



# **SCQF Partnership**

## **Credit Transfer in the context of the Recognition of Prior Learning**

**October 2012**

## **Introduction**

This guidance is about using credit transfer in the context of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The guidance is aimed at those working in credit rating bodies who assist learners to use credit to gain access to courses or gain credit against a new qualification. The guidance aims to provide further advice about using credit transfer in the context of the recognition of prior learning to that provided in the SCQF Handbook: User Guide (2009).

The guidance looks at the benefits to learners, the process of allocating credit points to units/modules and learning programmes, gives a working definition of credit transfer and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), looks at the SCQF guidelines on these topics and gives some examples and case studies for exemplification.

## **Benefiting all Learners**

Since the establishment of the SCQF in 2001, the number of Credit Rating Bodies (CRBs) has grown to include all publicly-funded tertiary colleges and a number of other approved organisations, as well as the original CRBs which were Scottish Qualifications Authority and higher education institutions (HEIs)<sup>1</sup>. As a result of this, and due to improved awareness of the Framework, the number of credit rated qualifications and learning programmes (both formal and non-formal) on the Framework has increased significantly<sup>2</sup>.

For learners to gain maximum benefit from the SCQF, it is important that educational institutions develop and implement credit transfer and RPL policies and procedures. This will help learners by allowing for the transfer of their credit points along with the ability to have their prior learning recognised so that they:

- minimise any duplication of learning, and
- develop their full personal, social and educational potential.

## **SCQF Credit Points**

Credit Points are fundamental to the SCQF because they are the building blocks for credit transfer. They provide a way of quantifying the amount of learning achieved and they symbolise the amount of time taken to complete a unit/module or learning programme - 1 SCQF credit point represents 10 notional hours of learning for a typical learner.

SCQF Credit Points are calculated and allocated to units/modules and learning programmes during a process called 'credit rating' which is carried out only by SCQF Credit Rating Bodies. The number of SCQF Credit Points allocated is worked out on the basis of the number of notional learning hours that an 'average' learner at a specified SCQF level might expect to take to achieve all the learning outcomes. The time estimated includes time allowed for attending classes, carrying out assessments, undertaking periods of private study and research, and generally engaging in any activity needed to achieve the learning outcomes.

Qualifications and learning programmes are credit rated onto the SCQF provided they meet the following criteria:

- the qualification/learning programmes must be written in learning outcomes
- they must be worth at least 1 SCQF credit point (10 notional hours of learning)
- they must include assessment
- and they must be quality assured, both internally and externally

---

<sup>1</sup> Full list on the SCQF website

<sup>2</sup> See SCQF Database on the SCQF website at [www.scqf.org.uk](http://www.scqf.org.uk)

By using the notion of 'credit' as a measure, the SCQF gives recognition to any size of qualification or learning programme of 10 notional hours of learning or more. Most qualifications/learning programmes are made up of units/modules, each of which will be allocated its own level and its own credit point(s)

There is no limit to the number of SCQF Credit Points that can be allocated to a unit/module or learning programme. The actual number of credit points will depend on the time it takes for a typical learner to successfully achieve all outcomes and credit is awarded only when all outcomes have been completed successfully. SCQF credit points are only awarded as whole numbers (i.e. 1, 2, 3, etc.) not as fractional points (e.g. 0.5) and the number of credit points awarded to a learner is independent of (i.e. not influenced by) the grade of award achieved.

There is no limit to the number of SCQF Credit Points that a learner can accumulate. This will depend on the number of units he/she successfully achieves within a learning programme and the number of qualifications/learning programmes he/she successfully completes.

### **General Credit and Specific Credit**

The term '*general credit*' is used in the context of the SCQF to refer to the total number of credit points allocated to a unit/module or learning programme during the credit rating process.

The term '*specific credit*' is used in the context of the SCQF to refer to the number of credit points that a learner is allowed to use to gain credit or recognition during processes of credit transfer. This may be the total number of credit points or it may be only a partial number of credit points.

