Assessing formal prior learning against SQA HN Units: a guide to assist centres

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Introduction

SQA’s policy is to recognise prior learning as a method of assessing whether a learner’s experience and achievements (these may or may not have been developed through a course of learning) broadly meet the evidence requirements (ie the standard) of SQA HN Units.

This guide explains the process for mapping formal prior learning against SQA Units. (‘Formal learning’ is learning that is certificated by a recognised awarding or professional body.) The full SQA policy document explaining formal, non-formal and informal learning, ‘Recognition of Prior Learning’, can be found in Annex 1.

Evidence to support prior learning assessment decisions must be valid, reliable and of equal rigour to the standard assessment of the Units the candidate wishes to achieve. This means that the evidence, level and credit value of the prior-attained Units should broadly match the evidence requirements of the target Units.

You can assess complete or partial Units through recognising formal prior learning. The assessment process involves mapping the certificated learning that has been awarded by recognised or professional bodies, against the evidence requirements of one or more SQA HN Units. You have to take a number of factors into account:

♦ The recognition of prior learning is not an exemption from a Unit within a Group Award. Nor is it Credit Transfer. Candidates need to be enrolled on the Units for which they are being assessed through prior learning.
♦ The evidence of prior learning should broadly match the evidence requirements specified in the target Unit and reflect its SCQF level (see Annex 2) and credit value.
♦ The content, level of demand and assessment approach of the prior-attained qualification should broadly match the evidence requirements of the SQA Unit.
♦ Where evidence of prior learning only partially meets the evidence requirements of a Unit, other methods of assessment should be used to complete the outstanding requirements.
♦ The assessment involved in the prior learning should (with very few exceptions — see Annex 1) have been conducted in English.
♦ Assessing prior learning will require the assessors to consider more than a qualification certificate. It will require module descriptors (or equivalent documents) that provide information on the level, demand, content and assessment of the prior-attained qualification.
♦ To support prior learning decisions, you will need evidence to ensure the currency of the learner’s knowledge, skills and achievement in the context of the target Units.
♦ There are some restrictions on which Units can be assessed through the recognition of prior learning — see Annex 1.
♦ The assessment of prior learning is subject to the same internal verification as any other methods of assessment.
Guidance
The process of assessing formal prior learning involves mapping the certified qualifications against SQA HN Units. You should gather the required evidence to undertake the mapping task, and retain this evidence for scrutiny at both internal and external verification events. The evidence may include:

- qualification certificates
- module descriptors (or equivalent documents)
- details of the recognised awarding or professional body
- syllabuses/course content
- transcripts
- details of assessments
- qualification levels and their equivalence in terms of SCQF
- records of discussions with the learner to determine currency of the prior learning, content, etc

Once evidence has been gathered, you can assess the prior learning by completing the mapping document (see Annex 3). A completed example of the mapping document is provided below for guidance.

Once you have completed it, retain the table and other evidence collected for internal and external verification events.

Undertaking an assessment of prior learning may (or may not) result in a learner being awarded complete or partial SQA HN Units. SQA will also adopt the same approach to quality assurance as for any other method of assessment. Appeals from learners will follow the same process applicable to standard assessment of the Units or Group Award and/or centre type concerned.
### Recognising formal prior learning: A mapping document for HN Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HN Unit Title and Level:</th>
<th>Marketing: An Introduction, F7BX 34, SCQF Level: 7</th>
<th>SCQF points: 8</th>
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<tr>
<td>Certificated Unit Title and Level:</td>
<td>Unit 4: Marketing Principles F/601/0556, QCF Level 4</td>
<td>SCQF points: 15</td>
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<td>BTEC</td>
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<td>Date certified:</td>
<td>21/9/1X Current: Yes</td>
<td>Does the certificated Unit have the same (or higher) equivalent level to that of the SQA HN Unit? Yes No</td>
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<td>If all three boxes are checked as Yes, proceed with the mapping for this Unit. If any box is checked as No, abandon the mapping</td>
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#### Outcomes, knowledge and Skills and Evidence Requirements of HN Unit being sought

1. Explain the nature of marketing and its importance in organisations

   **Knowledge and/or Skills**
   - Marketing concept
   - The marketing environment
   - Market research and information
   - Segmentation and targeting

#### Outcomes and supporting evidence from previous certificated qualification

1. Understand the concept and process of marketing

   **Assessment Criteria**
   - Explain the various elements of the marketing process
   - Evaluate the benefits and costs of a marketing orientation for a selected organisation

