

SCQF Case Study – SkillsActive and Mountain Leader Training Scotland The Benefits of Credit Rating



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Background

SkillsActive is licensed by government as the Sector Skills Council for Active Leisure, Learning and Wellbeing. Led by employers, SkillsActive works across the sport and recreation, health and fitness, outdoors, playwork, and caravan industries to articulate the demand for relevant and appropriate training and qualifications that meet the needs of employers in the sector and to lobby funding agencies and policy makers for a simplification of the skills system so that employers have better access to training.

What programme was credit rated?

The Winter Mountain Leader Award was developed by Mountain Leader Training Scotland (MLTS), the organisation that provides the training and assessment for leaders taking groups into the hills. To achieve the qualification, candidates have to integrate personal experience, training and assessment, and must also go through six formal stages:

- gaining personal winter hill walking experience;
- registering for the scheme and completing a log book;
- undergoing at least six days of specific training;
- gaining further personal experience during a period of consolidation;

- undergoing a minimum of five days' assessment; and
- maintaining an on-going log book of experience gained.

Given that candidates need to go through such a demanding, comprehensive programme, it is no surprise to learn that the Winter Mountain Leader Award (Winter ML) has been placed at Level 9 on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the same level as a University degree. Nearly 200 candidates a year register for the Winter ML on average. The qualification is widely recognised across the UK as the gold standard and essential for anyone taking groups into the hills in winter.

What were the benefits?

In a sector where safety is paramount, recognition and robustness of qualifications is vital. By working closely with SkillsActive to bring further recognition for their qualification, MLTS has gained the added step of SCQF status for this qualification, giving it credibility and national recognition in terms of the level of competence and knowledge required. Traditionally, outdoor professionals have not always been valued for the learning and training they undertake, so it is extremely significant that the Award has been placed at Level 9 in the SCQF.

This SCQF recognition has had a fundamental effect on the industry in giving it more recognition for the knowledge, skills and experience that make up this award. Because of its practical nature it was previously difficult to compare this award to other qualifications, but now this has been made easier due to its status in the SCQF. It is common for people without an academic background to work in the outdoors and this demonstrates their high level of competence in this very specialist field.

Practically, the credit rating and levelling of this Award has assisted holders in job evaluations and also in achieving chartered teacher status. And, overall, it has helped improve the perception of the professionalisation of the outdoor sector and helped individual holders to understand where their qualification sits within a wider context.

Dorothy Breckenridge from C-N-DO, an outdoor activities company based in Stirling, says, "Achieving a Winter ML takes as much skill, knowledge and dedication as gaining a university degree. We have always known this, but it is great to see Winter ML gaining credence in the wider educational world. To be able to demonstrate the attainment of knowledge and skill should be recognised whichever path is chosen. We are now one step closer."

Pam Scott, SkillsActive's National Manager Scotland Sport and Recreation, adds, "We are delighted to have played our role in bringing Mountain Leader Training Scotland and the SCQF together. Qualifications are important in every walk of life and the national recognition that SCQF has now given shows even more that it is a qualification worth having and whoever holds it has a high level of skills and knowledge. We have known this award as the "industry standard" for many years but this gives it more recognition. Also those that hold it have a better understanding of where it sits in terms of levels of learning achieved."

Chief Executive of the SCQF Partnership, Aileen Ponton, comments, "Giving recognition to qualifications like this is what the SCQF is all about. It is important that employers and learners alike – and in this case, outdoor enthusiasts - can start to recognise the true worth of qualifications in individual sectors. The SCQF level gained by this qualification is a real indicator of just how vital are the skills and knowledge needed in what can be a challenging environment."

For more information on the benefits of credit rating your learning programmes, contact the SCQF Partnership on 0845 270 7371 or at info@scqf.org.uk.