

THE SCOTTISH CREDIT AND QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Research and Library Service

Background

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) initiated a review of postgraduate education in 1995¹ in response to increasing concern and confusion about the nature of postgraduate provision, and the quality and nomenclature of UK postgraduate qualifications. After the review, a Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals was established and reported (Harris Report) in 1996². Among its recommendations was the establishment of a national qualifications framework.

The Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report)³ considered both undergraduate and postgraduate provision in 1997. It recommended that:

“The Government, the representative bodies, the Quality Assurance Agency, other awarding bodies and organisations which oversee them, should endorse immediately the framework for higher education qualifications that we have proposed”. (Recommendation 22)⁴

The Dearing Report also pointed out that:

“The provision in Northern Ireland and Wales corresponds, in the main, to that in England, but bearing in mind the distinctive nature of the education structure and qualifications systems, the legal framework, and the administrative funding arrangements in Scotland, Ministers agreed that we should establish a Committee (known as the Scottish Committee) to consider issues particular to Scotland and to advise us accordingly. The report of the Scottish Committee is published as part of this report in a separate volume. No such special arrangements were thought necessary for Wales and Northern Ireland...” (Chapter 23)⁵

¹ Higher Education Funding Council for England “the Review”, under the chairmanship of Professor Martin Harris, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manchester in 1995.

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/1996/m14_96.htm

² Higher Education Funding Council for England, Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, Standing Conference of Principals “Review of Postgraduate Education” May 1996.

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/1996/m14_96.htm

³ The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education report was submitted to the Secretaries of State for Education and Employment, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland by Chairman Sir Ron Dearing on 23rd July 1997. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>

⁴ The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education Report, List of Recommendations (Recommendation 22) in Chapter 10. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>

⁵ National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education Report, Chapter 23 Higher Education in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>

The Scottish Framework of qualifications was initially recommended in the report of the Scottish Committee of Inquiry (The Garrick Report)⁶ and recommended:

“to providers of higher education programmes in Scotland, the Quality Assurance Agency, the Scottish Qualifications Authority, and the Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access that they should together consider and adopt an integrated qualifications framework based around level of study and the SCOTCAT credit points” (Recommendation 1)

This briefing focuses on the background of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, and the structure and key features within the Framework

Management and development of the SCQF

The SCQF was established in 1997 by a partnership of national bodies — the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) through its Scottish office, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), Universities Scotland, the Committee of Scottish Higher Education Principals, The Scottish Advisory Committee on Credit and Access, and the Scottish Office Education and Industry Department supported by the Scottish Executive (known as the Development Partners).

The Development Partners established a Joint Advisory Committee (JAC). The Chair of the JAC was Dr Andrew Cubie. All Scottish organizations were involved on the JAC to identify ways in which the SCQF can be used to assist in widening access, encouraging participation and ensuring the development of people’s skills and knowledge to their full potential.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework brought all Scottish mainstream qualifications together into a single unified framework (shown in Appendix 1). The qualifications of higher education institutions, SQA National Qualifications and Higher National Qualifications and Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) were fully in line in 2003.

Structure and key features of the SCQF (Levels and credit points)

Two measures were used to place qualifications and learning programmes in the SCQF⁷. These are the levels of the outcomes of learning and the volume of these outcomes, described in terms of SCQF credit points.

The SCQF has 12 levels. Each level is described in terms of its characteristic general outcomes under five broad areas:

- Knowledge and understanding
- Practice
- Generic cognitive skills
- Communication, numeracy and IT skills
- Autonomy, accountability and working with others

SCQF credit points are used to quantify the outcomes of learning and give them a value or currency. The allocation of credits was based on the amount of time that an

⁶The Chairman of the Scottish Committee, Sir Ron Garrick produced “Report of the Scottish Committee” which attempted to avoid repetition and to concentrate on issues where action was required in Scotland. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe/>

⁷ http://www.scqf.org.uk/the_framework.asp

'average' learner at a specified level might expect to take to achieve the outcomes. Credits can be used to assist learners to transfer between programmes. It is the responsibility of awarding bodies within the SCQF to determine how much credit can be transferred into different programmes.

Appendix 1: The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

SCQF level	SQA National Units, Courses and Group Awards	Higher Education	Scottish Vocational Qualifications
12		Doctorates	
11		Masters	SVQ 5
10		Honours Degree Graduate Diploma/Certificate*	
9		Ordinary Degree Graduate Diploma/Certificate*	
8		Higher National Diploma Diploma in Higher Education	SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher	Higher National Certificate Certificate in Higher Education	
6	Higher		SVQ 3
5	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade		SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade		SVQ 1
3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade		
2	Access 2		
1	Access 1		
* These qualifications are differentiated by volume of outcomes and may be offered at either level			

June 2008