#### Level of match

Very good match but more evidence needed

#### Comments/proposed methods for addressing evidence shortfall

There is a very good match between the first Outcome of the HN Unit F7BX 34 and the BTEC Unit. The one area that is lacking is the Evidence Requirement ‘Provide two examples of how market research information is collected and used, consisting of one quantitative research technique and one qualitative research technique’. This would require assessment and one or more questions could be created to allow the learner to evidence this requirement. Alternatively the learner may be able to evidence the requirement in another certificated Unit, and if so this should be identified here.
Evidence Requirements
- Identify the key characteristics of the marketing concept
- Explain an organisation’s micro and macro environment
- Explain why market research and information is important to organisations
- Provide two examples of how market research information is collected and used, consisting of one quantitative research technique and one qualitative research technique
- Explain the importance and the process of segmentation and targeting in marketing

2 Be able to use the concepts of segmentation, targeting and positioning

Assessment Criteria
- Show macro and micro environmental factors which influence marketing decisions
- Propose segmentation criteria to be used for products in different markets choose a targeting strategy for a selected product/service
- Demonstrate how buyer behaviour affects marketing activities in different buying situations
- Propose new positioning for a selected product/service
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>2 Explain marketing decisions for a product based and a service organisation</strong></th>
<th><strong>3 Understand the individual elements of the extended marketing mix</strong></th>
<th><strong>Very good match</strong> - The BTEC Unit goes in a lot of detail and is 15 points compared to the SQA Unit’s 8 points.</th>
<th>No further evidence required.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge and/or Skills</strong></td>
<td><strong>Assessment Criteria</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The marketing mix for products</td>
<td>• Explain how products are developed to sustain competitive advantage</td>
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<td>• The marketing mix for services</td>
<td>• Explain how distribution is arranged to provide customer convenience</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Impact of changing market conditions on marketing decisions</td>
<td>• Explain how prices are set to reflect an organisation’s objectives and market conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence Requirements</strong></td>
<td>• Illustrate how promotional activity is integrated to achieve marketing objectives</td>
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<td>For a given situation, explain marketing theory in relation to:</td>
<td>• Analyse the additional elements</td>
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<td>• Product mix decisions</td>
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<td>• Channels of distribution</td>
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<td>• Pricing methods</td>
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<td>• The promotional mix</td>
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<td>• The importance of people, process and physical evidence in the marketing of services</td>
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<td>• How the marketing mix responds to changing market conditions</td>
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No integrated plan is required, as only one area has been identified that requires assessment by one or more questions.

Assessor Signature name: John Smith
Assessor signature: [Signature]
Date of assessment: 23rd April 2014

Internal Verifier name: Isla Burek
Internal Verifier signature: [Signature]
Date of internal verification: 25th April 2014
Annex 1: Recognition of Prior Learning

Our Policy

SQA’s policy is to recognise prior learning as a method of assessing whether a learner’s experience and achievements meet the evidence requirements (i.e., the standard) of a SQA Unit or Units and which may or may not have been developed through a course of learning.

The following questions and answers have been prepared to explain SQA’s policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Is the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) new?

It is new in the sense that this is the first time SQA has had a policy statement specifically relating to the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). However, other terms have been used in the past to refer to very similar concepts, for example, Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL), Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL).

What types of prior learning may be used in the assessment of SQA Units?

SQA recognises that learners gain knowledge and skills acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning contexts. Formal learning is learning certificated by a recognised awarding or professional body; Non-formal learning includes learning such as employer’s in-house training courses, which may or may not be assessed and/or certificated; finally, Informal learning is learning based on experience from a variety of environments which is not formally assessed.

How closely should a learner’s evidence of their prior learning and experience match the requirements of a SQA Unit?

Evidence to support prior learning assessment decisions must be valid, reliable and of equal rigour to the standard assessment of the Unit concerned. This means that the evidence should broadly match the evidence requirements specified in the Unit and reflect the SCQF level and credit value attached to the Unit.

Can evidence of prior learning and experience be presented in a language other than English?

Evidence in support of recognition of prior learning assessment decisions should be presented in English, or where appropriate, Gaelic. Gaelic may be used in evidence to support the recognition of prior learning assessment decisions only where the SQA Unit(s) are themselves assessed in Gaelic. This reflects SQA’s policy on the language of assessment.

Can the Recognition of Prior Learning be used to assess partial SQA Units?

