



Qualifications  
& Credit  
Framework

The Qualifications and Credit  
Framework in action  
Employer and learning provider case studies



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# Foreword

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I'm delighted that the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) and our partners have been able to publish the case studies included in this brochure. They show the good progress that's been made across the further education and business landscape as the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is implemented.

We've been building the QCF for the last five years, first as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), and now as QCDA. During this time, we've received support and interest from colleagues working both in education and in business.

Learning providers and employers are essential to the success of the QCF. They can put all the pieces together and connect learning experiences in the classroom and at work with a curriculum that makes the most of the QCF's flexibility. They empower learners to personalise their learning experience to suit their own aspirations. Without them the 'back wiring' of the QCF will mean nothing.

Over the following pages, you'll see how the QCF is starting to come alive in the real worlds of colleges, training providers and businesses.

In these 12 case studies learning providers and businesses talk about how and why they've got involved in the QCF and how it's benefiting them.

I hope you'll be inspired to get involved with the QCF to realise its exciting potential.

Special thanks go to the Association of Learning Providers and the Association of Colleges for contributing to the illustrations.



**Sue Georgious**  
**Director of QCF and lifelong learning**

# Introduction

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## 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.

## How does the QCF work?

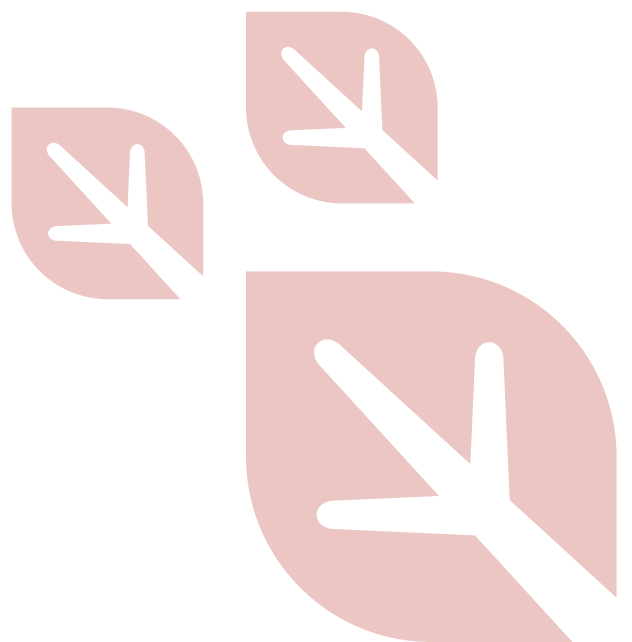
All qualifications in the QCF are built from smaller units of learning. Learners can build up units at their own pace and put them toward a full qualification. They can bank all their achievements over time and keep them as they move from education into a job or from one job to another. They don't have to study anything they already know.

Through the QCF learners can achieve nationally recognised qualifications in ways they couldn't before. That could mean gaining a qualification through training at work or studying part-time.

Staff at B&Q, for example, are now gaining a recognised qualification through completing their in-house training programme in home improvement. Initiatives like this will support the government's agenda to keep young people in education and training, and help encourage a culture of lifelong learning.

There are no fixed teaching or learning methods in the QCF. Tutors and trainers can shape QCF units and qualifications to the needs of their learners. This freedom and flexibility means learning can be classroom based, work based, online or a mixture of all these and much more.

For more information on the QCF and how it works visit [www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf).



# Employer case studies

## Honda

The car manufacturer Honda has been at the forefront of hybrid car production since the release of its first hybrid model in December 1999.

### Working with the QCF

With the launch of the hybrid car came the need for mechanics with the skills to keep this new technology on the road. Honda, along with Toyota and BMW, worked with the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) under the QCF to develop a level 2 and a level 3 qualification in maintaining hybrid technology cars.

The level 3 qualification, a skills-based award in automotive internal combustion and electric hybrid system repair and replacement, is being offered at the Honda Institute to mechanics across the car manufacturing industry.

The level 2 qualification, a knowledge-based award in automotive internal combustion and electric hybrid technology components and operation, is being offered by colleges and other learning providers across the country.

### Sharing the experience

In the past, technicians, especially those with no formal qualifications since school, have seen a lot of their hard work go unrecognised. Now, through this flexible approach to further learning, they're gaining motivation and confidence, and increasing their skills levels.

Further education colleges can also make full use of the QCF's flexibility by using the level 2 unit in the wider automotive qualifications and apprenticeships that they already offer.

“ I believe I speak for the industry as well as Honda when I say that this not only benefits learners but it's also the responsible thing to do in terms of end-user safety and awareness. Independent car mechanics can also gain a nationally recognised qualification and therefore assure motorists that they're servicing a hybrid car correctly and safely. ”

Eliot Smith, technical training coordinator at the Honda Institute



## DnA Awards Ltd

DnA Awards is a new awarding organisation specialising in law and legal services. It was developed as a separate company from the original ALM Training, which has offered training and qualifications for the incident, fraud and claims investigation industry for over 11 years.

