



The Qualifications and Credit Framework: an introduction for learning providers

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About this leaflet

Over the next 18 months, providers will be learning how to use the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) to develop personalised learning programmes that suit learners' needs.

This leaflet tells you about the QCF and will help you to understand how the new system works and how it can benefit you, as a provider. It also has information on the support available to providers.

What is the QCF?

The QCF is the new framework for creating and accrediting qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It's at the heart of a major reform of the vocational qualifications system, which will become simpler to understand and use, more accessible to a wider range of learners, and more relevant to learners' and employers' needs.

The QCF:

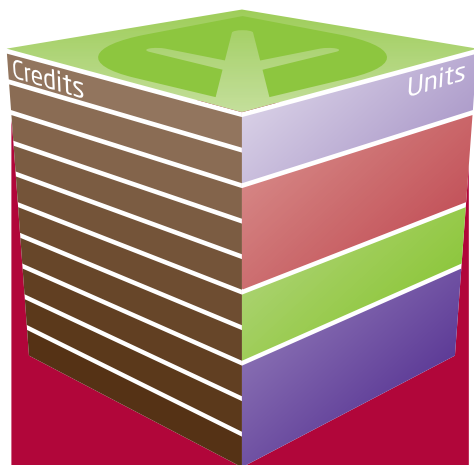
- recognises smaller steps of learning and enables learners to build up qualifications bit by bit
- helps learners achieve skills and qualifications that meet industry needs

- is open to a wider range of awarding organisations, including employers, which means that work-based training is also 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).

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.

There are three sizes of qualifications in the QCF:

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

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.**

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.

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



The qualification name – Award, Certificate or Diploma – represents the size of a qualification, not how difficult it is.

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) for vocational qualifications.

Who's involved?

The former Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Ofqual to implement the QCF in England.

QCA, now operating as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), is working with partner organisations to get the education sector ready for putting the QCF into practice. We're working closely with learning providers, awarding organisations, sector skills councils and learners.

The LSC is responsible for implementing funding, planning and performance measures to support qualifications within the QCF in England. It's also delivering the QCF Service Layer, which stores learners' achievement data from awarding organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It also provides 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.

Support for providers

QCDA is working with the following organisations to help providers get ready for the QCF.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) has set up the LSIS QCF Readiness Provider Support Programme to help managers and practitioners from learning providers to use the QCF to deliver learning programmes that meet the needs of learners and employers. Support on offer includes a consultancy service for QCF action planning, professional development

opportunities, events, resources and funding for action research projects. To find out more visit www.qcfprovidersupport.net/home.

The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) is helping large, independent work-based learning (WBL) providers understand the QCF through various communications and events.

This will help them see how they can improve their offer to learners by delivering flexible learning that reflects individual learners' pace and style.

ALP has recruited a dedicated team of provider liaison managers to work with the large WBL providers. They will help WBL providers understand and make use of available support services on business and strategic planning activities. ALP is keen to talk to providers about the QCF and explain how ALP can support them over the next 18 months. To find out more, visit www.learningproviders.org.uk.

The Association of Colleges (AoC) is providing communications and support with the introduction of the QCF to colleges. AoC is speaking to those who need to understand the implications of the QCF at a strategic level and so will be dealing with principals, governors and senior managers. AoC is keen to

help providers with the QCF and explain how it can support them over the next 18 months. To find out more, visit www.aoc.co.uk.

The LSC expects that providers will start to offer QCF qualifications, where it is appropriate and available, from August 2009. Initially, the LSC will prioritise QCF provision through the following gateways: Train to Gain, Pre-employment Training, the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) and Adult Learner Responsive. The June 2009 LSC *policy update* (at <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support>) provides key information about the progress towards wider QCF implementation across publicly funded learning and skills provision in England.

How the QCF works alongside other reforms

The QCF has been designed as an inclusive framework for all regulated qualifications. Apprenticeships, Diplomas and Welsh Baccalaureate qualifications and units have been designed with the QCF in mind and are expected to become part of the framework in the future. Guidance is also being developed on the relationship between the QCF and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

The QCF will be linked with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. This common European reference tool will enable European countries to easily compare achievements within qualifications systems across countries.

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 'recognising 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.

Benefits of the QCF

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

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

They're transferable

All units in the QCF have a credit value. It's this credit that lets individuals take their learning achievements with them as they make progress on their course or training. In some cases they can also use the credit towards another qualification, so they don't have to repeat their learning.

This means that you, as a provider, know where learners are starting from and that you have more options of learning programmes that you can suggest to learners.

It also enables learners to keep track of how they're progressing on their course, training or qualification, giving them a sense of ownership and control of their learning and training.

They're flexible

All qualifications in the QCF have been built from smaller units of learning. You can offer clear and flexible routes to achieving qualifications that are suitable to the individual needs of your learners and at a pace that suits their circumstances. You can also target skills gaps in your area or in relevant sectors.

The QCF's flexibility and inclusiveness will also attract new learners and means that you can engage and re-engage harder-to-reach learners, improving your progression and retention rates.

They're quality assured

All QCF qualifications will be approved by the relevant sector skills council and all awarding organisations developing the qualifications will be regulated. All QCF qualifications, therefore, will be robust and relevant to the specific industry needs.

They're easy to understand

All qualifications use simple vocabulary and a consistent way of describing what the qualification

is in, how challenging it is and how much time it involves. This means that you can describe courses and qualifications to employers and learners in a way that is easy to understand.

They're geared towards progression

QCF qualifications have been designed to give learners more opportunities to progress. The smaller units of learning and the credits learners gain for successfully completing them may be part of a number of different qualifications. These qualifications appear across different sectors or even at different levels. This means that it is now possible, more than ever, to take new paths to success, either by progressing further with a skill or by changing direction and putting the achieved learning to a new use.

The QCF also offers the opportunity for you to collaborate and work in new and innovative ways, and also develop business relationships with employers.

Where to get more information

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

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

To find out more about their involvement with the QCF, providers can also visit the ALP website at www.learningproviders.org.uk, the AoC website at www.aoc.co.uk and the LSIS website at www.qcfprovidersupport.net/home.

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