The recognition of prior learning may be used to assess complete or partial SQA Units. Where evidence of prior learning only partially meets the evidence requirements of a Unit, other methods of assessment should be used to complete the outstanding requirements. The minimum level of awarding and certification will be a complete SQA Unit.
Can previously attained qualifications be used as evidence of prior learning?
Previously attained qualifications may be used as evidence of prior learning as long as they have been awarded by a recognised awarding body or professional body. It is a Centre’s responsibility to ensure that the content, level of demand and assessment approach of the prior attained qualification broadly matches the evidence requirements specified in the SQA Unit(s). A qualifications certificate on its own is unlikely to be sufficient evidence for assessment and verification purposes. This should be supported by module descriptors or equivalent which provides information on the level, demand, content and assessment of the previously attained qualification.

Is there a different quality assurance approach for the Recognition of Prior Learning?
The assessment of prior learning should be subject to the same internal verification by Centres as other methods of assessment. SQA will also adopt the same approach to quality assurance as any other method of assessment. Appeals from learners will follow the same process applicable to standard assessment of the Unit(s) or Group Award and/or Centre type concerned.

Is the Recognition of Prior Learning an exemption from a Group Award?
The recognition of prior learning is not an exemption from a Unit(s) within a Group Award. Candidates should be entered for the Unit(s) and/or Group Award as normal. Standard Unit and Group Award entry fees also apply.

How current does a learner’s evidence of prior learning or experience have to be?
Evidence to support prior learning decisions needs to ensure the currency of the learner’s knowledge, skills and achievement within the context of the Unit(s) being assessed. SQA does not set a general time limit for the currency of evidence of prior learning or experience. Currency is likely to differ depending on the sector. Supplementary questioning may be undertaken by assessors in order to ascertain the currency of a learner’s prior learning or experience.

Can the Recognition of Prior Learning be used to assess a full SQA Group Award?
The recognition of prior learning can be considered in relation to the internal assessment of one or more Units in the following types of SQA Group Award:

- Higher National Certificate and Diplomas (except Graded Units)
- Professional Development Awards
- Scottish Vocational Qualifications
- National Progression Awards
- National Certificates
- Awards

In some instances, a full Group Award may be achieved through the recognition of prior learning. However, it is unlikely that a learner would have the appropriate prior learning and experience to meet all the requirements of a full Group Award.
Are there any types of Units or assessments where the recognition of prior learning may not be used as a method of assessment?

The recognition of prior learning may **not** be used as a method of assessing in the following types of Units and assessments:

- HN Graded Units
- Course and/or external assessments
- Other integrative assessment Units (which may or not be graded)
- Certain types of assessment instruments where the standard may be compromised by not using the same assessment method outlined in the Unit
- Where there is an existing requirement for a licence to practice
- Where there are specific health and safety requirements
- Where there are regulatory, professional or other statutory requirements
- Where otherwise specified an assessment strategy, for example, in Scottish Vocational Qualifications.

**What is the difference between the Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer in SQA Group Awards?**

When a SQA Group Award is updated or replaced by another award consideration is given to the relationship between the old and the new Group Award. This allows candidates to convert old units to new units and to allow them to gain credit towards the new, for example, HNC/HND awards. These arrangements are also known as **credit transfer**. Credit transfer may be viewed as a form of the recognition of prior learning where SQA clearly specifies Unit to Unit equivalences.

**Does SQA's Recognition of Prior Learning policy apply to Core Skills?**

Specific information on the recognition of prior attained Core Skills may be found in the *Core Skills Bulletin (September 2010)*. This may be accessed by clicking on this following link:

Annex 2: Level and credit — what does it mean?

Levels and credit points
The SCQF uses two measures to describe qualifications and learning programmes within the framework:

- the **level** of the outcomes of learning
- the **volume** of outcomes, described in terms of the number of credits

The volume of an outcome is arrived at by estimating the amount of time required by the 'average' learner, at a particular level, to achieve the outcomes. The number of credits will differ greatly from qualification to qualification, within levels and between levels. See the Ready Reckoner download for further details of the credits associated with SQA's qualifications.

Levels
Each of the 12 SCQF levels can be the location of one or more qualifications. At present these are qualifications of higher education institutions in Scotland and those awarded and accredited by SQA.

