



University for the Common Good

# **Handbook on Credit Rating at Glasgow Caledonian University**

June 2019

## Introduction

The complexity of learning provision and in particular the learning that often takes place at work, have only gradually been acknowledged in government strategic thinking and arguably more gradually still in some Higher Education Institutions. This has meant that resource allocation by Higher Education to activities such as accrediting prior learning or offering credit rating has been limited.

Our capacity to neatly categorise learning into ‘formal’ education and training within education institutions, ‘non-formal’ learning opportunities outside of institutions, and ‘informal’ contexts where learning is not planned, is of course now under serious challenge. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Work Based Learning can now not only be recognised in the work place through formal credit rating of planned learning outcomes, but also through Recognition of Prior Learning informal and non-formal learning in the workplace can be recognised.

This approach to Learning acknowledges that a learner can undertake learning in or at work for different reasons – personal and career development, or to support the move between informal and formal learning; or for gaining credit for entry into or credit within a formal programme of study.

Credit Rating can give a learner credit to gain entry to, or credit within, a formal programme of study. This of course depends on Higher Education providers acknowledging that while learning in traditional centres like Universities and Colleges and learning in the workplace may be different in terms of mode of delivery and the context of delivery, they are nonetheless equivalent in terms of the level of intellectual demand and higher levels skills required.

## The Role of SCQF

One of the key purposes of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework<sup>1</sup> was to achieve ‘parity of esteem’ between qualifications.

This was achieved by mapping each major qualification in Scotland and giving each of them a number of credit points. Credit points represent the volume of learning within each qualification and one credit point equals 10 hours of notional learning (ie the amount of time it would take the average learner to complete the qualification).

In addition to providing a map of qualifications and how they related to each other, SCQF also provided a set of level descriptors. These described the knowledge skills and understanding required at each of the 12 levels in the SCQF framework from access to doctorate level study.

It therefore became possible to match a range of learning to the SCQF by relating it as suggested above, to outcomes or national standards and make a judgement as to where it should be located on the SCQF table and based on the 10 notional hours of learning time, make a judgement as to how much credit it should be given.

Essentially that is what this handbook is all about. GCU embraces this more democratic approach to knowledge and learning and we hope to promote this by putting theory into practice and helping employing organisations get the credit they deserve for the efforts they invest in learning in the workplace.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://scqf.org.uk/>

## **What is Credit Rating?**

Credit rating is the evaluation by Glasgow Caledonian University of programmes offered by the University or an external organisation. The evaluation takes place against the SCQF guidelines (Appendix 1) in order to assess the level and volume of credit attributable to the programmes or units concerned.

Credit rating has a number of purposes:

- Its primary purpose is to give a specific value at a specific level, of general credit to learning undertaken in the workplace, or learning that is work related.
- From the external organisation's perspective, it may enhance the attractiveness of the learning from the point of view of potential learners.
- From the University's point of view it helps with employer engagement and depending on the learning, it may encourage learners to use the credit ultimately acquired, in a GCU course so that they can translate it into specific credit.
- While it does not lead to a named award, the organisation concerned may use the SCQF and GCU logo on certificates distributed to successful candidates, enhancing the award as well as promoting SCQF and GCU.

### **1. Academic Quality Policy and Practice**

A definition of Credit Rating (External) sits within the typology of partnership arrangements as part of the AQ policy on TNE and Academic Partnerships. As part of the University's quality assurance procedures all decisions taken in relation to Credit Rating will be subject to scrutiny and ratification by the relevant School Board of the University.

### **2. How the Process Works**

In the event of an organisation expressing an interest in having provision credit rated, a member of staff from the Department of AQD will advise the interested organisation on how GCU implements the guidelines that the SCQF sets out in relation to credit rating. Of special interest at this stage of the process will be the minimum amount of credit that can be offered; the processes, timescales, costs and level of documentation involved in the process.

