

Vocational and Other Qualifications Quarterly: January to March 2017

Background information accompanying the
statistical release



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Information about the statistics

Purpose

This release presents information on the number of certificates issued for regulated vocational and other qualifications during January to March 2017 (quarter 1, 2017).

It does not include the Advanced Extension Award, GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications, project and principal learning. The number of certificates awarded for these qualifications can be found on the website of Joint Council for Qualifications¹.

Data tables accompanying this release shows the number of awards broken down by awarding organisation, sector subject area, type of qualification, level of qualification and country.

Comparisons in this release are mainly made with data from the same quarter of the previous year and the 12-month period up to the end of the same quarter of the previous year. This is because of seasonal changes in the number of certificates issued over the year.

Geographical coverage

The data cover regulated qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, whether regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA (Northern Ireland regulator).

Description

Ofqual regulates qualifications and assessments in England. Until May 2016, it also regulated vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. This bulletin includes data on vocational and other qualifications awarded in England as well as data on qualifications taken in Wales and Northern Ireland collected on behalf of Qualifications Wales, the regulator in Wales, and CCEA, the regulator in Northern Ireland.

Regulated qualifications are classified into 19 qualification types with an associated 'level', which is indicative of the level of demand. The table below shows the current levels for each type of qualification and the relationship between them. Level 3 is at about the same level of demand, but not necessarily the same size, as an A level, and Level 2 is at about the same level of demand as a GCSE at grade C or above.

¹ <http://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results>

On 1 October 2015, Ofqual withdrew the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) requirements. From that date, the QCF type has ceased to exist. However, for administrative reasons, until our new system was introduced in summer 2016, awarding organisations could still use the QCF type on the system for new qualifications when no other type was appropriate.

Qualification type	Current levels
Advanced Extension Award	Level 3
Basic skills	Entry Level, Levels 1 and 2
CVET	Levels 1 to 6
English for speakers of other languages	Entry Level, Levels 1, 2 and 3
Entry Level	Entry
Essential skills Wales	Entry Level, Levels 1 to 3
Free-standing mathematics qualification	Levels 1, 2, 3
Functional skills	Entry Level, Levels 1 and 2
GCE A level	Level 3
GCE AS qualification	Level 3
GCSE (9 to 1)	Level 1/Level 2
GCSE	Level 1/Level 2
Higher level	Levels 4 to 8
IVET	Entry Level, Levels 1 to 5
Key skills	Levels 1 to 4
NVQ	Levels 1 to 5
'Other general' qualification	Levels 1, 1/2, 2 and 3
Occupational qualification	Levels 1 to 4
Principal learning	Levels 1 to 3
Project	Levels 1 to 3
QCF	Entry Level, Levels 1 to 8
Vocationally related qualification	Entry Level, Levels 1 to 8
Welsh Baccalaureate	Levels 1, 1/2, 2 and 3

This release presents data on regulated vocational and other qualifications² coloured blue in the table above. It does not include the rest of the qualifications given in the above on which data are published separately. Neither does it include university degrees, which Ofqual does not regulate.

² Vocational and other qualifications are taken in order to develop and demonstrate the skills needed for a particular job, to improve career progression, or for personal growth or leisure purposes. They include some qualifications taken in schools, sixth forms and colleges, for example Level 1/ Level 2 Certificates and BTECs.

Data source

Information on qualifications (covering title, type, awarding organisation, sector subject area and level) is taken from [Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications](#), which gives information on regulated qualifications and recognised awarding organisations in England and Northern Ireland. Data on qualifications offered in Wales is available at [Qualification in Wales \(QiW\) database](#).

Qualification types used to describe the nature of qualifications are used in the registers of both Qualification Wales and Ofqual. However, there are some that are present only in the Qualification Wales register and therefore only contain qualifications offered in Wales. These qualification types were incorporated into the Ofqual systems from July 2016 for the 2016 quarter 2 data collection.

Data on the number of certificates awarded are sent by awarding organisations to Ofqual.

Limitations

Data are collected at the earliest point available, which is the first day of the next reporting period. This reduces the time between the activity and reporting on the activity.

The main source of potential error is in the information provided by awarding organisations. Ofqual cannot guarantee the number of certificates submitted is correct and there may be systematic bias when the information is sent, although awarding organisations are expected to provide the correct data. Ofqual compares the data over time and checks for systematic issues. Summary data are then sent back to awarding organisations to be checked and confirmed. The figures reported in this release reflect the certificates issued by awarding organisations at the time of data collection.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance procedures are carried out as explained in the [Quality Assurance Framework for Statistical Publications](#) published by Ofqual to ensure the accuracy of the data and to challenge or question it, where necessary. Ofqual continuously manages this process by:

- ensuring that data providers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design phase and for any subsequent change;
- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;

- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same provider;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers; and
- having a proportionate data-auditing framework in place, allowing for auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes as necessary.

Publication may be deferred if the statistics are not considered fit for purpose.

Published data

The [data underlying these statistics](#) are published alongside this statistical release at 9.30am on the day of release. The data set is not revised until the next publication is released. You can find the publication schedule for the next releases by [clicking here](#).

Revisions

Once published, data on the number of certificates issued for any qualification are not usually subject to revision, although subsequent releases may be revised to insert late data or to correct an error. Qualifications may also be recategorised to a different type, level, sector subject area or awarding organisation. In some cases, data may be amended to reflect the new categorisation.

In this release, previous years' figures from three awarding organisations (Trinity College London, Quasafe Awards and Chartered Management Institute) have been revised. The table of revisions, published alongside this publication, shows the changes for each country (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

Confidentiality and rounding

In accordance with Ofqual's rounding policy, figures in the statistics and commentary for the number of certificates issued are rounded to the nearest 50 for ease of understanding. If the value is less than 25, it is represented as 0~. A 0 represents zero achievements. In general, we use unrounded values to derive percentages. As a result of rounded figures, the percentages shown in charts/tables may not necessarily add up to 100.

In the datasets published alongside this publication, the figures are rounded to the nearest 5 (values less than 5 is represented as 0~). A 0 represents zero achievements. This is to ensure the data does not reveal an individual student.

Status

These statistics are classified as National Statistics. The presentation of these statistics have been changed starting with this release based on the user consultation held by Ofqual in February and March 2017. Please [click here](#) for more

details on the consultation and its outcome. After the changes these statistics have retained their National Statistics status (subject to ongoing conversations with the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#)).

Related publications

[Further education and skills: March 2017](#): the quarterly Statistical First Release, published by the Department Education, reports statistics about learner participation, outcomes and highest qualification held in further education and skills.

[A level and other 16 to 18 results: 2015 to 2016 \(revised\)](#) covers A level and other results for 16- to 18-year-olds at the end of their final year.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency's [Individualised Learner Record](#) data and the Department for Education's [national pupil database \(NPD\)](#) provide data on graded qualifications and data broken down by region. The latter also provides data on progression between award, certificate and diploma, and number of registrations.

Definitions

A levels

Also known as General Certificates of Education (GCE), the A level is an academic qualification offered by educational bodies in the UK to students completing secondary or pre-university education. At present, a combination of legacy and reformed A levels are available to students. A levels are generally (but not exclusively) sat by 18-year-olds in schools and colleges but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification. The first reformed A levels will be awarded in 2017. Click [here](#) for more information on the reform timetable see.

Accreditation

A process by which Ofqual (or one of the other regulators) reviews and confirms that proposed qualifications meet specific criteria before they can be offered. Ofqual no longer requires all regulated qualifications

Accredited qualification

This is an old term that is sometimes used to mean 'regulated qualification' (see below). Ofqual now allows awarding organisations to submit most qualifications for regulation without having been accredited, so it is strictly incorrect to refer to regulated qualifications as accredited.

Awarding organisation

An awarding organisation is recognised by the qualifications regulators in England, Wales and/or Northern Ireland to develop, deliver and award qualifications. Awarding organisations are also referred to as exam boards in the context of GCSEs and A levels.

Certificate

A formal acknowledgement of a student's achievement. This will be any award that is not graded as U, absent or X (fail).

Certification end date

The last date on which a student may be issued with a certificate of achievement for the qualification.

GCSEs

General Certificates of Secondary Education are the main school-leaving qualification in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. They are available in a range of subjects and can be studied alongside other qualifications. They are generally (but not exclusively) sat by 16-year-olds in schools and colleges, but are open to anyone who wants to gain a qualification.

Level

Qualifications are assigned a level from Entry Level, then Level 1 through to Level 8 (equivalent to a doctorate), indicating the broad level of demand of the qualification. Click [here](#) for further information.

National vocational qualifications (NVQs)

These are work-related, competence-based qualifications that cover a broad range of industry sectors and occupations, and are delivered in a workplace setting.

Other general qualifications

Qualifications that assess a particular subject area, such as music or art, other than GCSEs, AS and A levels. These qualifications are not directly work related but may support career development. They are often graded. The category also includes qualifications at Level 1/Level 2 certificates.

Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

A set of regulatory rules for vocational qualifications that Ofqual has withdrawn from October 2015 in England and Northern Ireland.

Quarter

It refers to calendar quarters. Quarter 1 (Q1) refers to January to March, quarter 2 (Q2) is April to June, quarter 3 (Q3) is July to September, and quarter 4 (Q4) is October to December.

Recognition

The formal process that Ofqual operates, whereby awarding organisations that wish to offer regulated qualifications can demonstrate that they meet Ofqual's recognition criteria. The scope of recognition is the qualifications or types of qualification that the awarding organisation is recognised to offer, which may be quite narrow or very broad. Recognition is a robust gateway into the regulated marketplace. Only applicants who meet the criteria in full will be recognised. Recognised organisations have to meet Ofqual's Conditions of Recognition on an ongoing basis.

Register

The [Register of Regulated Qualifications](#) contains details of recognised awarding organisations and the regulated qualifications they offer.

Regulated qualification

A qualification that is offered by a recognised awarding organisation within the scope of its recognition. Regulated qualifications must be added to the Register of qualifications and have to meet Ofqual's requirements. Some qualifications are subject to an accreditation requirement and have to be checked by the regulator before they can be offered as regulated qualifications.

Vocationally related qualifications

These are work-related, competence-based qualifications designed to give students the skills and knowledge they need to do a job. They are related to employment but, unlike NVQs, do not necessarily require a work placement.

Statistical policies

The policies and procedures that Ofqual follow for production and release of its statistical releases are available [here](#).

Useful links

The report and data tables accompanying this release are available [here](#).

Feedback

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Should you have any comments on this statistical release and how to improve it to meet your needs please contact us at statistics@ofqual.gov.uk.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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