

2008

Embedding SCQF in the Voluntary Adult Education Sector



REPORT

Acknowledgement

Learning Link Scotland would like to thank Learning Connections, Scottish Government, in supporting the work of embedding SCQF within the voluntary adult education sector. Learning Link Scotland would also thank to thank the member organisations, facilitators and speakers who assisted on the development of this project.

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Executive Summary

Learning Link Scotland supports and represents the Voluntary Adult Education Sector which is recognised at all levels as being essential to the Scottish economy, society and culture. Voluntary sector adult education is valued for its transformational impact, bringing about real difference for people in Scotland for whom mainstream education is not appropriate or effective. Whilst different from mainstream adult education and recognised as an essential part of the lifelong learning landscape, the recognition of programmes and courses on the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) and the implementation of SCQF within the sector is patchy.

Learning Link Scotland carried out an investigation (Report 2006) to engage the members in raising awareness and dialogue on the SCQF within adult education in the voluntary sector and to identify the level of knowledge/understanding and implementation of SCQF within the sector. This snapshot evidenced that there was a varied level of experience and need amongst the sector. While some organisations were well versed in SCQF some had no knowledge of it. This work was followed by an event to engage the sector further and to bring learning sectors and Credit Rating Bodies together to build the knowledge and dialogue with the aim to further the implementation of SCQF within the voluntary adult education sector.

Evaluation of the event brought about better understanding of how to support organisations to implement the SCQF within their organisations for the benefit of the delivery of the programmes and the learners they engage with. Participants had identified the need for more focused sessions to relate SCQF to the work of their own organisation. A small working group from across Learning Link Scotland members was established. Organisations who were well versed in SCQF and those who had only a little knowledge of the framework came together to learn from each other and record the process they went through. The learning from this working group created a 'development tool' and a training day to widen the understanding about credit rating learning programmes and to commence benchmarking SCQF to organisational learning programmes with other members.

This report records the activity of the working group and the workshop/seminar. The workshop tested and gathered evidence on the use of the development tool and learning gained from the working group members. One of the members benchmarked their programme at SCQF level six and others have started the process. Evidence from the workshop indicated the need for further training and development for practitioners in the field. Members who took part were keen to benchmark their programmes and to take back their learning to colleagues. Members also explored the ideas of working in collaboration to have programmes credit rated. Members identified the advantages of benchmarking their programmes and the benefits for the learners they work with.

1. Background

Learning Link Scotland represents its membership on the SCQF CLD Forum. As a membership organisation it is raising the awareness and understanding of SCQF across the Learning Link Scotland network, and brings to the Forum of the work across the sector. Learning Link Scotland was supported as a member of the Forum by Learning Connections to investigate in 2005/06 the extent of awareness and understanding of SCQF across the Voluntary Adult Learning Sector in Scotland and published the 'Critical Understanding of Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework within Adult Education in the Voluntary Sector' (June 2006).

The evidence gathered suggested a varied level of experience and need amongst the network. In gathering knowledge and intelligence on views and use of the SCQF, it found that there were four degrees of engagement with SCQF within the voluntary adult education sector.

- Those who had little or no knowledge of the framework - may be involved with informal learning and non formal learning. For example, an organisation that offers recreational programmes.
- Those who had heard of the framework and showed some interest but not actively using SCQF - this level of engagement indicated involved in confidence building, skills attainment and "first steps" learning. Assessment may be a challenge with some of their learners.
- Those who used the framework as guidance and/or an assessment tool - those at this level of engagement may use the framework in a variety of ways, such as, advising staff and volunteers interested in further study or levelling and accreditation of courses.
- Those who understood the framework and used it as a pathway to a specific academic progression - at this level of engagement, organisations usually operate in formal learning environments and have direct ties with universities or colleges. For example, an organisation that offers training programmes that directly feed into a specific college or university degree programme.

The knowledge gained from this investigation evidenced the need to expand the use of the framework and promote its versatility within the sector. The 'Delving Deeper', SCQF event was then designed to inform and engage the voluntary adult education sector to develop further their understanding, knowledge and application of the SCQF. This event provided workshops at different levels of engagement on SCQF. Feedback from attendees indicated degrees of engagement with the SCQF and challenges for the sector around credit rating and the associated costs, as well as the need for more practical sessions in helping members to look at assessment and

levelling of their programmes. A 'Working Group' was established in order to bring members together and work in a more focused way.

2. The Aims of the Working Group

The main aim was to create a small working group who would explore and examine the learning process that an organisation would go through in credit rating of short courses or programmes. The Working Group would bring together members from across the Learning Link Scotland network that had some to a lot of knowledge and understanding of SCQF and a wish to, or had already implemented the use of SCQF within their organisation. The group would meet about 6 times throughout the year to share the work they do with fellow working group members. They would examine the process of levelling and credit rating. They would explore this by using their own short course programmes. The group would also develop a small workshop/seminar to share the learning they gained with the wider network in this event. Finally this learning process would be captured in a short report by Learning Link Scotland.

