

Nationally Recognised Qualification Delivered Through Online Learning and Assessment



Customer Service Professional
Journey to Excellence

Setting the Scene

The Improvement Service is the national improvement organisation for local government and community planning in Scotland. Working with councils, it has played an integral role in setting the development agenda across the last five years and beyond, supporting improvement across Scotland.

A national initiative involving a partnership of Scotland's 32 Scottish Councils - **Customer First** – was established as a transformational programme to encourage and support service providers to redesign services around customer needs. Customer First was Scottish Government-funded and Improvement Service-led.

The Challenge

Scotland's councils aimed to deliver more convenient and responsive public services, ensuring that at least 75% of core service requests were dealt with first time. For this to be realised it was recognised that customer service staff must have the right skills, tools and training.

In 2007, a project group was formed to consider a number of options to achieve this goal. A training programme was considered and quickly rejected in favour of the considerably greater challenge of creating a

customer service qualification. It was felt that a qualification would do more to, develop and empower employees, represent the importance of effective customer service across local government and offer national recognition.

The qualification had to offer wider benefits, including educational and career progression and portability across the Scottish public sector. To enhance flexibility for candidates plus reduce administration time and cost - centrally and at point of delivery

- the qualification had to adopt a blended learning approach while using online learning and assessment.

Renfrewshire Council was chosen as the initiative's lead council, to work with the Improvement Service and the qualification's awarding body, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), to develop the qualification. eCom Scotland was selected as the learning and technology partner for the development, build and delivery of the qualification.



The Solution

The design of the qualification was rigorous to ensure SQA's accreditation framework was met. Practitioners and subject matter experts in local government HR, Organisational Development and Customer Service, along with other external providers, collaborated effectively to ensure relevancy of content to the sorts of challenges typically faced by staff day-in, day-out.

eCom advised on curriculum development and online learning and assessment best practice to secure the right blend of online and face-to-face teaching and support. With a supportive learning environment viewed as critical to the Qualification's success, candidates take part in an induction programme, and each is assigned a learning coach.

eCom built the secure learning management and assessment platform, using the eNetEnterprise system, making it accessible from desktop, table and mobile devices. The easy-to-navigate qualification content provides links to support materials at relevant points. Candidates can take practice tests, submit assignments for e-marking, take high-stakes assessment, and access an online message tool to communicate with their learning coaches. A distinct brand identity was developed for the Qualification together with a dedicated website www.customerserviceprofessional.co.uk



The Award Level (SCQF Level 5) of the qualification was launched in 2008 and subsequently expanded to include both Certificate (SCQF Level 6) and Professional Development Award levels (SCQF Level 8).

Forty three public bodies now deliver the courses to their employees, including almost all of Scotland's 32 Councils, plus other public bodies such as the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service. Recently, the qualification has been introduced within NHS Scotland. Since launch, there has been over 2300 candidate registrations plus over 1100 graduates.

The qualification is SQA's fastest-growing customised award as well as a winner of two prestigious national awards, COSLA Excellence Gold Award and the HR Network Strategic Project of the Year.

The Benefits

The Customer Service Professional Qualification has helped to raise the quality of customer service across the public sector in Scotland. By using an outcomes-focused approach to public service delivery, the Qualification has

improved employees' skills, knowledge and behaviours, contributing to more effective customer service and improved customer satisfaction levels.

Delivering the qualification using blended learning has delivered significant cost benefits as well as provided staff with more options on how they learn. The online learning and secure assessment provides candidates the flexibility to work at their own time, place and pace. It also provides immediate test results and signposts candidates to appropriate revision, when required. In comparison to traditional classroom-based approaches, the qualification is delivered at approximately 1/6th of the average cost of a similar type and level of qualification.

The Customer Service Professional Qualification has provided councils and other public bodies with a highly relevant learning resource and, critically, one able to help the development of an organisation's key asset, its people. By recognising professionalism, it has helped councils and other public bodies to retain talent and attract fresh talent.



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