

Benchmarking the SQA Advanced Certificate and Diploma in the Sri Lankan Education System

SUMMARY REPORT



The SQA Advanced Certificate is considered comparable to National Diploma NVQ Level 5. Depending on the area of study, it may be possible for holders of the SQA Advanced Certificate to obtain advanced standing in the first year of a Sri Lankan Bachelor degree.

The SQA Advanced Diploma may be considered comparable to Higher National Diploma or NVQ Level 6 standard. Holders of an SQA Advanced Diploma may be able to gain exemptions from up to the first two years of study thereby entering a relevant degree programme in the third year, at institutional discretion.

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 Sri Lankan 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.

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

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.

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

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.
ICT and Communication, 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 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.

⁴ Scottish Qualifications Authority, "SQA Advanced Certificate in Business (GM8A 47) SQA Advanced Diploma in Business (GM8Y 48)," 30.

⁵ <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/79553.html>
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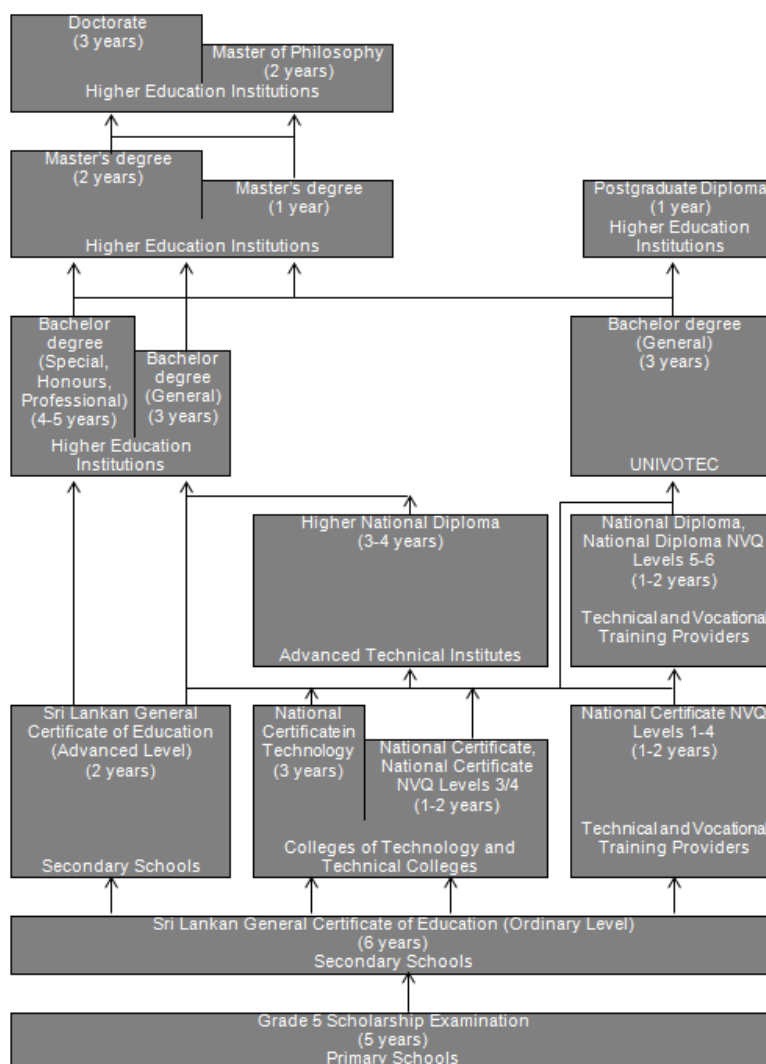
2. Comparative analysis with the Sri Lankan education system

School education includes primary (grades 1 to 5), junior secondary (grades 6 to 9) and senior secondary (grades 10 to 13). As of 2016, education is compulsory up until age 16 (grade 11). Education is taught in Sinhala, English or Tamil. The Ministry of Education and the provincial education authorities administer school education. Education policy is formulated by the National Education Commission. All national school examinations, including the Grade 5 Scholarship Examination, GCE O Levels and GCE A Levels, are overseen by the Department of Examinations. Post-GCE O Level technical and vocational education is overseen by the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training (MSDVT). Post-secondary academic education is governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE).

Sri Lanka has two national qualifications frameworks, the Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework (SLQF) – developed by the Ministry of Higher Education for academic qualifications – and the National Vocational Qualifications Framework of Sri Lanka (NVQSL), developed by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) for vocational qualifications. The table shows how the SLQF and NVQSL frameworks compare.

Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework (SLQF)		National Vocational Qualifications Framework of Sri Lanka (NVQSL)	
Level	Qualification	Level	Qualification
12	Doctorate		
11	Master of Philosophy		
10	Master (research component)		
9	Master (course work)		
8	Postgraduate Diploma		
7	Postgraduate Certificate		
6	Bachelor (Honours)		
5	Bachelor	7	Bachelor of Technology / Bachelor of Education (Technology)
4	Higher Diploma	6	National Diploma / Advanced Diploma / Higher Diploma
3	Diploma	5	National Diploma / Diploma
2	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A Level) or equivalent	4	National Certificate
1	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE O Level) or equivalent	2,3	National Certificate

The overall structure of the Sri Lankan system can be seen below:



As shown in the diagram, the GCE A Levels and NVQ Level 5 and 6 qualifications are most similar in terms of entry requirements and progression routes to the SQA Advanced qualifications; however in terms of the style and structure of study the National Diploma / NVQ Level 5 and Higher National Diploma / NVQ Level 6 are more relevant reference points for the SQA Advanced qualifications.

NVQ Level 5 qualifications are offered mostly by technical colleges and include National Certificates and National Diplomas at NVQ Level 5, and the National Certificate in Technology (NCT), which is a three-year post-O Level programme in engineering or quantity surveying. The Institute of Engineering Technology (IET) offers the NVQ Level 6 National Diploma in Engineering Sciences (NDES) qualification and the Institute of Technology, University of Moratuwa (ITUM) offers the Level 6 National Diploma in Technology (NDT) programme. The Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education (SLIATE) delivers the Level 6 Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) in subjects such as agriculture, business administration, engineering, information technology, quantity surveying and tourism.

The typical entry requirement for NVQ Level 5 qualifications is GCE O Levels or NVQ Level 3 and 4 qualifications. The GCE O Level is considered comparable to SCQF Level 4 or 5, depending on the GCE O Level grade achieved whilst NVQ Level 3 and 4 qualifications are comparable to SCQF Levels 5 and 6 respectively, similar to the SQA Advanced qualifications which typically require qualifications at SCQF Levels 5/6

The duration of the Sri Lankan qualifications (two to three years) is generally longer than the SQA qualifications (one to two years); but as mentioned above these can be accessed by those with qualifications comparable to SCQF Level 4-6. The SQA Advanced qualifications comprise unit credits, similar to the modular structure of the NVQ Level 5 and 6 qualifications.

The modes of learning may vary by subject. Vocational qualifications in Sri Lanka can include industrial training and practical work. The methods of assessment for vocational qualifications can similarly vary by institution and course but overall are similar to those used by the SQA where, for example, the graded units can be assessed via practical and theoretical methods such as case studies, performances, written portfolios, projects and/or exams. Units in the SQA Advanced Certificates and Diplomas 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.

To determine how the Sri Lankan and SQA qualifications compare in terms of learning outcomes, reference was made to both the SCQF and the SLQF and NVQSL frameworks. This found that the knowledge and skills described in the SCQF Level 7 descriptors best reflected expectations at SLQF Level 3 and NVQSL Level 5 in terms of demonstrating knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge, communicating reliably, addressing problems and showing initiative in independent learning. The knowledge and skills associated with SCQF level 8 were found to be comparable to SLQF Level 4 and NVQSL Level 6 where students are expected to develop higher level skills that include demonstrating specialised knowledge and understanding and the ability to adapt and apply knowledge in different contexts, to formulate solutions or responses to problems and to communicate efficiently.

The associated outcomes of the Sri Lankan and SQA Advanced qualifications are also broadly comparable. The NVQ Level 5 and 6 qualifications prepare students for employment and may allow advanced placement on to Bachelor degrees. The University of Vocational Technology offers Bachelor of Technology degrees for entrants with NVQ Level 5 or 6 qualifications, some of which may provide some advanced standing. Some other public universities also accept the Higher National Diploma, although in practice there are few defined articulation routes from the NVQ to academic study programmes. This is in contrast to the SQA which has established Diploma-to-Degree pathways for its SQA Advanced Diploma graduates to degrees in Scotland and a number of other countries.

3. Key findings of UK NARIC's Independent Review

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.

Comparison of the SQA Advanced qualifications to relevant Sri Lankan qualifications highlighted many similarities in terms of entry requirements, content and structure, mode of learning, assessment, learning outcomes and associated outcomes. In the context of the Sri Lankan education system, the SQA Advanced Certificate may be considered comparable to National Diploma / NVQ Level 5, whilst the SQA Advanced Diploma may be considered comparable to Higher National Diploma or NVQ Level 6 standard. Depending on the area of study, it may be possible for holders of the SQA Advanced Certificate to obtain advanced standing in the first year of a Sri Lankan Bachelor degree. Holders of an SQA Advanced Diploma may be able to gain exemptions from up to the first two years of study, entering a relevant degree programme in the third year, 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 and vocational qualifications in the Sri Lankan 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 Sri Lankan education system and comparable qualifications was obtained from UK NARIC's *International Comparisons* database and official websites of Sri Lankan education authorities and institutions. The level descriptors of the qualification frameworks and similarly focussed qualifications in Sri Lanka were used as reference points in this study.