What Course Should I Take To Get Into Security Management?

“Make sure any management course you take is accredited. Don’t waste your money on courses that cost £30-60 and expect the contents to rock your world or employers to know what they are. Those short courses are good for guidance, but a real qualification will have accreditation by a reputable organisation. The even better courses will have university credits attached to them so pick wisely.”

John Sephton, MSyI


OK, so how do you choose wisely?

A lot depends on your starting point and where you want to go – a vocational route or an academic route? But let’s start with some key knowledge about the building blocks of qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The building blocks are slightly different in Scotland.

It’s complicated, what seems to be clear-cut often turns out to be not so. In this article I’ll avoid some of the mind-boggling detail and concentrate on the bits which might help you decide on which qualification to pick. But, be careful, be watchful – smoke and mirrors can be misleading.
So, here are some of the things you need to think about.

Regulated Qualification Framework, Qualification Levels And Titles

There would be good reasons to choose a qualification which is on the Regulated Qualification Framework (RQF).

Why?

Because all formal general and vocational qualifications have been measured by Awarding Organisations, like BTEC and City & Guilds, against certain nationally agreed standards to do with size and quality before they are placed on the RQF at a given level from 1 to 8, where Level 1 is a very basic level and Level 8 is a PhD/Doctorate. SIA qualifications are mostly Level 2, school leaving qualifications like A Levels and some industry vocational and supervisory qualifications are Level 3. Level 4 includes some vocational qualifications like BTEC HNCs and Level 5 includes BTEC HNDs.

The Regulated Qualification Framework Guide To Size And Title Of Qualifications

The regulations for the RQF provide a way of comparing qualifications. The size of a qualification is denoted by the terms Award, Certificate or Diploma and is determined by the total qualification time (TQT) needed to complete it. TQT includes contact time with a tutor or assessor, or non-contact time for assignments and individual studies often referred to a private or directed study time.

- Award has a TQT value of 120 hours or less
- Certificate has a TQT value of 121 – 369 hours
- Diploma has a TQT value of 370 or more hours

A credit value may also be added based on 10 hours = 1 credit.

Credits are important because they can be used to gain access to the next level of qualification.

Be careful, all of the qualification titles can apply to all qualification levels as you can see here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_qualifications_frameworks_in_the_United_Kingdom

However, having said you should look for a qualification on the RQF, a search of the register of these regulated qualifications https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/ shows there are very few qualifications in security management at the higher levels which are likely to be the ones you are looking for.
So how are qualifications not on the RQF regulated? How can you be sure of their quality?

Customised vocational qualifications

There are two Awarding Organisations (AOs), Pearson’s and Industry Qualifications (IQ) which have developed their own customised qualification frameworks designed to meet the needs of employers or training providers who are seeking new or more flexible qualifications than the RQF offers. These are the Awarding Organisations which provide the quality assurance for qualifications with which you may be familiar – for example, the BTEC Certificate (Level 3) and Diploma (Level 5) in Security Management and the International Security Management Institute's Certified Security Management Professional, CSMP® Level 6 Diploma.

Both these AOs provide publicly available information about how these qualifications are developed in partnership with the employer or training provider. They both indicate that the same standards as those for the RQF qualifications will be applied to the customised ones. So, the customised qualifications must have the titles and the TQT values set out above. They may also have a credit value.

However, unlike the RQF, this information is not always publicly available.

A number of security qualifications which are CPD accredited are not part of the RQF and are not customised qualifications, so are not quality assured in the same way. The level of these courses is not always made clear, but a little digging seems to indicate that they are at Level 2 or 3 and may use the titles Certificate and Diploma with no reference to the regulations laid down by the RQF. So, you may find a Security Management Diploma which takes only eight hours.

Degrees

Why do a degree?

If you’ve got experience of the industry, are keen to improve your knowledge and promotion prospects, then a degree is worth thinking about. As the industry continues to professionalise, there is an increasing awareness that academic qualifications carry more value with employers than vocational ones.

A degree not only provides expert knowledge, but it also develops that broader range of skills which you probably already find you need in your work: skills such as effective communication skills, critical thinking, analysis and evaluation, team-working, management and leadership. You will find good employers are increasingly looking for these skills.