For example, if a learner gains a qualification worth 60 (general) SCQF credit points and wants to put these towards a different qualification he/she may be allowed to use a certain amount of *specific credit* (e.g. 5, 10, 20, 40 or 60 credit points) towards the new learning.

The amount of specific credit that a learner is allowed to use is decided on by staff in colleges, universities and other educational institutions. The calculation of the amount of specific credit that can be used is normally based on the notion of 'best curriculum fit' between the prior learning and the new learning content.

### **Credit Transfer and the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)**

Credit Transfer embraces the idea that the learning symbolised by credit points is transferable in certain contexts, that learners can use the credit points gained from one qualification/learning programme towards achieving all or part of another qualification or learning programme.

Credit Transfer and RPL can be defined in terms of:

*.... a process whereby qualifications, part qualifications and learning experiences are given appropriate recognition to enable students to progress in their studies without unnecessarily having to repeat material or levels of study. Where appropriate credit can be transferred from one qualification or learning programme to another in order that the learners can gain further educational experience and qualifications without undue loss of time, thereby contributing to the maximisation of accumulated educational capital<sup>3</sup>.*

For example, in principle, a learner with 60 SCQF credit points achieved from a qualification in 'using computers' who wants to achieve a new qualification in 'programming computers' worth 120 SCQF credit points, might be allowed by an institution to use 40 credit points (specific

---

<sup>3</sup> Amended from Toyne, P (1979) *Educational Credit Transfer: a feasibility study*.

credit) from their existing qualification towards achieving the new qualification. In practice, this means that the learner only has to achieve the remaining 80 credit points of the new qualification, reducing the time taken to achieve the new qualification.

In this context, the recognition of prior learning (based on credit transfer) avoids the learner having to repeat learning already achieved and shortens the length of time taken to complete a new qualification.

### **Credit Transfer and the aims of the SCQF**

The SCQF was established to promote lifelong learning by providing a framework within which individuals could be helped to negotiate and develop their educational capabilities. It helps people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to continue to develop their personal, social and economic potential<sup>4</sup>.

Using Credit Transfer is one of the ways in which the SCQF can do this and is one of the basic principles underpinning the Framework. The principle of transferability of SCQF Credit Points can help learners gain access to different forms of education, give them advanced standing/entry into a course (e.g. allowing them directly into the second or third year of a degree programme instead of the first year) and supports both flexibility and progression.

### **SCQF Credit Transfer and RPL Guidelines**

SCQF Guidelines 28 to 47 relate to Credit Transfer and RPL. They are listed in the SCQF Handbook (2009) and reproduced here for ease of reference.

SCQF Guidelines	
28	Procedures for the transfer of credit should be embedded in general good practice in assuring quality and standards.
29	Policies, procedures and information available to potential applicants, existing learners and staff should be clear, explicit and accessible.
30	Receiving organisations should establish when it is appropriate for them to deal with applications for the transfer of credit.
31	Staff should be competent to undertake their duties.
32	Appropriate support should be offered to applicants for credit transfer and to those who have made successful claims.
33	Policies and procedures should be monitored and reviewed.
34	Qualification and learning programme development and design should promote and facilitate credit recognition and transfer.
35	Articulation arrangements should be managed flexibly and actively.
36	Credit transferred is of equal standing to the credit awarded to the learning programme entered.