It should be noted that costs will obviously reflect the nature of the work required. Some external organisations may not only be seeking credit rating, but advice and support in how they develop the necessary infrastructure to offer provision that can be credit rated. Consideration may also have to be given for employing the services of an external expert (See below: Approval Process-stage 5).

### **3. Approval process – stage 1**

If an external organisation wishes to proceed on the basis of the above information, the Department of AQD will identify at least one academic expert in the area concerned and another member of staff experienced in the credit rating process to make an initial assessment of the case for credit rating. The credit rating team will always comprise at least two or three people at least one of these will be external to School and their function inter alia will be scrutiny of decisions. Depending on the nature and size of the organisation and nature and range of the learning being considered, it may be necessary to widen and deepen the credit rating team. In any case the member of the School to which the credit rating is aligned should take responsibility for leading the team.

The basis of the initial assessment should be the initial documentation submitted by the submitting organisation (Appendix 2) as described below in the second stage of the approval process. Please note the detail required by the employer will be acquired through an application form. This can be located in the document *Guidance for External Organisations on Credit Rating at GCU*. It should be noted here that GCU will not credit rate the provision of any external organisation where GCU does not have a member of staff with the relevant academic knowledge and experience to make the necessary judgments on the nature of the provision.

At this stage a formal contract should be agreed between the external organisation and GCU based on the GCU regulations and standard terms and conditions.

#### **4. Approval process – stage 2**

The external organisation is required to submit documentation to the leader of the Credit rating team for scrutiny. There is a detailed pro forma attached as appendix two but essentially the key information required is the nature and purpose of the organisation, for example is it public, private or not for profit; the kind of learning that the organisation is engaged in and for what purpose, and critically the quality of this learning. That will require information on who delivers, the resources used in support and what quality assurance processes are in place along with the learning outcomes and assessment.

#### **5. Approval process – stage 3**

On receipt of this information, the Credit Rating Team will use the matrix as set out in Appendix 3 to consider how they should go about assessing key quality facets in relation to delivery and support materials. Depending on the external organisation and the nature of the support they seek, this could involve scrutinising learning materials and direct observation of training. It is of course possible that some organisations would not wish this and in these cases indirect evidence may be the best source of sound judgement. In addition to the matrix in appendix 3 there are two sheets which support assessing level and quality of credit and attendant rationales for these decisions.

There may be a request from the organisation for support in relation to effective methods of delivery, support and assessment. The subject experts would be best placed to offer this.

#### **6. Approval process – stage 4**

There needs to be an assessment of the organisation against the criteria for quality assurance as laid out by SCQF.

There is a detailed audit tool set out as Appendix 4. The purpose of this audit is to assess whether organisation has the necessary quality assurance policy and procedures in place to ensure a high quality learning experience. It may be at this stage the organisation will require advice and support in addressing gaps that might be identified. It may be the team leader is likely to best placed to offer this advice, although this may well depend on the composition of the team.

## **7. Approval process – stage 5**

Based on the information available from stages two and three and four, the team will have to make considered judgements in relation to the level and quantity of credit applicable to each unit and the programme as a whole, where appropriate.

If the credit sought is at SCQF level 8 or above it is necessary for an external examiner or experts to be involved in endorsing the decisions of the credit rating teams. The external expert would normally be the external examiner for that level of programme in that subject discipline already engaged by GCU. Where this is not possible, the external expert would need to be someone capable of undertaking that role in GCU.

There are essentially three options:

- To credit rate the learning at a specified level and volume of credit for the number of years set out in the SCQF guidance.
- To suggest that further development is required in relation to parts or all of the learning presented and the relevant infrastructure.
- To reject the request for credit rating but offer a rationale for this along with recommendations

## **8. Approval process – stage 6**

The decision of the team will be presented to the School Board for ratification and this will be communicated in writing to the external organisation by the Credit Rating Team Leader.

The decision of the team following ratification by School Board will be provided to the Department of AQD.

The University Learning and Teaching Sub-Committee will receive the outcomes of the credit rating process and decision for noting.