University degrees in the UK are set out on specific higher education frameworks which are linked to the levels of the RQF. Too complicated (and mind numbing!) to go into here. Suffice it to say that they all follow the titles, credits and levels (with a slight numbering difference in Scotland) set out on the table below.
Most university degrees last three years and are set at Levels 4, 5 and 6. Master’s is Level 7. There are a limited number of university accredited qualifications in security management in England and Wales. These include:

- Portsmouth University BSc in Risk and Security Management, part time by distance learning
- Buckinghamshire New University’s BA (Hons) in Security Consultancy, part time by distance learning
- Buckinghamshire New University BA (Hons) Corporate Security Management with Foundation Year, full time
- University of South Wales BSc (Hons) in International Risk and Security Management, full time and part time but both on campus

Foundation Degrees take two years to complete so the 240 credits accumulated can be used to gain acceptance to the third year of a BA.

Candidates can, if they choose, leave their degree programme after one or two years and take their credits with them as a Certificate or Diploma in Higher Education. They can then seek entry to another programme using these qualifications at a later date.

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**University Qualifications, Levels and Credits**

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<tr>
<th>HE Levels</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Exit Route from Degree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>PhD/Doctorate</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Post-graduate diploma</td>
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<td>Post-graduate certificate</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Final Year BA Hons/BSc Hons</td>
<td>2/3 of Master’s Course (120 Credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Final Year BA or BSc (Ordinary)</td>
<td>1/3 of Master’s Course (60 Credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Second Year BA Second Year Foundation Degree HND</td>
<td>Diploma in Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>First Year BA First Year Foundation Degree HNC</td>
<td>Certificate in Higher Education</td>
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Masters

John Sephton also said:

“If you have significant experience in the industry, you can go straight to a master’s degree.”

Indeed, if you have a significant number of years in a range of roles at a senior level, a masters would definitely be worth considering.

There are a number of master’s programmes in Security Management including:
- University of Leicester Master’s in Security and Risk Management
- University of Portsmouth, MSc in Security Management
- University of South Wales MSc International Security and Risk Management
- Buckinghamshire New University MSc in Risk Management
- Edinburgh Napier University MSc in Crowded Space Design, Management and Risk Analysis

So, there you have it – Regulated Qualifications, customised qualifications and university qualifications.

Which to choose? How to choose?

RQF qualifications
There are too few at a higher level to consider further here

Customised vocational qualifications
You need to apply the RQF guide to size and title of qualification to courses you may be considering. Be aware - not all customised qualifications make clear the title and size; you will need to ask questions.

Credit and progression
Ask questions about credit and progression. Will the qualification give you credits which will enable you to progress to the next level?

For example, a BTEC HND at Level 5 requires the same number of hours to complete as a first two years of a degree course i.e. 2400 hours, and therefore offers 240 credits. A successful candidate will be able to make a strong case for access to the third year of a relevant bachelor’s degree.

On the other hand, a BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Management only requires 390 hours, so a successful candidate will only have 39 credits. These credits could be used to reduce the amount of studying for the second year of a management degree by maybe two modules but that would be decided by the institution involved.

Although not publicly stated on any website, it would seem that the BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Security Management has been allocated 80 credits. This could provide exemption from 4 modules of the first year of a security management degree. The Diploma takes a year or 800 hours.
The International Security Management Institute’s Certified Security Management Professional CSMP® Level 6 Diploma requires 370 hours, so attracts 37 credits. The Awarding Organisation, Industry Qualifications, does make this information publicly available. They also say:

“These credits may be used towards higher education in UK, but this will be at the discretion of individual education institutions who will also take into account the relevance of the acquired qualification for the new programme.

**What does the level mean?**

Ask questions about the stated level of the qualification

You will notice that the two BTEC qualifications are both called Level 5 and while they both have Diploma in their titles, the number of hours involved and therefore the amount of studying and assessment you would have to do are hugely different. The HND is actually recognised to be equivalent to two years of study at degree level. The Level 5 Diploma in Management is not. Some of the content and assessment may be at second year university level, but the 390 hours limits the depth of study.

The BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Security Management provides access to the first year (Level 4) of a degree. Some of the 800 hours may contain second year university level (Level 5) content.

The CSMP® covers 12 modules in a year at Level 6 which is the level of the final year of a degree. They say it is ‘equivalent in terms of academic rigour to 3rd year Bachelor’s degree’. But again, the number of hours available limits the possibility of the depth of study required at third year degree level.