<sup>4</sup> SCQF Handbook User Guide, 2009

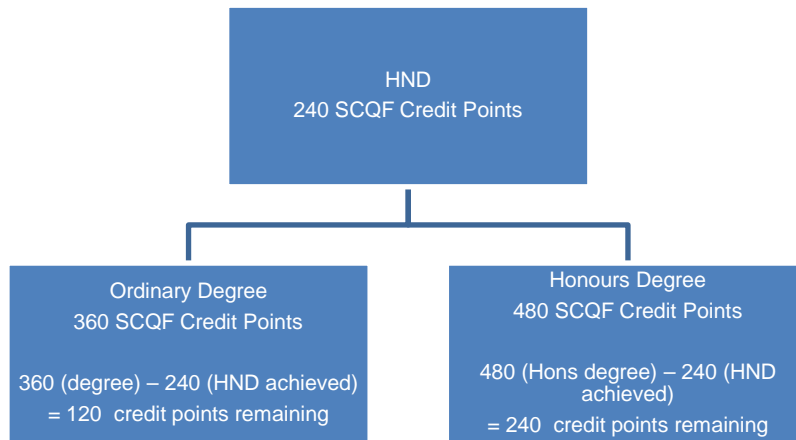
37	Applications for the transfer of credit from qualifications and learning programmes awarded by non-SCQF credit rating organisations should be considered in the contexts of the specific procedures set out in the <i>SCQF Handbook</i> .
38	RPL is about recognising learning that has its source in experience and/or previous formal learning contexts. The following principles apply to recognising learning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition is given for learning, not experience alone;</li> <li>• The learning that is recognised should be transferable;</li> <li>• SCQF Credit Points awarded as a result of RPL are of the same value as credit gained through other formal learning</li> </ul>
39	A wide range of learners should be able to use RPL to assist them in re-entering learning or to gain recognition as a contribution towards a formal learning programme.
40	Credit limits for RPL within formal qualifications and learning programmes must be made explicit. Programme limits, if any, on the credit that can be awarded for RPL within a qualification or learning programme should be clearly stated, as should any implications for progression, grading or classification.
41	Clear mechanisms for making RPL claims must be in place. Evidence of learning can be gathered through a variety of different mechanisms.
42	Effective links between learning providers, guidance services and Human Resource personnel, where appropriate, should be established to support individuals for RPL.
43	RPL should be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learner focused;</li> <li>• Accessible;</li> <li>• Flexible;</li> <li>• Quality-assured.</li> </ul>
44	Formative recognition of prior learning can be used for personal and career development.
45	RPL for the award of SCQF Credit Points (also called summative recognition) involves a formal assessment or acceptance of evidence of learning.
46	The assessment procedures for RPL, including arrangements for external assessment, should be consistent with the normal assessment and general quality assurance of the organisation.
47	The process of monitoring and reviewing the operation of RPL procedures should be clearly defined and integrated within the existing quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms of the learning provider.

The decision to recognise prior learning and allow the transfer of credit is made by staff in educational institutions. The guidelines above provide a basis on which these decisions might be made. When making these decisions, staff often have to base decisions on the best curriculum fit between two qualifications or learning programmes.

### **Examples of Credit Transfer and RPL**

**Example A:**

The following is an example of articulation between an HND and a degree programme.



On the basis of this example, a student who has achieved an HND (240 SCQF credit points) might be allowed to enter university directly into either 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> year to complete a degree or Honours degree.

*Other examples of credit transfer and RPL*

There may be cases where a learner wishes to transfer credit points but a decision is taken by staff at an educational institution that not all the credit from a previous qualification can be transferred. This is normally in situations where the prior learning achieved does not match closely enough the learning outcomes of the new qualification or learning programme (i.e. there is limited curriculum fit between qualifications). In these situations, it is often decided that only partial credit can be given.

The awarding of credit is carried out by staff who are able to make professional judgements to compare and consider the relationship between the content and level of the prior learning achieved and the content and level of the learning outcomes in the new qualification. The awarding of credit is also likely to depend on the prerequisites (e.g. entry requirements) of the new qualification.

**Example B**

In the following case study, a learner has achieved part of a programme and returns to FE college after a few years to update his qualifications:

*Case study*

Ravi attended college a few years ago studying for an HNC but dropped out after achieving 64 SCQF credit points. He then worked for 2 years but the work was unrelated to what he had studied. He decided to return to college and try to complete his HNC, but by then the HNC had been revised and updated. College staff advised Ravi that he needed a total of 96 SCQF credit points in order to be awarded the new HNC.