Summary of aims:

- To establish a working group to take forward the implementation of SCQF in the voluntary adult education sector, to support voluntary organisations to prepare for levelling and credit rating
- To establish and implement a programme of workshops and development sessions for other voluntary adult education sector members, to embed SCQF.
- To support short courses developed in the voluntary adult education sector for Credit Rating

3. The Process and Learning

The member organisations who had responded to previous investigative work and who had attended the 'Delving Deeper' event were invited to join the working group. Some members would have liked to take part but did not have the staff available to attend the meetings but wished to be kept updated and would take part in future work or events. Three members were keen to be a part of the working group and invited to attend the first meeting. The aim of this initial meeting was to have an open dialogue around their knowledge of SCQF, implementation within their organisation and what they wished to achieve from being a part of the working group. The working group would steer the development work and activity to achieve the overall aims and outcomes of the project.

3.1 The Working Group Members

The working group members came from across the membership. Members included national organisations and smaller local organisations. They deliver adult education across differing themes and target groups as well as working in different geographical areas:

Lead Scotland

Lead Scotland, Linking Education and Disability, is a voluntary organisation set up to widen access to learning for disabled young people and adults and carers across Scotland. Lead Scotland was set up in 1979 to widen access to learning for disabled people. Since then Lead Scotland has signposted and supported thousands of disabled adults (and more recently carers) into learning opportunities. People learn by different methods, but we believe disabled people should have an equal opportunity to learn and find routes to progression. We encourage people to see their own potential and work towards their goals, whether it is learning for fun, for work or self development. Lead also promotes learning through volunteering.

Lead Scotland had taken part in the investigation, attended the 'Delving Deeper' event and had some knowledge of SCQF and a wanted to begin the process of credit rating their programme 'Supporting Adult Learners'. Lead Scotland was represented by Emma Whitelock, Training and Development Officer.

Glasgow ESOL Forum

The Glasgow ESOL Forum (GESOLF) was established in 1998 and in July 2004. The Glasgow ESOL Forum became a membership organisation of teachers, tutors and volunteers providing English language tuition to Speakers of Other Languages and a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. The main activities include regular professional development workshops in Teaching ESOL as well as two externally funded projects: The Workplace ESOL Project and the Volunteer Tutor Project. The Workplace ESOL Project delivers vocationally specific ESOL courses to non-native English speakers employed in Glasgow. The Volunteer Tutor Project supports volunteers and community based organisations involved in teaching English to Refugees and Asylum Seekers. They also developed a Professional Development Award in Teaching Adult ESOL Literacies.

Glasgow ESOL Forum had taken part in the investigation, attended the 'Delving Deeper' event and had some knowledge of SCQF and a wanted to begin looking at credit rating a course they had developed under Workplace ESOL delivered for a specific employer. They knew that the employer they delivered the training for did not have any understanding of SCQF. Glasgow ESOL Forum was represented

initially by Deborah Boekestein and then Sarah Cox, Workplace ESOL Project Co-ordinator.

Volunteer Development Scotland

Volunteer Development Scotland (VDS) provides a leadership role which supports decision makers in identifying ways in which volunteering can help them achieve their objectives. Their knowledge, tools and services seek to continually enhance the quality of the volunteering experience. By adopting an evidence based approach they can assist others in maximising the impact and opportunities of volunteering. The VDS Learning & Practice Development Service has a focus on the learning, training and quality of experience in volunteering and volunteering management.

VDS are well versed in SCQF, for example in a previous partnership with the University of Dundee, offering accredited learning at SCQF level 8 which includes the Diploma of Higher Education in Professional Development (Volunteering Management) and the VDS Award in Volunteering Management which equates to 50% of the Diploma process. These awards are named pathways within the BA in Professional Development and are work-based programmes of study and professional development, delivered through blended learning approach. Entry to the diploma programme requires a minimum entry at Higher National Certificate – SCQF level 7 or it can be entered by recognition of prior learning at level 7 of the SCQF. VDS have more recently developed three new accredited awards in volunteering coordination and management with SQS, at levels 6, 7 and 8. These accredited awards have been launched by VDS in 2008 with a Customised Award, 'Coordination of Volunteers', at level 6 and a Professional Development Award 'Volunteering Management' at level 8 currently being delivered.

VDS had taken part in the investigation, designing and delivering a workshop at the 'Delving Deeper' event and wanted to become a member of the working group to share the learning and tools they have developed and adapted for implementing SCQF within their organisation. VDS was represented by Elizabeth Holden, Learning and Practice Development Officer.

Learning Link Scotland

Learning Link Scotland is the national intermediary for voluntary adult learning organisations in Scotland who support and represent a membership of around 100 voluntary adult learning groups and organisations based in 24 local authority areas. Together, member organisations provide a wide range of community based learning opportunities for almost 70,000 adults in 2007/08. Learners from ethnic minority backgrounds, single parents, unemployed people, people with disabilities, carers and rurally isolated people are amongst the many beneficiaries provided for by the Learning Link Scotland Network.

Learning Link have been involved in understanding and disseminating the practice around SCQF since the launch of the Framework and have been working to ensure that the voluntary adult learning sector is involved in the SCQF for the benefit of the learners, practitioners and volunteers who work within the organisations that Learning Link represents.

