

Short Courses/Non-recognised Qualifications (NRQs)

Colleges are the most accessible route to learning, offering an invaluable route to gaining skills or improving employability or gaining a higher education. Colleges provide a flexible learning approach through full-time, part-time, day/block release or evening and weekend courses.

Short/NRQs courses can be broadly split into two types:

1. **Leisure courses** – these include courses that are not necessarily vocational in nature such as sports, languages, digital photography, cookery and art. These are more likely to be self-funded and make up a larger proportion of evening and weekend course delivery than they do in other modes of study, and are delivered as part of the sector's broader lifelong learning offering.
2. **Introductory and pre-access courses** – these are courses that while vocational in nature, do not in themselves lead to qualifications as recognised by assessors independent of the college such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), but are designed to provide a grounding in a vocational subject, a route into or back into vocational learning for people without recent experience of further or higher education, or with no/low level entry qualifications.

In the [Baseline Report for Academic Year 2012/13](#), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) set out detailed examination of the impact of guidance (SFC/26/2009) which announced that the SFC would no longer be funding courses running less than 10 hours, or those which lead to NRQs. Of the 208,000 enrolment drop shown between 2007/13, the SFC attributed half of these to the changes in funding rules impacting on short and non recognised qualifications (NRQs) courses.

SFC data indicates that adults with no qualifications tend to study entry level or non advanced qualifications, or those perhaps not attained at school. A large number undertake NRQ courses (19,530) such as taster/pre-access courses.

In particular female learners in the adult group (61,124) appear to strongly prefer part-time learning mainly day, evening and weekend, open, flexible and distance learning, with fewer than one in six – only 9,600 – studying full-time.

Young learners, as with the 25-59 cohort, also favour courses classed as short/NRQs. Over 50,000 of these students in 2007/08 were studying NRQs – almost 70%. In 2012/13 that number had fallen to just under 14,000, closer to half of the total. The high proportion is to be expected as the courses offered in school-college partnerships have often been bespoke taster classes designed to complement the curriculum and school timetable, and sometimes delivered jointly with a particular school. Those which are 'recognised' may reflect those attending specifically to gain qualifications such as Highers that are not offered in their school.

The guidance requiring that full-time provision be prioritised and funding of NRQs would cease does appear to have had a significant impact on provision, with the data showing that decreases in part-time, evening and weekend provision has reduced across all subject areas.

Colleges Scotland: This briefing has been provided by Colleges Scotland for MSPs' information. To discuss, or for further information, please contact:
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