In order to help Ravi avoid repeating learning he had already achieved, college staff reviewed and mapped the content of the HN units in his existing programme with those in the new qualification and agreed that he could only be credited with a total of 48 SCQF credit points because his previous (older) programme did not exactly match the content of the new HNC. Staff advised him that he now needed to achieve the remaining 48 SCQF credit points to gain the new HNC, which he did.

### **Example C**

The Certificate in Higher Education (Cert HE) sits at SCQF Level 7 and is offered both by higher education institutions and by some FE colleges. The following case study illustrates credit transfer between the Cert HE and a Bachelors degree programme:

#### *Case study*

Megan enrolled at an FE college and undertook the Certificate in Higher Education there. She wanted to progress to do a Bachelors degree at university. On completion of the Cert HE at college, Megan was awarded 120 SCQF credit points. She approached a university hoping to be able to use these credit points towards a degree. University staff advised Megan that to complete an Ordinary Bachelors degree she would have to complete 360 SCQF credit points or if she chose to do an Honours degree she would need to achieve 480 SCQF credit points. When university staff reviewed the Cert HE qualification that Megan had achieved they advised her that she would be credited with 80 SCQF credit points towards her degree (because the Cert HE did not exactly match the content of the university's first year of study in that discipline). This allowed Megan to start university by going directly into second year, carrying a deficit of one unit/module worth 40 SCQF credit points, which she will have to make up during her time at university.

### **Example D**

The following case study illustrates the use of RPL, where credit towards a qualification is given for experiential learning:

#### *Case study*

Mark worked as a Manager in a food processing plant and although he had over 10 years on-the-job experience he had no management qualification. He decided he would like to gain a formal qualification but could not afford to give up work to achieve it and was concerned at the length of time it might take to complete. His employer was not in a position to allow Mark day release from the factory floor but did offer to support Mark if he could find alternative routes to gaining a qualification. Mark approached a local university and staff there advised him that he might be a suitable candidate for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) where his prior knowledge and skills could be assessed towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Management (120 SCQF credit points) at SCQF Level 11. Over a period of 2 years, based on the content of the qualification, Mark collected and collated evidence of achievement based on his work activities. Evidence took the form of reports and direct observation from line managers and colleagues, emails, witness testimony, and with support from his employer Mark was able to produce logs and activity sheets demonstrating effective management techniques which contributed to his overall portfolio of evidence. University staff monitored and advised during this period and carried out an assessment which involved matching the evidence to the content of the Postgraduate Certificate and Mark was awarded the qualification.

### **Example E**

#### **BA Degree in Tertiary Education with TQFE qualification.**

A college had an agreement that any students who completed a Dip HE in Training and Development (accredited by a local University) could benefit from an articulation agreement with another university, entering into the 3rd year of a BA Degree programme in Tertiary Education with TQFE qualification.

### *Case Study*

Evie was an Administrator at the college who had previous experience of delivering training overseas and had completed her TESOL Diploma to teach English to students in the Czech Republic.

Evie was keen to develop her skills and enhance her career opportunities so approached the Diploma staff at the college for advice and guidance. The team reviewed both her qualifications and her teaching experience and Evie was then enrolled on the College's "Foundation Course" for all new trainers. Through the RPL process and on completion of the course, Evie was awarded 120 SCQF Credit Points at SCQF Level 7.

Evie was then afforded the opportunity to undertake the Dip HE in Training and Development. During her studies she was given the opportunity to build on her previous teaching experience and did a 12 month secondment, as a trainer,. Evie achieved a Distinction on the programme and was awarded 120 SCQF Credit Points at SCQF level 8.

Through the articulation agreement with the university, Evie has since enrolled into 3rd year of the University's BA in Tertiary Education and has now graduated with her BA and a TQFE qualification.