## **9. After the Decision**

Following a successful credit rating exercise, the Credit Rating Team Leader, in addition to relaying the decision of the School Board to the external organisation, should also make available the following information in writing:

- That the external organisation must notify GCU in writing in advance of the introduction of any changes to the credit-rated programme, if these changes might affect the SCQF level or volume of credit.
- That the external organisation must submit a brief annual report to the School Board describing the progress of the programme since the initial credit rating or last annual report.
- That at the end of the period of credit rating (usually 5 years), the provider may re-apply for credit rating. Should they wish to do so, the organisation will have to submit an assessment of the programme or learning and specifically highlight any desired changes.

The Department of AQD will ensure that the credit rated programmes are uploaded onto the SCQF database which allows organisations to search for programmes that have been credit rated by other bodies.

The Department of AQD will also ensure that a formal GCU notification, bearing the University's logo and the SCQF logo, setting out the details of the Credit Rating Exercise will be issued to the organisation concerned. (A fictitious example is attached as Appendix 5)

# Appendix 1

## SCQF guidelines for credit rating 1 to 12

<b>Guideline 1</b>	Allocation of a level to learning is essentially a matter of professional judgement, using appropriate reference points such as the SCQF level descriptors, relevant programme descriptors, higher education subject benchmark information, SQA specifications and other appropriate sources of information and guidance.
<b>Guideline 2</b>	SCQF levels are not related directly to years of study. They are defined by the extent of demands made of the learner in each of the five broad categories of competence.
<b>Guideline 3</b>	SCQF credit points are a measure of appropriate and defined learning outcomes at a specified SCQF level.
<b>Guideline 4</b>	One SCQF credit point equates to the learning outcomes achieved through a notional 10 hours of learning.
<b>Guideline 5</b>	Notional learning hours refers to the time judged to be required by an 'average' learner at a particular SCQF level to achieve defined learning outcomes. It includes all the learning activities relevant to the achievement of the outcomes, including undertaking and completion of assessment tasks.
<b>Guideline 6</b>	The minimum number of SCQF credit points is one. Only full SCQF credit points are awarded. Fractions of SCQF credit points are not permissible.
<b>Guideline 7</b>	SCQF credit points are always allocated at a specified SCQF level, normally determined by the original design content of a Unit of learning.
<b>Guideline 8</b>	The number of SCQF credit points allocated to a Unit of learning, or module, is independent of the perceived centrality or importance of the Unit within any wider programme.
<b>Guideline 9</b>	The number of SCQF credit points awarded is independent of the standard at which the outcomes are achieved.
<b>Guideline 10</b>	SCQF credit points are general in that they define a volume at a level of outcome within the SCQF. They become specific when related to transfer to a particular programme or to an individual's claim for credit towards a particular programme.
<b>Guideline 11</b>	SCQF credit points can be transferred.
<b>Guideline 12</b>	The SCQF Credit Rating Body will be responsible for ensuring that the credit rating process and outcomes are consistent with relevant reference points.

**SCQF guidelines for credit rating 13 to 17 — general processes to be undertaken by SCQF Credit Rating Bodies**

**Guideline 13** The SCQF Credit Rating Body should offer an appropriate person to act as the principal link between the credit rating body and the submitting body.

**Guideline 14** The SCQF Credit Rating Body should establish systematic arrangements for credit rating.

**Guideline 15** The SCQF Credit Rating Body should give written guidance on its SCQF credit rating processes and criteria to the submitting body.

**Guideline 16** Opportunities for initial informal discussions about the processes and potential outcomes of the proposed credit rating should be offered.

**Guideline 17** The SCQF Credit Rating Body should assure itself, as far as is practically possible, of the general good standing of the submitting body.

**SCQF guidelines for credit rating 18 to 21 — information to be provided by submitting bodies to Credit Rating Bodies**

**Guideline 18** Submitting bodies should provide the SCQF Credit Rating Body with a formal written proposal.

**Guideline 19** Documented evidence on assessment processes must be submitted to the SCQF Credit Rating Body at the point of application.

