SCQF CREDIT POINTS EXPLAINED:
Notional Learning Hours

scqf

scottish credit and
qualifications framework

BACKGROUND

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) provides a shared context for learning in Scotland. It was created by bringing together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified Framework. Within the overall context of lifelong learning, the aims of the SCQF are to:

- help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential; and

- enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how the qualifications relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

It does this by allocating an SCQF Level and SCQF Credit Points to qualifications and learning programmes. The SCQF has 12 Levels and each level is described by a set of SCQF Level Descriptors. The allocation of a level is based on the difficulty of the learning. More information on the way in which a level is allocated to qualifications and learning programmes is explained in the SCQF Handbook (2015) and the SCQF Criteria Explained publication.

The allocation of SCQF Credit Points does not refer to a perception of ability, nor is it based on age or experience but is worked out by those with an expert knowledge of the subject who make a professional judgement on how many hours it would take the typical learner, (not those who complete the learning outcomes quickly nor those that require additional time), to achieve the learning outcomes at a given level. This is described in the SCQF Handbook (2015) as:

> "… the time required for a typical learner at a specified SCQF level to achieve the learning outcomes. The amount of time taken by actual learners in reality may differ, but this does not affect the number of SCQF Credit Points awarded."

The estimation of the time required is referred to as notional learning hours. One SCQF Credit Point represents a notional 10 hours of learning.

Credit Points provide a way for learners, employers and learning providers to describe and compare the amount of learning that has been achieved, or is required to achieve, a qualification or learning programme at a given level of the SCQF. SCQF Credit Points quantify learning outcomes that are subject to valid, reliable methods of assessment. Explanation of SCQF Credit Points can be found in the SCQF Handbook (2015).

The purpose of this guide is to provide further explanation on what is meant by notional learning hours and to clarify the types of activities that can be counted towards them.

NOTIONAL LEARNING HOURS

Notional learning hours include all the learning activities that are required to achieve the learning outcomes. Within the SCQF the minimum number of credits recognised for a learning programme is one which represents a notional 10 hours of learning. This, along with the type of activities that can be included in the notional learning hours, gives the Framework the flexibility to recognise small pieces of learning such as short employer led programmes.

When credit rating a qualification or learning programme, it is important to consider the time spent on all activities that contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme and this includes those that take place before and after delivery as well as the actual delivery itself.

With the growth of bite sized learning programmes, including those that are delivered in just one day, the following suggestions of what might make up the notional learning hours may be useful:

For example, activities before delivery might include:
- preparation such as reading materials provided prior to delivery;
- self reflection on prior knowledge and experience and how it links to the delivery;
- personal programme planning;
- using libraries or learning resource centres for reading and research.

Some of the more obvious activities for actual delivery are:
- attending and participating in formal teaching sessions;
- practical work in laboratories and other locations;
- relevant Information Communication Technology (ICT) activities;
- self directed study using online or text-based open learning materials;
- involvement in informal learning such as community groups, youth groups, outdoor activities.

For after delivery, notional hours might include:
- private study and revision; on what has been learned;
- assessment of learning;
- application of knowledge and understanding and skills within the workplace.

It should be noted that this list of suggestions is not exhaustive nor are the activities mutually exclusive.

PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT

Notional learning hours must reflect the time spent on ALL of the activities relating to the programme which are calculated by those who are best qualified through experience and knowledge of the discipline, field of study, profession, trade or area of skill and by those who are familiar with the SCQF.

CREDIT RATING PROFORMA: PARTICIPATIVE DEMOCRACY

As an example of how the notional learning hours are recorded, we provide an example from Fife College. Fife College credit rated a short Youthlink programme called Participative Democracy, designed to support young people undertaking an advocacy role. With their permission, the credit rating proforma for this programme is replicated below. This shows how the number of SCQF credit points was calculated taking into account the number of notional learning hours required for ALL aspects of the learning programme.

LEARNING ACTIVITY	FORMAL INPUT(HRS)	ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES (HRS)	ASSESSMENT (HRS)	TOTAL TIME
Assessed research activity		2	2	
Formal taught input	6			
Observed practice		1		
Recorded practice		7		
Recorded reflection		2		
Total number of notional learning hours	6	12	2	20
			Credit value (hrs/10)	2