



New qualification delivers better services and savings

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Alison Gudgeon,
Highland Council



A pioneering, award-winning qualification for customer-facing professionals in Scotland's councils is helping Highland Council deliver better services for less.

Online learning is a proven way of transforming performance in local government. And the Customer Service Professional qualification - made available by Scotland's national Customer First programme - is delivering tangible savings while ensuring increased levels of skills.

It is the only local government-led online qualification certificated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority and aims to make customer service more efficient by increasing the ability of staff to deal with core service requests first time.

Alison Gudgeon, who lives and works in Lochinver for Highland Council, is one of the successful candidates who has completed the course. She works alone in the office, dealing with enquiries and also helping with the Passport Office's application process.

"My daily job involves dealing with customers - both internal and external to the council," Alison explains. "The qualification is definitely worthwhile. I do feel that it has helped me understand more about what the customer expects. I also feel I'm able to deal with enquiries more effectively and more confidently."

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Bottom Line Benefits

- £750,000 council savings in developing and delivering the qualification
- Faster, more efficient customer service
- Instant feedback and results for candidates sitting exams



In association with:



CUSTOMER FIRST

The Customer First Advantage

In the new spending context for local government, the Customer First programme helps councils to deliver:

Better quality public services
through improved collaboration and learning

Faster response
by delivering 'first time' public services

Enhanced credibility
improving perceptions of local government

Lower costs
by delivering public services more efficiently

Wider coverage
ensuring people receive the services they're entitled to



Lochinver, the largest white fish harbour in the North-West of Scotland, is 100 miles from Inverness, so it was hard for Alison to attend classes at Highland Council training centre. She had a coach from Inverness who helped her with modules and was at the end of the phone. During quiet spells at work, Alison was able to progress on her own, reading through the online material and undertaking mock tests. E-learning means huge savings in print too. The only paper that is now required is for the certificate, which Alison proudly received at a ceremony at Highland Council headquarters.

The Customer Service Professional qualification has been developed by Customer First in conjunction with eCom Scotland and Renfrewshire as lead council. Providing a single online e-learning solution for all 32 Scottish councils has generated estimated savings of £500,000 in procurement, development and roll out. The central managed service for candidate registration, certification and quality assurance provided by Renfrewshire Council saves another £250,000.

Linda Steedman, Managing Director, of eCom Scotland, says: "The delivery of online examinations and assessments is a massive cultural change for local councils. These courses now provide a managed system which gives major savings in having one national assessment process for the delivery of consistent high standards in public services."

As a mature learner in her 50s, Alison was apprehensive about undertaking the new qualification, but would now recommend it to anyone working in a customer-facing position across Scotland's councils.

"I feel in most cases it does help the customer get a quicker response to their enquiry about local services," she concludes.

What Products?

The Customer Service Professional Qualification - available as Award, Certificate or Diploma and portable across Scottish local government. Rather than being purely academic, the qualification recognises the importance of professionalism in the work place.

Number Crunching

- £250,000** - savings from the provision of a central managed service for candidate registration, certification and quality assurance
- 66%** - savings from online learning versus traditional classroom teaching
- 21** - the number of Scottish Councils and associated bodies - and with more to follow - now delivering the Customer Service Professional qualification

Customer First is a £34.5m Scottish Government-backed programme to deliver more convenient and responsive public services, encourage online access to services and ensure that at least 75% of core service requests can be handled at first point of contact. It has been developed in partnership with councils, COSLA and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), under the auspices of the Improvement Service.