3.2 Group Meetings

The working group meetings provided members with the chance to share the work they do and to have peer support in going through the process of implementing SCQF within their organisation. The initial agenda was set by Learning Link Scotland and subsequent agendas were decided by the working group. The group meetings also gave Learning Link Scotland the opportunity to share with members the wider context from the SCQF CLD Forum and the SCQF National Forum and receive direct feedback from members with regard to policy development. The working group aimed;

- to share the work of their organisation, their knowledge and understanding of SCQF, the knowledge, understanding and level of implementation of SCQF within the organisation
- to explore and agree the activity of the group, in particular around levelling and credit rating and develop a training day and tool kit for the working group members
- to develop and plan an event to widen the scope of the working group across the adult learning sector
- to develop and implement levelling and credit rating of an organisational programme being delivered and learn from the process
- to share and gain knowledge of SCQF projects across other sectors

3.3 Working Group Training Day

The agenda for the training day emerged through increased understanding of the needs of members and areas for development. The working group discussed and questioned the following aspects of SCQF; learning outcomes, assessment, levelling and credit rating. Each member's knowledge and understanding differed and discussion drew together the areas that they felt should be investigated to work towards a systematic approach for credit rating their programmes. The training day for members would cover the following areas:

- Aims of our learning with regard to - assessment, levelling, credit rating

- Aims of learning courses or programmes - setting learning outcomes, the language to make these explicit
- Levelling – exploring questions such as; why do we want to do this? Who's going to use it? How do we sell levelling to our users? How do we incorporate Quality Standards? Should we level everything? Can one programme fit more than one level? How do we level? How to pinpoint the language we use and consider the abilities under each level?
How do we present this evidence for levelling?
 - looking at models for this
 - looking for as much evidence as possible against each level's checklist
- Assessment - How are we going to measure the learning? How are we going to provide evidence?
 - Exploring moderation
 - Exploring validation
- Credit Rating - Why do it? Who is using it? Who can credit? What is the process and its difficulties? How can we proceed?

As an experienced member of the working group in the credit rating process, Elizabeth Holden VDS, created a format for the training day based on the discussions held in the working group meetings. It included the useful tool (Appendix 1) that helped members to go through the thinking behind the credit rating process and arrive at answers or further questions. Elizabeth walked the other members of the working group through the tool. Members brought with them a paper based copy of a programme that they deliver in the format that was in current use. Members had time to examine each others programme content and format. The exercises in the tool were carried out using their programmes. The tool is reproduced below for general use:

3.4 The Tool – Development of SCQF work within the Voluntary Sector Learning

Extracts of the tool to help working group members to think about implementing SCQF into their learning programmes is produced below. The full tool is found in the appendix 1.

Learning Objectives of the tool:

- To raise awareness and understanding of SCQF
- To enable stakeholders to relate SCQF to the work of their organisation
- To develop understanding about credit rating learning programmes
- To commence levelling SCQF to organisational learning programmes

Learning Outcomes

Broad summary statement on areas that have to be attained by learners as they work through programme of learning

Asking ourselves - What do we want to achieve from our learning?

Our Involvement with adult learning

Learning is an essential part of our lives, we learn through experiences, through volunteering and work and through taking part in leisure and recreation activities.

Learning can be for many purposes, for personal satisfaction, and enriching our experiences, to develop specific skills or creative and intellectual skills. It can be used to support personal and professional developments. In an increasingly competitive and changing world, learning is key to our future economic and social well-being, as individuals and as a nation. Learning can contribute to the development of communities, to society, to family units to the workplace and perhaps most of all to the individual.

Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

What is the relevance of our learning programmes with SCQF?

Purpose	For the learner	For the organisation
Why are we doing this?		
Who will use the alignment?		
How will we engage levelling with users?		
How will we engage other learning providers in our		

developments		
Any other -		

For Organisations to Consider

- **Quality Standards:**

What, if any Quality Standard should our organisation be working towards?

- **Understanding Credit**

Credit is one way of quantifying the volume of learning.

SCQF credit points are **general** in that they define a volume and a level of outcome within the SCQF. They become specific when related to transfer to a particular programme towards an individuals' credit towards a particular programme.

SCQF 1 credit = 10 notional hours of learning activity

The minimum credit that can be placed is 1 point = 10 hours

The number of credit points awarded is independent of the standard at which the outcome is achieved – therefore different learners may work towards different levels and credit points within the same programme.

SCQF credit points can be transferred into other settings – however this must be acceptable to the learning provider.

- **Understanding learning activities**

This is not simply calculating the number of hours that the learner may attend a learning event but can include:

- One to one peer coaching
- Informal learning e.g. through volunteering, being involved in a community group
- Practical activities in various locations and settings
- Reading
- Reflection and review of experience

- **Aligning learning to SCQF**

Each level increases with the complexity of learning and demand of the learning outcomes.

Each level is described in terms of its characteristic general outcomes under five broad headings: knowledge and understanding, practice, generic cognitive skills, communication numeracy and IT, autonomy – accountability and working with others.