While these kinds of qualifications will add to your knowledge of the security industry, they are unlikely to be able to develop the wider range of skills needed for a management position – critical thinking, report writing skills, communication – those skills which enable effective individuals to mobilise teams, defuse possible conflict and clarify confusion.

**Degrees**

There are only a few to choose among at the moment, but it is important to know that most of them recognise the value of professional experience and will offer ways of accessing the degree without formal entry qualifications. It may be that you have enough experience and work-based experience and/or qualifications to be accepted on to the second year of a degree. There is an element of knowing how best to present and “sell” yourself.

**Alternative route to a Bachelor’s degree**

Silverback Security Academy offers an alternative route to a degree in Security Management. This organisation has a Certificate and Diploma in Security Management accredited by a Scottish University at Levels 4 and 5 on the qualification table above. Each year has 120 credits. Successful Diploma candidates can use their 240 credits for direct access to the third year of relevant degree programmes listed on P49.

The courses are offered as blended learning, based around 6 workshops in each year. They combine specialist industry knowledge with the development of university study skills including critical thinking, research, analysis and evaluation skills, report and essay writing skills.

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It is possible to combine the BTEC Level 5 Diploma in Security Management with relatively new Advanced Diploma in Security Management, an IQ customised qualification, comprising three modules taught at a master’s level to get 40 credits toward the University of South Wales’ Masters in Security and Risk Management. These modules are mainly a preparation for masters level research. They would give you exemption from two of the MSc modules. You would need to complete the remaining modules to get the 180 credits for a masters.

There is another qualification for security consultants which offers successful candidates 60 credits towards a University of the West of Scotland’s MBA with a specialty in Risk and Resilience or 60 credits towards a number of MSc degrees at Buckinghamshire New University. You would need to complete the remaining parts of the course to get the 180 credits for a masters.

Once you’ve navigated the rapids of the various qualifications and got an idea of the course you want to follow, then you have to consider how well you might fit in to a particular programme of study. In short …

How do you like to learn?

Have you thought about how you like to learn? What are your preferences? On your own, or with other people? Do you have the commitment/ motivation/discipline to study on your own with online learning? Do you prefer to have regular contact with a teacher? And what motivates you to learn?

Currently, online learning is very popular. It appeals to people who are fully employed and believe they have little time for studying and a lot of what’s available provides stimulating materials and lots of online tutorial support. That may work for you to start with, but you need to be sure you can carry on, on your own over the months and possibly years.

Perhaps you might consider an alternative approach which could be blended learning in which time is spent with colleagues and security experts in workshops alongside individual study. This approach can help motivate you to complete assignments and succeed.

So, what do you need to think about when choosing a security management qualification?

I would recommend that you consider the following:

- The level of the course and the credits it will give you are perhaps the most important things to consider. Ask how many credits and at what level.
- Check the current operational experience of the tutors on any course you are interested in. Are they current practitioners?
- If you are looking for a lower level qualification chose one which is on the RQF
- Be very wary of courses which are not on the RQF or not customised vocational qualifications
- Learn to recognise customised vocational qualifications.
- And watch out for courses called Diploma in Security Management which may only be at Level 2 or 3. You may be wasting your money on a course which offers little in the way of worthwhile learning, may not enhance your CV and won’t help you progress to another level.
- Be wary of courses that claim to be at degree level. Check that they really are full degrees and not just some modules taught at the level of a degree.
- Think about how you like to study, what support you might need and choose a course that you can stick with.
- Price – comes into it. Remember, you get what you pay for. Consider value for money.

There are no short-cuts or quick fixes - good qualifications from quality organisations don’t come cheap, so it pays to check out the options before you pull out your credit card, launch the raft and take to the rapids.
Author’s note:
This article represents my view from the boat amidst the rapids. It’s a changing panorama and, around the next bend in the river, you can be sure that there will be a different set of arrangements, challenges and interests. Best keep the eyes peeled and steer carefully amongst the confusion of rocks and spray.

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Originally, Anne’s background was in teaching, both in the UK and abroad. Subsequently Anne worked as a Vocational Qualifications Manager at a department of Oxford University specialising in assessment and qualification development where she worked on accredited professional development courses for business and industry.

More recently drawn into the Silverback circle of specialists to take on the role of Quality Assurance and Development Manager.

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