**Guideline 20** The assessment system of a submitting body that results in the award of credit points to a programme of learning should be subject to external assessment from outside the organisation on a regular basis to confirm that the processes and judgements made, linked to Guideline 19, are being adhered to.

**Guideline 21** Certificates issued to learners, indicating the SCQF level and credit points should specify the SCQF Credit Rating Body.

**SCQF guidelines for credit rating 22 to 24 — outcomes of credit rating decisions and monitoring**

**Guideline 22** The SCQF Credit Rating Body should specify the maximum duration of the credit rating before review.

**Guideline 23** The SCQF Credit Rating Body should clarify the distinction between general and specific credit and explicitly identify the nature of the credit being considered.

**Guideline 24** Any conditions should be defined by the SCQF Credit Rating Body.

**SCQF guidelines for credit rating 25 to 27 — actions required of the Credit Rating Body and submitting bodies**

**Guideline 25**                      The credit rating process and its results should be reported to the SCQF Credit Rating Body's system of governance and copied to the submitting body.

**Guideline 26**                      Regular reports should be submitted to the SCQF Credit Rating Body.

**Guideline 27**                      Submitting bodies should explain their credit ratings to their learners

## Appendix 2

The following is the initial information required from an external organisation by GCU for Credit Rating purposes. There is a standard application form available in the Guidance for External Organisations on Credit Rating at GCU which covers this.

1. Name of the Organisation
2. Address of organisation and details of contact person in relation to the Credit Rating Exercise
3. Brief description of the organisation including nature and purpose, for example whether it is a public, private or not for profit company and its mission. (Documents may be appended to explain these)
4. Brief outline of the Learning or Training Policy, if the organisation has one. (If it is formal it may be attached to the relevant documentation). If it is not formally stated it needs to be described.
5. What learning programmes or learning units does the organisation provide?

If these are not constituted as modules with learning outcomes, see 6. If they are more formally constituted see 7.

6. If the organisation has a more formal approach the following information is required:
  - Overall programme aims and objectives of the programme
  - Programme or Module (or equivalent) names
  - Learning outcomes
  - How the programme is delivered (e.g. face to face, on-line)
  - Learning and teaching strategy
  - Assessment strategies
  - Length and structure of programme
  - Any entry requirements to the programme
  - Typical student numbers
  - Completion and achievement statistics
  - Quality assurance arrangements (e.g. internal and external verification)
  - An assessment, by the organisation of volume and level of credit (if feasible)
7. Has the programme(s) or learning been credit rated by any other agency.

## Appendix 3

The purpose of this document is to help get an overview of where provision is in relation to SCQF levels at module or learning unit level. It requires the Credit Rating Team to assess what form of evidence they think is best suited to make the necessary judgement in relation to credit rating. The subsequent forms help establish level and quantity of credit

This should be used in conjunction with audit tool in Appendix 4 which follows.

Name of module or learning units: .....

.....

	<b>Documents</b> What do we need to see?	<b>Interviews</b> Who do we need to talk to?
Teaching/training material		
Delivery (Direct)		
Delivery (Online)		
Learning Outcomes		
Assessment		
Verification systems		

## Level of Credit to be awarded

In the box below, describe what is being considered using the range of forms of evidence described in Appendix 4. Please use a separate sheet for each item being considered.

<b>SCQF Criteria</b>	<b>What Level is the provision at?</b> (Please refer to the SCQF level descriptors)	<b>Rationale</b>
Knowledge and Understanding		
Practice/Applied Knowledge		
Generic Cognitive Skills		
Communication/ ICT/Numeracy		
Autonomy/Working With Others		

### Overarching assessment

Please provide a summary of your rationale including, where necessary quotes to support your over arching judgement of the evidence considered.

**Quantity of Credit to be allocated**

Unit being considered, for example module, one day of formal training, on-line unit.	<b>Formal input Hours</b> For example, Classroom based delivery, online learning unit, seminars webinars	<b>Additional Activities Hours</b> For example, Reflective practice, work based practice,	<b>Assessment Hours</b> For example, preparation and completion of assessment theoretical and practical	<b>Total time</b>
<b>Total hours</b>				

**Credit Points**

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**Summary and rationale**

### Decision Summary

In the box below please put a summary of the judgements made and the signatures of the assessment team

Name of programme/learning unit	Level of provision	Credit points
Signed Credit Rating Lead		
Signed Subject specialist		
Signed External Expert (where appropriate)		

## Appendix 4

### Audit tools for assessing an external organisation in relation to SCQF criteria for Credit Rating

#### Learning Outcomes and Opportunities

1.	That there are defined aims and objectives of the learning opportunities, including a statement of possible articulation and progression arrangements	<i>In these boxes please note to what extent the organisation meets this standard and where the relevant evidence can be sourced.</i>
2.	That there is a clearly defined set of outcomes for the programme as a whole and each of its constituent parts	
3.	That there is a clear statement of the coherence of the outcomes in relation to the overall aims of the programme	
4.	That there is a description of the learning process including the notional hours of learning activity that supports the achievement of the defined outcomes.	
5.	That there is an indication of how the learning opportunities will be sustained and enhanced as a result of monitoring and evaluation.	

#### Assessment

1.	That there are valid and reliable methods of assessment and involving appropriate levels of externality	
2.	That the assessment criteria and processes are appropriate to the defined learning outcomes	
3.	That the assessment arrangements guard against plagiarism, cheating and fraud	
4.	That there are effective procedures for approving, supervising and reviewing assessment strategies and assessment	
5.	That there are clear criteria for marking assessments particularly for distinguishing a pass/fail	
6.	That the arrangements for re-examination or re-assessment are clear	
7.	That the appropriateness, effectiveness and rigour of any system of Recognition of Prior Learning is clearly outlined	

8.	That there are methods of proper and secure recording of learner achievement including the issuing of formal records, transcripts or certificates	
9.	That there are arrangements for appropriate external evaluations to be made regarding the assessment of outcomes including the evaluation both of the validity of the judgements made and of the appropriateness of the assessment instrument(s) in relation to the specified outcomes.	
10.	That current policy on the appointment of externals is appropriate in relation to clarity of duties, roles and competence.	
11.	That there is a system for periodic reporting from external assessors with a view to ensuring that the assessment processes and criteria have been applied consistently and achievements appropriately recorded	

# Appendix 5

## CREDIT RATING OF THE **PREPARING TO LEARN** PROGRAMME



University for the Common Good

BY **GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY**

**Submitting body:** Any External Organisation

**Number of credit points allocated against each module is as follows. All of the credit offered is general credit.**

### **Preparing to Learn (Introductory)**

SCQF level: 7

Notional hours of learning time: 20

Credit Points: 2

### **Preparing to Learn (Intermediate)**

SCQF level: 8

Notional hours of learning time: 80

Credit Points: 8

### **Preparing to Learn (Advanced)**

SCQF level: 9

Notional hours of learning time: 100

Credit Points: 10

**Principal link between the credit rating body and the submitting body:** Credit Rating Lead

**Credit rating group:** 1<sup>st</sup> Academic  
2<sup>nd</sup> Academic (lead assessor)  
3<sup>rd</sup> Academic

## **OUTCOMES OF CREDIT RATING DECISIONS AND MONITORING**

**Outcome of the credit rating process:** to credit-rate

**Duration of crediting rating before review:** 5 years

**Credit assigned:** General

**Number and level of credit points:** As stated above

**Monitoring requirements:** An annual report must be submitted to GCU, which includes information on:

- Any proposed major or minor changes in the outcomes expected;
- External examiners/evaluators reports;
- Statistics regarding recruitment, completion and achievement.