Level 1 represents outcomes designed for learners with severe and profound learning difficulties, while level 12 contains outcomes associated with doctoral studies. Increases in level of demand relate to factors such as:

- complexity and depth of knowledge and understanding
- links to academic, vocational or professional practice
- the degree of integration, independence and creativity required
- the range and sophistication of application/practice
- the role(s) taken in relation to other learners/workers in carrying out tasks

Each level of the SCQF from two to 12 has a descriptor, known as the level descriptors, which sets out its characteristic general outcomes under five broad headings:

- knowledge and understanding - mainly subject based
- practice (applied knowledge and understanding)
- generic cognitive skills, eg evaluation, critical analysis
- communication, numeracy and IT skills
- autonomy, accountability and working with others

The level descriptors are designed to allow broad comparisons to be made between the outcomes of any learning that has been, or can be, subject to valid, reliable, and quality-assured assessment. They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements of required learning at each level, but can provide a useful reference point when:

- determining the level within the SCQF of a qualification or programme of learning
- designing a programme of learning
- determining the level of individual units/modules, etc
- assessing prior learning
- giving guidance/information on learning opportunities/training provision
It is not envisaged that every qualification or programme will, or should, have all of the characteristics set out in the level descriptors.

The positioning of two or more qualifications or programmes of learning at the same level should be taken as indicating only that they are broadly comparable in terms of the general level of outcome. It does not indicate that they have the same purpose, content or outcomes, nor does it take account of any structural or operational features. It is also important to note that the SCQF does not demonstrate equivalence of qualifications. An example of this is Advanced Higher, HNC, and the Certificate in Higher Education all being on level 7. Although these qualifications are all on the same level, they have quite different forms of delivery and assessment rules. When programme designers create a qualification they need to think about matters such as course content and the nature of the assessment required, but the SCQF is not directly concerned with either of these.

Qualifications awarded by Scottish higher education institutions, and those awarded or accredited by the SQA, will all be placed on the levels of the SCQF. The smallest free-standing qualifications (such as SQA Units) and components of larger qualifications (such as university modules) are allocated to a single level. Larger qualifications are allocated a final or exit level, but will often be composed of components at a number of different levels. For example, an individual who completes an SQA Scottish Group Award will normally have completed Units at two levels, while a holder of an Honours Degree will normally have completed units or modules at four levels.

In some cases, all the qualifications of a particular type will have the same exit level. In other cases, such as SQA's Professional Development Awards (PDAs), and Graduate Diplomas/Certificates awarded by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), they will have different exit levels, depending on level and volume of outcomes. All of SQA's qualifications will be in the framework by 2006.

Credit points
SCQF points are used to quantify the outcomes of learning and give them a value or currency. These general SCQF points are allocated to outcomes of learning that are subject to valid, reliable methods of assessment.

The number of SCQF points is worked out on the basis of the amount of time that an ‘average’ learner at a specified level might expect to take to achieve the outcomes. In common with other credit systems, the SCQF works on the basis that one credit point represents the outcomes of learning achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning time. However, this is merely a guide and no points are added or taken away if more or less time is taken to achieve the outcomes. No points are ‘earned’ by a learner if the outcomes of learning are not achieved.

Most mainstream qualifications in Scotland have been developed on a credit basis with design rules related to the amount and level of credit required. For example, the achievement of a Higher National Diploma requires the accumulation of 96 SCQF points, at least 48 of which must be at level 7, while an SQA Course at Higher requires the accumulation of 24 SCQF points at level 6.

General SCQF points can be used to assist learners to transfer between programmes. The awarding bodies - SQA and individual universities - decide the extent to which this kind of transfer can take place. They determine how much of the credit already achieved is relevant to the new programme and the specific number of credits that can be transferred.
### Equivalence of SCQF

#### SCQF, QCF and EQF Ready reckoner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)</th>
<th>Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF)</th>
<th>European Qualifications Framework (EQF)</th>
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Annex 3: **Recognising formal prior learning: A mapping document for HN Units**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>HN Unit Title and Level:</th>
<th>SCQF points:</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Certificated Unit Title and Level:</td>
<td>SCQF points:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awarding/Professional Body:</td>
<td>Is the awarding body/professional body recognised? Yes ☐ No ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date certified: Current: Yes ☐ No ☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the certificated Unit have the same (or higher) equivalent level to that of the SQA HN Unit? Yes ☐ No ☐</td>
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</table>

If all three boxes are checked as Yes, proceed with the mapping for this Unit. If any box is checked as No, abandon the mapping.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes, knowledge and Skills and Evidence Requirements of HN Unit being sought</th>
<th>Outcomes and supporting evidence from previous certificated qualification</th>
<th>Level of match</th>
<th>Comments/proposed methods for addressing evidence shortfall</th>
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**Integrated plan for assessing shortfalls**

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**Assessor Signature name:**
**Assessor signature:**
**Date of assessment:**
**Internal Verifier name:**
**Internal Verifier signature:**
Date of internal verification: