R	D	E, DNC
GPA	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	0
Percentage	90-100	85-89	80-84	75-79	70-74	65-69	60-64	55-59	50-54	40-49	0-39

GPA = Grade Point Average

R = Restricted Pass

DNC = Did not pass

SQA Advanced qualification units are given a pass or fail mark with the exception of graded Units, where students are awarded an A (70-100%), B (60-69%) or C (50-59%). To achieve the qualification, students need to pass all the units in the course and attain grade A-D in the course assessments.

All qualifications within the NZQF are expressed in terms of outcomes, with a description of what holders of qualification types at each level are expected to know and be able to do. All qualifications listed on the NZQF have outcome statements which include a graduate profile, an education and an employment pathway.¹⁰ At Level 5 of the NZQF and Level 7 of the SCQF (Advanced Certificate) students are similarly expected to have a broad overall knowledge of their chosen field of study; to be able to apply their knowledge and skills to familiar, routine problems; and in a workplace setting, to be able to exercise some responsibility for the management of others, whilst in a study context, be able to demonstrate some initiative and capacity for independent study. Comparability can also be seen in the expected outcomes at Level 6 of the NZQF and Level 8 of the SCQF where students would be expected to have developed some specialised knowledge of their subject; be able to select and apply their knowledge and skills, sometimes in complex situations; and be able to take a lead or managerial role in a range of contexts.

Beyond these overarching outcomes, course examples have been seen to also include subject-specific learning outcomes. This is similar to the design of the SQA Advanced qualifications, which are covered by the level-specific learning outcomes from the SCQF, as well as course-specific learning outcomes.

The associated outcomes of the New Zealand Level 5 and 6 qualifications reflect those of the SQA Advanced Certificate in that they provide advanced standing into undergraduate degree programmes. Specific exemptions will depend on the subject studied previously and the student's chosen degree programme. Some universities place limits on the number of credit exemptions and typically the value of these will not exceed a third of the total credit value of the Bachelor degree.

⁹ UK NARIC, "Grading".

¹⁰ New Zealand Qualifications Authority.
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3. Key findings

The SQA Advanced Certificate and Diploma are found to be well-designed and internationally-relevant programmes, noting in particular that they:

- Are developed with colleges, universities and employers – the qualification design process includes consultation with key external stakeholders designed and reference to National Occupational Standards, to help ensure the relevance of the SQA qualifications to learners and to labour market needs
- Have established progression routes in key destination countries including but not limited to the UK, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the USA, enabling students to top-up, with further study, to a Bachelor degree in a number of universities
- Provide career-focussed, practical learning: integrating core skills relevant to employment and with a structure that provides a well-rounded overview of the subject area as well as a specialisation through its combination of optional and mandatory units.

In the context of the New Zealand education system, the SQA Advanced Certificate is considered comparable to the New Zealand Level 5 Diploma, and the SQA Advanced Diploma is considered comparable to the New Zealand Level 6 Diploma. Advanced standing into undergraduate study may be awarded at institutional discretion.

4. Methodology

Based on UK NARIC's well-established methodology for credential evaluation, this independent benchmarking study comprised a review of the SQA Advanced Certificate and Diploma as well as national awards in the New Zealand education system. This took into consideration the following core criteria:

- Entry requirements
- Duration
- Structure and content
- Modes of learning and assessment
- Learning outcomes
- Associated outcomes.

Relevant information on the New Zealand education system and comparable qualifications was obtained from UK NARIC's *International Comparisons* database and official websites of New Zealand education authorities and institutions.