

HEI Credit Rating Project 2016/17 SCQF Case Study – Glasgow University Top-Up



Background to the university

Founded in 1451, the University of Glasgow is the fourth oldest university in the English-speaking world. It is one of the top 100 of the world's universities and has been named Scottish University of the Year by The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2018. The University has a long history of working to equalise and enable entry for under-represented or disadvantaged groups in society and currently facilitates a suite of Widening Participation (WP) programmes, to aid school leavers and adult returners access higher education, within UoG and elsewhere, e.g. the University of Glasgow Summer School, which was the first set up in Scotland in 1985. In 2016-17, as part of the SCQF HEI Credit Rating Project, the University decided to credit rate the Top-Up Programme, one of the flagship WP programmes for school pupils.

Background to the project

The 2016/17 HEI Credit Rating (CCR) project set out to achieve three outcomes for the SCQF Partnership in its role of supporting Credit Rating Bodies within the university sector:

- to help overcome any perceived barriers to credit rating non-mainstream provision within universities;

- to expand the types of credit rated programmes within universities in Scotland; and most importantly
- to build capacity of staff trained to credit rate non-mainstream provision within the HE sector.

2016/17 was the second year of a project aimed at supporting universities to credit rate other provision that they might offer such as commercial projects, transition programmes, summer schools and weekend and evening classes.

The Learning Programme

Top-Up, created and delivered by the University of Glasgow (UoG) since 1999, is a senior element of FOCUS West, the west of Scotland rollout of the SFC Schools for Higher Education Programme. Top-Up also works with schools identified as Widening Participation schools by their respective Local Authorities. The programme works annually with around 2,000 S5 and S6 pupils across 60 secondary schools, who are applying to HE or considering this option. Top-Up has three overall main aims:

- 1) Promote aspiration for study in HE in under-represented groups.
- 2) Prepare applicants for the transition to HE study, within UoG or elsewhere and enhance their chances of continuation beyond Year 1, a successful student experience and degree completion.
- 3) Provide an access route for applicants to gain entry to UoG or elsewhere via Admissions progression agreements.

Top-Up is designed to make the transition from secondary school into higher education as smooth as possible. Research shows that participation in the programme leads to increased student success and retention.

Top-Up was credit rated at SCQF level 7 with 10 SCQF credit points.

Why did you decide to apply to participate in the SCQF HEI Credit Rating Project?

Dr Neil Croll, Head of Widening Participation at UoG explains: *“We hoped to facilitate better, easier and more widespread progression for programme participants to HEIs across Scotland and strengthen the place of FOCUS West within the widening access field, bringing knock-on benefits to the other elements of the programme, which are facilitated by other west of Scotland HEIs. We also aimed to train and familiarise UoG WP staff members with the SCQF credit rating process, to enable not only the formal recognition of Top-Up, but also the other UoG WP programmes.”*

How has having your learning programme SCQF credit rated benefited your learners and your organisation?

Credit rating of the Top-Up programme set a precedent within the University of Glasgow: a UoG credit-rated programme with credit points counting towards admission rather than as part of a degree course or other qualification. This has paved the way for further programmes of this nature being credit-rated. The credit rating of the programme will hopefully have a positive impact on take-up by learners in the coming years, encouraging even higher numbers of schools and pupils to participate and preparing more pupils for applying to, progressing to and being successful within university or college.

Credit-rating Top-Up and the experience and new skills gained by the staff involved and the broader University of Glasgow Widening Participation team has been a valuable addition to the provision of the University and the skillset of WP staff.

What future plans do you have for further programmes to be credit rated onto the SCQF?

We intend to credit rate the other main widening participation programmes within the University of Glasgow portfolio: the Summer School in 2017-18 and the Reach Programme, Access to a Career Programme and Taster Weeks by 2018-19. The system put in place for credit-rating Top-Up will be used to credit rate these programmes and should allow this to be conducted smoothly and efficiently.

For more information on the benefits of having your learning programmes credit rated, contact the SCQF Partnership at info@scqf.org.uk.