Allocation of level to learning is essentially a matter of professional judgement using appropriate reference points such as:

- SCQF level descriptors
- Relevant programme descriptors
- Education benchmarking
- Awarding bodies sources of information and guidance

- **Levelling our Learning Programmes**

Use of language is important for the learning provider, the learner and future learning providers and employers. Consider a number of questions:

Explore	For the learner	For the organisation	For others
Why will we level our programme/s?			
How will levelling benefit our stakeholders?			
What drawbacks or difficulties might we experience in levelling our programmes?			
How will we engage other learning providers in our developments?			

- **Understanding the Language**

Understanding the vocabulary is not the same as mastering the content of a discipline, but it does give us a start on the levelling.

- **Using a Level Descriptor**

The benefits of using a descriptor are that it helps writers of learning programmes to look at the knowledge, skills and understanding that will fit within a level.

Why think about Accreditation?

Accreditation is the recognition of the achievements of an individual, linked up to some internal or external standard. In other words it is a process of confirming that someone's performance conforms to standards that are agreed or approved.

Why get involved in accreditation?	
For Learners	For the Organisation
Motivation	Increased retention of learners Easier recruitment of learners
Increased skills	Learners who are more effective and skilled in tasks Improved service/community cohesion
Increased likelihood of moving into employment, volunteering or further learning	Improved outcomes from learning programmes linking to local and national outcomes
Personal development	As above
Recognition of their contribution to the organisation/community	As above

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Accreditation clearly has a lot to offer volunteers and the organisation that they are involved in. If you are considering introducing accreditation into your organisation, you should first of all think through clearly what you hope to gain from it. This will make it much easier to select the most appropriate method for your organisation.

There are some key issues to consider before you decide to go ahead:

- Offering accreditation of voluntary activities can result in attracting volunteers who may be better educated and/or who are doing voluntary activities very much as a step towards paid work.
- You need to make it very clear that accreditation is for anyone, and not equate it with formal or written examinations. It needs to be properly presented and explained to avoid deterring people who may have had previous bad experiences in education or who are not very confident of their own abilities.
- If it is handled properly, accreditation can make a positive contribution to equal opportunities by enabling people who may have no or few qualifications to gain in confidence and skills.
- Accreditation can bring assessment and possible success or failure into voluntary activities. Some people volunteer to avoid these pressures and would choose not to be involved in any form of assessments.
- For accreditation to succeed, the volunteer must be performing specific tasks that demonstrate particular skills. This demands a clear role description for the volunteer and may reduce flexibility.
- As a volunteer's manager, you would need to support learners to keep proper records of all activities to provide evidence for accreditation.
- Your organisation must be prepared to contribute some costs in time and finance

Internal/Informal Accreditation

Internal accreditation can achieve many of your aims. It is cheaper than external accreditation. Your organisation would be required to invest resources; including your time into internal accreditation. The main drawback is that it may lack external credibility.

Internal accreditation can be very helpful, if recorded and evidenced by an organisation, this can provide recognised prior learning for a learner. This may support a learner to build evidence to enter formal learning.

External Accreditation

This involves using external criteria to assess your learners. Rather than drawing up your own list of necessary skills and competencies, you can use ones produced by an external recognised awarding body. This guarantees that standards have been defined and that the assessment of skills and competences is rigorous. External accreditation has more status for the learner. It is also more likely to be impressive to potential employers than an internal accreditation scheme.

3.5 The Learning – learning journeys of working group members

As well as group meetings we met with members of the group on an individual basis to focus on the learning they had achieved from being on the working group. The individual meetings explored in depth the work of the organisation in implementing SCQF, linked to their training and education programmes. In addition, the meetings explored the process and learning that the practitioners and their organisations have gone through in implementing SCQF. These meetings also investigated if the working group members had started to implement any of the learning and guidance from the training day and whether they had been able to carry out any activity using the development tool.

3.51 Case Study – Lead Scotland

Lead Scotland delivers a programme 'Supporting Adult Learners' which is presented in a Handbook format. This 3 part training is not an accredited course and is not benchmarked against SCQF. It is delivered to volunteers. Emma Whitelock, the Training and Development Officer has developed this programme further and saw its potential in being Credit Rated and started to benchmark it against the SCQF. Having gone through the training day she had the necessary knowledge to begin benchmarking the programme and wanted to learn from the process and derive questions to help others in the organisation to go through the benchmarking process. She wanted to create a formula or model for the organisation to build a process to benchmark and or credit rate other courses delivered by the organisation. Working with her colleagues they identified that they had more questions than answers when they started to benchmark the programme, the most fundamental one being - Why are we doing this?

They reflected on the importance for learners on having an understanding of what they were achieving. They also identified the importance of the level of achievement by volunteers' C.V. and recognition by employers. Emma worked with Kay Mitchell a Lead Scotland volunteer based in Fife. Kay created an observation checklist and potential portfolio of evidence that would be collected by a volunteer. This helped

Emma and Kay to go on to benchmark the programme at SCQF Level 6 (Appendix 2 table 1) and created an observation check list to assess the volunteer's level of achievement (Appendix 2 table 2). Emma has embedded the work into the organisation and has shared the work externally as well through publishing her findings and programme on the Lead Scotland website (Appendix 3) and is set out below:

Benchmarking Lead Scotland's Volunteer Training against SCQF

Potential **advantages** of benchmarking Lead's training:

- *empowering volunteers as learners – helping them to understand the mechanics of the framework, the value of their learning and possible progression routes*
- *more meaningful to volunteers - to enable a volunteer to more meaningfully add their experience to their CV. (one third of current volunteers are looking for experience for their C.V.)*
- *more meaningful to external funders - whether we are seeking grant or consultancy funding, it may help us compete other volunteer involving organisations for funding*
- *informative - to enable a volunteer to realise what level the training is pitched at to make an informed choice when choosing particular volunteer training opportunities*
- *compete for volunteers - it might help us recruit, and retain volunteers who are keen to learn and develop by promoting this benefit*

Potential **disadvantages** of this development:

- *alienating volunteers - it may be most helpful for volunteers seeking employment, further learning or further volunteering, however I don't want to alienate volunteers who do not have these motivations*
- *time consuming - it takes staff time to benchmark the training and check that volunteers have met the level. However SCQF have helpful, clear guidance which eases this process*
- *limited value - because is notionally benchmarked, not actually level and credit rated – however responses from agencies/volunteers indicated that it may still be helpful and give more credibility to the training*
- *confusing - we can't assume that people and agencies have a working knowledge of the SCQF. Over half of the online responses from volunteers indicated that they had not heard of the SCQF before and some feedback from agencies led me to think that the framework was not as widely known amongst employers and job seekers as we'd previously thought. We will try to raise awareness of the framework to volunteers in tandem with benchmarking the training; otherwise the level may not be meaningful.*

Findings from online survey -Volunteer Database

Reading, research, theory – This development fits with Lead's ethos of widening access to learning and the Scottish Government's social inclusion, life long learning agenda and volunteering strategy. The SCQF includes all Scottish qualifications. The SCQF website indicates that framework may be particularly useful for learners, learning providers, employers, members of a statutory body and policy makers, to compare qualifications and see progression routes. The framework is comparable to the English and Welsh framework and future plans suggest linking with European frameworks as they emerge. The expanding framework would appear therefore appropriate to benchmark against and the political climate seems favourable for this development.

Online survey – 35 people responded to the online survey. The vast majority of results supported the development and encouraged me to think we are heading in the right direction. 20 people hadn't heard of the SCQF before so we wouldn't assume awareness of SCQF.

Volunteer database statistics - Almost a third of Lead's current 180 volunteers are looking for experience to record on their Curriculum Vitae, when they applied to become a volunteer. This has increased from 20% since 2000.

About 30% of our volunteers disclose themselves to be disabled. The 2007 Disability Rights Commission (DRC) publication, "The Disability Agenda" indicates that disabled people are twice as likely not to have recognised qualifications and are also underrepresented in volunteering (6%). In the last year Lead's disabled volunteers numbered between 30% and 37% which is well above average. The DRC indicate that 20% of the population is disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act. We explored this idea with Employment Opportunities, an organisation who support disabled people to get employment, who thought anything which helped peoples CV's was worth doing. Just over a third of the volunteers who completed the questionnaire were disabled volunteers – they unanimously agreed or strongly agreed that the training would help their CV.

1 to 1 interviews face to face

Some feedback indicated that employers may not be as familiar with the framework as we had assumed. We were given helpful advice about the terminology to use, e.g. "benchmarking" instead of "notionally level" and that volunteers may need to explain/provide evidence of the training, e.g. compare to more traditional qualifications that employers might have heard of.

We have scratched the surface of this potential development in a first exploratory phase and have become aware of many more questions that we now need to explore, e.g. can we benchmark the training without putting off people who might not wish to know the level. We think a second investigation will be needed, e.g. more meaningful

consultation with targeted volunteers who would like it on their CV, about what the development would mean to them, e.g. employed, unemployed, young, older, disabled people, retired people, etc. The majority of the feedback was however overwhelmingly positive and encourages us to explore the development further. However we would like to supplement the results with more targeted exploration with specific groups of volunteers.

Ethical considerations:

We were aware that the online survey was excluding people who had no internet access, or sufficient IT confidence and/or literacy skills. We did offer to contact interested people but none came forward.

Background to this development – 3 specific influences:

- Inspiration from a seminar - attended a one day workshop, organised by Learning Link Scotland (LLS), called 'Delving Deeper', which helpfully demystified the SCQF and enthused us about engaging with the framework. We subsequently joined the LLS working group to explore the idea of benchmarking Lead volunteer training against the SCQF.*
- Investing in Lead volunteers - Nearly one third of Lead's current volunteers indicate on their application form that they are looking for experience for their CV. One of the practices within the Investing in Volunteers award (9.5) states that "volunteers leaving the organisation are offered a reference and/or other statement of their achievements." Offering levelled training opportunities may be one way by which we could offer a meaningful statement of their achievements in relation to the training they undertake. Otherwise the volunteers learning during their time as a volunteer may not be fully understood, or valued.*
- Competing for funding and potential volunteers - The executive summary of the Scottish Executive's first Volunteer Strategy, 2004, indicates that volunteers are to be "given guidance, training and support to develop through volunteering, according to their individual needs and aspirations". This positive political will and resulting funding to Volunteer Development Scotland and Volunteer Centres may now raise the profile of volunteering and generate more volunteers, who hopefully expect benefits such as meaningful training, learning and development. Lead promotes training as a benefit to potential via the website and other publicity. It may help Lead compete with other volunteer involving organisations for volunteers and for funding if we can benchmark some of our training against a relevant national framework.*

Lead has quality standards in relation to staff and volunteer development, namely Investors in People (IIP) and Investing in Volunteers (IiV). Lead promotes lifelong learning plus Organisers support learner and sometimes volunteer transitions into learning opportunities and onto next steps. Lead is keen that potential avenues for learning and development opportunities are explored and developed as appropriate.

3.52 Case Study – Glasgow ESOL Forum

Glasgow ESOL Forum deliver a pilot project for a specific employer who has no understanding of SCQF and the main recognition at present for the learner/worker is the achievement of an attendance certificate and the completion of the programme. Sarah Cox, Workplace ESOL Project Co-ordinator and her predecessor Deborah Boekestein, realise the importance for the learners to be able to demonstrate a level of achievement as may not have any previous qualifications. In addition it is important the employers recognise the level that the learners are being trained at so they can demonstrate the need for different levels of training to ensure progression and achievement for the learners. However as the employer does not have any understanding of SCQF the process of starting to level their programme will have to convince the employer as well as the organisation's board in taking forward benchmarking the course. The Co-ordinator has identified the areas of work that she will now take on board as a consequence of attending the working group and training day.

- *Raising awareness of SCQF across the organisation, the specific employers they deliver the train for and the learners.*
- *Measuring and benchmarking to ensure that a learner is assessed at a certain level to do their job safely and at a certain standard*
- *To identify the progression routes for the learner after the course, therefore levelling the course would help the learner to move on*
- *To identify how to give validity to benchmarking the course to reassure the employer the worth of the training course and the levels associated with it*
- *To identify the cost associated with benchmarking the course with regard to staff time and resources and to weigh this against the benefit of carrying it out what will it achieve*

3.53 Case Study - Learning Link Scotland

Learning Links Scotland delivers a range of events, seminars, conferences and training to the voluntary adult education sector. This work attempts to bridge the

divide between policy and practice. Working on embedding SCQF has allowed us to sharpen our thinking in order to raise awareness of SCQF with our members and stakeholders. It has made us think more deeply and critically about the impact of SCQF for our sector, including the implications for informal/non-formal learning and the advantages and disadvantages of embedding it. In our role as a national intermediary it has reinforced the importance of trying to bring policy closer to practice as a clear outcome.

As a learning provider it has helped us to look at our learning programmes and sharpen our approaches to devising achievable learning outcomes for our programmes. It has made us more aware of the progression route to get our programmes credit rated. At the same time it has raised the debate for us and our members about informal/non-formal learning and where sometimes it has a place outside of SCQF. The work has helped to see the benefits of benchmarking in its own right as an educational tool.

An unexpected but welcome outcome has been to re-energise our work with partners and stakeholders regarding the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL).

3.54 Case Study – Volunteer Development Scotland

Volunteer Development Scotland has worked in partnership with University of Dundee and other credit rating bodies in creating and providing accredited learning for volunteers. They have the expertise, knowledge and experience to assist other organisations to develop their knowledge on the credit rating process. Elizabeth Holden has been influential in establishing the process in her organisation and has developed the 'Tool' for the working group members and has presented at the two events organised by Learning Link to embed SCQF within the voluntary adult learning sector.

3.6 The Workshop/Seminar for the Learning Link Scotland Network

At the end of the training session for the working group, unfortunately one of the members moved on from the organisation. She passed on the SCQF development work to another colleague. The workshop/seminar was developed by three of the members and the other member participated. This would help the new member to gain an understanding of the work carried out by the working group and develop her own knowledge of SCQF.

The workshop/seminar was based on a similar approach to the training day. It was designed to reach a small group of members from the sector. This event was called 'Putting ourselves in the Framework'. Members were invited who had some knowledge of SCQF and wished to embed their knowledge and understanding of

benchmarking and credit rating into the organisation. Participants were asked to bring along one of their short courses/programmes.

Members from the working group would share the work they had undertaken to date in the workshop with participants. The aim was to increase the knowledge and understanding of the participants. Practical activities from the 'Tool' were used to help them understand the process and thinking they should go through when assessing if they should, could or would take the process back into their own organisation to be developed further.

In addition to the learning experience from members within the working group attendees also gained further understanding of the process from a college perspective of SCQF. Alyson Barrie, formerly of James Watt College and now consultant with SCQF Partnership would deliver a session on the fundamental aspects of SCQF.

Feedback would be taken from the participants and also from Alyson Barrie on the workshop content and to identify further training needs of participants and in general for the sector.

The programme for the workshop is set out in table 1 and the activities and feedback explored in following sections.

Table 1

The Programme

Putting Ourselves in the Framework

Learning Link Scotland Seminar on the SCQF

Monday 31st March 2008

10am – 3.30pm

Deaf Action's Learning Centre

49 Albany Street, Edinburgh, EH1 3QY

Aims:

- Learn about the work we've undertaken to date
- Hear from colleagues in the voluntary sector about their work to link their training courses to the SCQF
- Examine your own training programmes to see how you can make these links
- Discuss possible pathways and routes into SCQF
- Develop a dialogue with your colleagues in the sector about how we can take this further

Programme for the day

- 10:00 Registration, introductions, tea and coffee
- 10:30 Welcome, Aims, Presentation by Learning Link Scotland
- 10:45 Case Studies:
Volunteer Development Scotland
Lead Scotland
- linking their training to SCQF
- 11:30 Coffee break
- 11:50 Activities exploring participants' own work in relation to SCQF
- Benchmarking
- Assessment
- 13:00 Lunch and networking
- 13:30 Pathways and Routes:
- Credit rating
- Progression and recognition of prior learning
- 15:15 Conclusions and next steps

3.61 The Workshop Aims

Learning Link Scotland set the scene for the day and outlined the aim of the working group and what it had achieved to date. The main input for the morning was the two case studies from Elizabeth Holden, Volunteer Development Scotland and Emma Whitelock, Lead Scotland. The presentations of each case study are found in the Appendix of the report. There were marked contrasts in the two case studies. One was well established at the credit rating process and placing its programmes on the SCQF and the other was beginning the process. Both were formulating questions and dilemmas that their organisation went through which participants could empathise with.

3.62 Activities exploring participants' own work in relation to SCQF

In this part of the workshop the tools that were used by the working group in their training day were tested and their use validated by participants. These were exercises from the development tool and two examples are included below:

- **Using a Level Descriptor**

The benefits of using a descriptor are that it helps writers of learning programmes to look at the knowledge, skills and understanding that will fit within a level.

Levels are determined by the complexity of five generic skills		
SCQF Characteristics	Best Fit	Comments
Knowledge and Understanding		
Practice applied knowledge and understanding – link theory to practice		
Communication ICT & Numeracy		
Generic cognitive skills – problem solving, analysis, evaluation		
Autonomy, accountability and working with others		

A sample of what a completed one may look like was also shared with participants to give some idea of the level of detail but not intended to be a guide.

Levelling our Learning Programmes				
Your training/learning programme title	Learning programmes objectives	Breakdown the learning outcome – What the learner should know and be able to do as a result of the learning	What level of difficulty is required – as a standard by the organisation Relates to SCQF levels	How long will the learner need to commit to this learning programme (10 hrs of learning = 1 credit point)

These exercises among others were carried out in smaller groups to allow participants to discuss the content of the tables and explore in general and specific to their organisation and its programme delivery.

3.63 Pathways and Routes

This part of the workshop was presented by Alyson Barrie, Consultant. Alyson had been a panel member at the ‘Delving Deeper’ event giving her perspective on SCQF from the college sector and also in general the process of credit rating. She also brought participants up to-date with the present thinking and terminology behind levelling and benchmarking. The main thrust of her presentation covered these questions and helped to reiterate some of the earlier content of the morning workshops.

SCQF Credit Rating – What and who is it for?

- Initial Questions; What are you doing credit rating for?
- Who are you doing it for?
- Expectations of what SCQF and credit rating will deliver?
- Initially 2 choices of route – formal credit rating or informal benchmarking.
- Looking at it in detail from college experience including the pros and cons of both and why/when you might use one route rather than the other.
- Introduction to the formal credit rating process and the paperwork involved using examples of credit rated units.
- Areas for discussion and feedback –
 - SCQF for transitions, progression and career development – looking at RPL and the role of personal development planning in acknowledging and valuing a wider range of learning.

- Sector initiatives – database; staff development; collaborations
- Govt initiatives in support of the recognition of all areas of learning
- Other credit rating body initiatives and SCQF initiatives

Alyson's presentation also looked at what is special about the voluntary sector and the work from examples of participants own programmes. In addition she observed and provided feedback on areas of further development needed around staff development, curriculum development, collaborative approaches, funding methodologies.

3.64 Feedback from participants

Participants in general agreed that they had a low level of knowledge about SCQF and its potential within their organisation and across the sector. Some of the participants were not fully aware how to use SCQF to best benefit their staff, volunteers and learners. They felt there was a need for them to develop their clarification of the terms used within SCQF around benchmarking, credit rating, credit value and accreditation and although the present documentation does explain these terms, working in the workshop today helped to explain terms better than documents and leaflets can.

Although the costs associated with credit rating are still seen as a major barrier for organisations they felt that gaining knowledge and understanding of benchmarking, greater understanding of SCQF, how it can benefit learners and the organisation would be an achievement for them at this stage. The cost of credit rating programmes they felt should be looked at collectively and explored later.

Finally the participants in general felt there was a need for more focused sessions like this and dedicated time within the organisation to develop the use of SCQF to benefit learners and staff.

3.65 Feedback from Consultant

There is a wide disparity in understanding of SCQF with some excellent work being done in the sector that needs to be harnessed and developed for the benefit of the whole sector.

It was a mixed group (some very enthusiastic and well informed about SCQF, others very keen but lacking knowledge about SCQF and its potential) – not sure if all are clear exactly how they want to use SCQF to best benefit their staff and learners. And I felt there is a need for clarification of terms used – levelling, credit rating, credit value and accreditation.

Volunteer Development Scotland are big player and well informed and well down the road of using SCQF. Can other groups work in partnership with them to benefit from the work already carried out?

Lead Scotland has made an excellent start and would benefit from a bit more support and clarification of options available in order to make best use of the excellent staff resource they have.

What came across as key was the fact that many volunteers want to highlight their experience in their C.V. The question is how best to do this? – by credit rated qualifications and / or reflective statement by the individual on what they have learnt from the experience that will enhance their application to further study, employment, career development and personal growth. Both of these objectives could be achieved by informal benchmarking of programmes by the voluntary organisation and by encouraging individuals to record their experiences and reflect on their learning through personal development planning (possibly using MV Passport or equivalent).

Costs are still a bit stumbling block as well as a lack of knowledge / understanding about SCQF and how it can be used, what it can be used for and how it can benefit individuals, employers, voluntary sector/CLD and others in the education and training sector.

The formal credit rating route or the use of nationally recognised qualifications from existing awarding bodies (SQA, ILM, City and Guilds etc) will be costly in monetary terms (credit rating costs or centre approval costs to deliver the qualifications) as well as for programme integrity. It may offer a 'quick fix' in the short term if funding is made available but it may not be the best option for the longer term.

Given the relatively small size of voluntary groups I would suggest collaborations to spread costs and share resources - either on a geographical basis or by programme type or by category of voluntary organisation. These partnerships could also include credit rating bodies and could be used to credit rate programmes, develop joint programmes, provide staff development and submit joint funding applications.

Another key area to focus on in order to progress the use of SCQF within the voluntary sector is communication about SCQF and how it can be used to benefit the sector. The more informed staff are about SCQF the more, potentially, they will get out of any partnership working. The more they can contribute to the credit rating process the more certain they can be of success and the more effectively they can use their scarce resources.

Collaboration for staff development and the importance of increasing knowledge about SCQF in voluntary organisations in order to be able to use the framework more to benefit learners and be cost effective in credit rating.

However it is important to remember that within the voluntary sector you are not alone and not expected to achieve the above single-handed! The expansion of staff within the SCQF Partnership means there will be much more central support and increased activity to raise awareness of the framework and how it can be used. In one way this will help all learning providers in terms of publicising what they do. And it will also lead to increased expectations and demand by individuals and employers to recognise what they do. It is

important that learning providers in all sectors are ready to respond to this increased demand and to meet learner needs.

4. The Achievements

This project aimed to bring about a small working group of practitioners in the field to experience and report on the learning of implementing SCQF within their organisation. The following outputs and outcomes were achieved:

4.1 The Outputs

- Hosted six working group meetings
- Co-ordinated input and facilitation at meetings
- Supported voluntary organisations to develop programme in preparation for credit rating
- Recorded meetings key issues and needs to feed to LC and SCQF stakeholder group
- Delivered and event of workshops on outcomes, assessment methods, levelling, credit rating with practitioners, tutors and trainers
- Created a Workshop Pack (tool) of practical knowledge of SCQF and the terminology
- Good practice examples from the Voluntary Sector Working Group members
- Dissemination to the network
- three short courses reviewed and one course benchmarked
- Final Report on learning journey of working group

4.2 The Outcomes achieved

- Increased the ability of voluntary organisations to engage in the implementation of the SCQF across the adult learning voluntary sector
- Increased the ability of voluntary organisations to engage in credit rating of short courses
- Appraised the process for credit rating of short courses in the voluntary adult learning sector

One of the unexpected outcomes was the recognition of the continued need to re-engage in dialogue across the sector around the issues of APL and RPEL. The project also identified through this experience the importance and ability to raise issues and feedback into the SCQF Partnership, SCQF National Forum and the SCQF CLD Forum and the profile of these groupings across the voluntary sector members.

5. Recommendations

These recommendations have drawn from the learning of the working group, the event for other members and the feedback from participants and consultant and are listed below:

- Build on the success and practical model of the voluntary adult learning working group to implement SCQF across the sector
- Develop and disseminate the tool, helping to build knowledge and understanding of terminology and language and useful ways to get started in benchmarking
- More sign posting of organisations to:
 - resources,
 - SCQF website,
 - members who have benchmarked their learning programmes
- Develop and deliver more focused practical workshops in benchmarking for members to develop their knowledge, understanding and experience in levelling their programmes/courses
- Gather and develop case studies to disseminate and assist organisations to see the potential of SCQF for their organisation
- Develop collaborative approaches and partnerships to include credit rating bodies and develop joint programmes, staff development and joint funding applications to credit rate programmes.

6. Appendices

- Appendix 1 Working Group Training Day - Development Tool, VDS sample benchmarking table
- Appendix 2 Lead SCQF level 6 Table, Lead Observation Checklist level 6, Extract from Lead Scotland website
- Appendix 3 Presentations – Putting ourselves in the Framework event

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