



Qualifications
& Credit
Framework

The Qualifications and Credit Framework: an introduction for higher education institutions

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About this leaflet

Learners will soon be applying for admission to higher education institutions with qualifications accredited to the new Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

This leaflet tells you about the QCF and gives you the information you need to understand how the system works, and how it relates to higher education.

What is the QCF?

The QCF is the new framework for creating and accrediting qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It's designed to make the whole system more flexible and accessible for learners and the qualifications offered far more relevant to learners' and employers' needs.

The QCF:

- recognises smaller steps of learning and enables learners to build qualifications bit by bit
- helps learners achieve skills and qualifications that meet industry needs
- enables work-based training to be recognised and formally accredited.

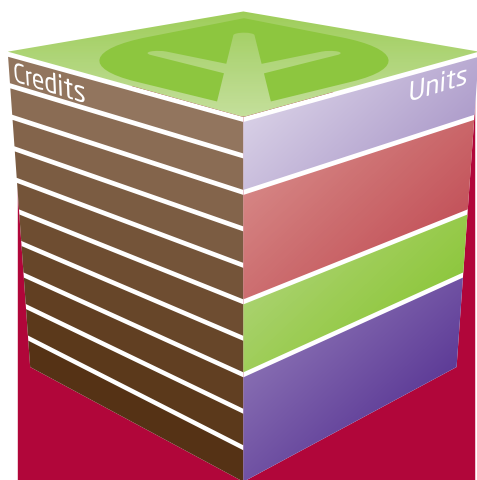
How does it work?

In the QCF, everything learnt is valuable. All qualifications in the QCF are built from smaller units of learning. Every unit and qualification has a credit value (showing how much time it takes to complete — one credit represents 10 hours) and a level between Entry level and level 8 (showing how difficult it is).

There are three sizes of qualifications in the QCF:

- **Award** (1 to 12 credits)
- **Certificate** (13 to 36 credits)
- **Diploma** (37 credits or more).

The structure of a QCF qualification

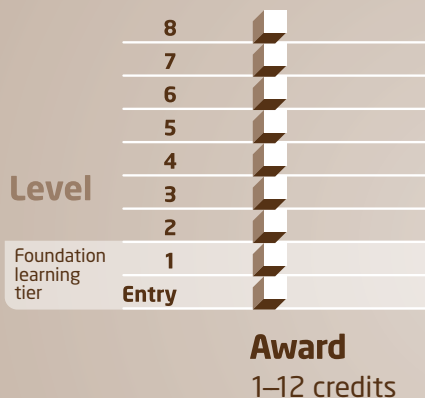


In the QCF, learners can accumulate credit in small steps by completing units, which can then build up into a full qualification.

Each qualification title contains the following:

- the level of the qualification (from Entry level at the bottom to level 8 at the top)
- the size of qualification (Award/Certificate/Diploma)
- details indicating the content of the qualification.

CHALLENGE



The qualification name — Award, Certificate or Diploma — represents the size of a qualification, not how difficult it is. To understand how difficult a unit or qualification is,

This consistent way of describing what subject the qualification covers, how difficult it is and how much work it involves will help learners and employers compare different qualifications.

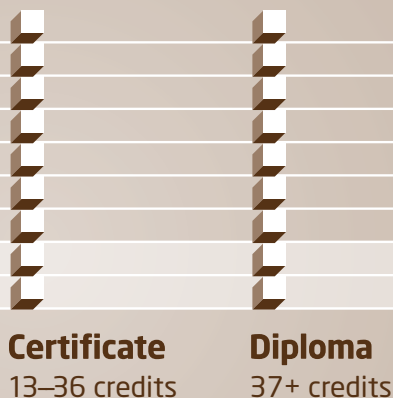
The QCF and other frameworks

The QCF does not replace the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) but the levels are equivalent at the higher levels. Familiar qualifications, such as bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees, will still remain a part of the FHEQ, while high-level professional qualifications may be accredited to the QCF.

The QCF has been designed as an inclusive framework for all regulated qualifications. Apprenticeships and Diplomas for 14- to 19-year-olds have been designed with the QCF in mind and are expected to become part of the framework in the future.

How might learners progress from further to higher education?

During the development of the QCF, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (now operating as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA)) and the qualifications regulators were working with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Joint Forum for Higher Levels to develop overarching principles and operational criteria for a common approach to credit. These aim to encourage learner progression



SIZE

it might be helpful to know that GCSEs (grades A* to C) are level 2, A levels are level 3, and a PhD is equivalent in difficulty to level 8.

Examples of QCF qualifications

Level 1	Certificate	in sport and active leisure
Level 4	Diploma	in buying and merchandising for fashion retail
Level 8	Award	in strategic direction and leadership

within lifelong learning and between the further and higher education systems. They have been evaluated and trials are currently underway, with learners transferring credit from QCF units and qualifications to higher education programmes.

How can higher education institutions get involved with the QCF?

Higher education institutions may want to use units and qualifications that are accredited to the QCF in their own programmes. They may also want to become a recognised awarding organisation in the QCF. This means that they are recognised by the qualifications regulators (Ofqual in England, DCELLS in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland) to develop units, rules of combination — pathways of units learners can follow to get a qualification — and/or assess and award credits and qualifications in the QCF. The University of the Arts London is now a recognised awarding organisation in the QCF.

The QCF in practice

Learners can avoid duplicating the learning and assessment they have already done in three ways:

- For achievement within the QCF, learners can transfer credits between units and qualifications.
- Other learning and achievements that haven't been certificated can be assessed and awarded through "recognition of prior learning".
- Learners with certificated achievements outside the QCF, who already have the skills and knowledge for a unit, can claim "exemption" and not have to repeat their learning.

What are the benefits of the QCF?

Units and qualifications in the QCF are beneficial to all of its end users as they're:

- transferable
- flexible
- quality assured
- easy to understand
- geared towards progression.

For learners the QCF:

- enables them to complete units at a pace and in a way that fits around their home and work lives
- allows them to build up all their learning towards units and qualifications that employers have helped design
- means they can use their learning and achievement towards recognised qualifications and avoid repeating what they've already learnt
- makes it easy to compare how hard each qualification is and how much work it involves
- has smaller steps of learning that make it possible to take new paths to success, either by progressing further with a skill or

by changing direction and putting the learning to a new use.

For employers the QCF:

- actively involves them in deciding what training and education is needed for their industry's future
- lets them get their in-house training recognised within a national framework
- can be tailored to suit their company's needs – they can get single units of training recognised as well as whole qualifications
- enables them to join forces with other employers to create qualifications relevant to their sector
- helps them quickly measure the level and size of achievements of prospective employees
- enables them to target their training to the needs of individual employees.

For learning providers the QCF:

- enables them to design more tailored learning programmes, suitable to individual learners' needs
- means they can easily see what learners have already achieved

and how that learning can be put towards other units and qualifications

- is quality assured – the QCF is a regulated framework
- lets them present courses and qualifications in a language that everyone understands
- offers the chance to work with employers and learners in new and innovative ways.

When's it happening?

The implementation of the QCF has already begun. The process of bringing all vocational qualifications into the new framework is now well under way, with growing numbers of learners taking units and qualifications through the system. By 2010, it's expected that all vocational qualifications will need to be accredited to the QCF and by that point, the QCF will have replaced the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in vocational qualifications.

Who's involved?

The former Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (now

operating as QCDA), Ofqual and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) to implement the QCF in England.

QCDA is working with partner organisations to get the education sector ready for putting the QCF into practice. We're working closely with sector skills councils, awarding organisations, learning providers and learners.

The LSC is responsible for implementing funding, planning and performance measures to support qualifications within the QCF in England. It's responsible for delivering the QCF Service Layer, which holds learners' achievement data from awarding organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It will also provide information, advice and guidance practitioners in England with information to help them advise learners and employers about QCF qualifications.

Ofqual, together with its partner regulators in Wales (DCELLS) and Northern Ireland (CCEA), is responsible for regulating the QCF.

Where to get more information

To watch an animation on how the QCF works, along with all sorts of other useful information about the new framework, visit www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf.

Subscribe for monthly email updates at www.qcda.gov.uk/subscribe.

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Council for the Curriculum,
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