### Working with the QCF

The QCF made it possible for DnA Awards to create a nationally recognised qualification for the claims investigation industry, giving ALM Training the chance to show that the industry is responsible and robust, and can stand up to the scrutiny of any watchdog.

ALM Training identified a lack of industry regulation and standardisation relating to some investigation practices, particularly in the insurance and claims fraud market. ALM Training was already highly regarded among insurance and legal institutions as the gold standard provider in investigator training but couldn't offer anything official to employers. Working with businesses in the sector, DnA Awards created a nationally recognised vocational qualification.



## Sharing the experience

// We've long wanted a national vocational qualification in our field of training. When I heard about the QCF I knew this would be a great opportunity for us to create national recognition for our training and a method of maintaining standards.

The profession is expanding as demand increases from insurance companies and lawyers who need claims investigators of the highest order. The QCF directly improves the opportunities for investigators to become better qualified and, ultimately, gain more opportunities for employment. //

Lin Hyde, qualifications and accreditations director at DnA Awards

// Giving agents an opportunity to develop themselves by having these qualifications is a must, and having access to a database of over 130 investigators that we know have had effective training has given us the opportunity to increase our business and workload fourfold. //

David Lloyd, commercial director for Lawyers Support Service Ltd

## Skillsmart Retail

Skillsmart Retail is the sector skills council for retail. Run by retailers for retailers, it works to generally raise the skills levels of people working in retail, which includes getting retail skills formally recognised in the UK.

Retail is the UK's largest private sector employer. Training their employees currently costs retailers £18 billion a year but little of this training is formally recognised.

### Working with the QCF

When Skillsmart Retail carried out a review of retail qualifications it discovered that learners and retailers were either not interested in the qualifications on offer or were turned off by their sheer number and the fact they didn't meet their needs.

As a result, Skillsmart Retail used the QCF to reduce the offering to just nine sector-endorsed qualifications. This lifted much of the confusion employers had been feeling and set a national benchmark across the industry.

### Sharing the experience

Awarding organisations can tailor the nine standard qualifications to each retailer's needs by creating optional add-on units.

Retail learners now have greater freedom to choose the direction in which they want to move. They also have the option to build up bespoke learning packages to suit their needs.



In turn, employers will be able to measure potential employees' success by the level of qualifications they've achieved, as well as being able to map their own programmes to QCF units to create qualifications that work for their business.

**“ This simplicity is very important to us as it allows us to both recognise skills and identify gaps in an employee's training, so it's more relevant and meets our needs. After all, our people make our business. ”**

Therese Edmonds of Booths food stores

## McDonald's

McDonald's is the world's largest chain of quick service restaurants. It invests £15 million each year in its well-established and long-running in-house training scheme to help staff at all levels develop and progress.

### Working with the QCF

To take its in-house training to the next level, McDonald's got involved with the QCF to become an awarding organisation that can develop and award its own nationally recognised qualifications.

The first qualification accredited by McDonald's, in September 2008, was a level 3 Diploma in shift management. The qualification covers everything the company's 7,000 managers across the country need to know about managing a McDonald's restaurant, from the day-to-day running to finance, marketing and human resources. It was designed as the first course managers would attend during their career with McDonald's.

### Sharing the experience

McDonald's employees now have their hard work and skills recognised both internally and by other employers in the service and hospitality sector, and can continue to develop through their work. McDonald's is finding it easier to attract recruits and then employ them for longer. There are now plans to offer accredited training in other areas of the business.

Receiving official awarding organisation status in January 2008 was an important and exciting step for McDonald's. As a progressive employer we're committed to taking a leadership position on training and skills. We want to ensure that our approach to recruitment, training and development continues to create valuable opportunities for our people.

David Fairhurst, chief people officer and senior vice president at McDonald's





## B&Q

B&Q is the UK and Europe's largest DIY retailer, employing over 34,000 people nationwide. It's earned a reputation for employing older workers; 28 per cent of its workforce is over 50 years old. It's committed to helping all its employees develop their skills and careers.

### Working with the QCF

B&Q already had a robust training plan in place but wanted to turn its training programme into a suite of formal qualifications. New employees could access top quality training while experienced staff could see the expert knowledge they'd built up through the years rewarded with a nationally recognised qualification.

B&Q worked with City & Guilds for Business to become the first retailer in the UK to offer a nationally recognised home improvement qualification, which launched in September 2008. After working with B&Q, City & Guilds had the infrastructure in place to develop more QCF qualifications.

### Sharing the experience

Over 17,000 of B&Q's employees either enrolled on or completed a work-related qualification in 2009. Employees with a City & Guilds qualification now wear a special badge on their apron so customers always know when they're being served by a qualified expert.



“ We were delighted to become the first retailer to offer a nationally recognised home improvement qualification. Our customers, quite rightly, expect a lot from us, and customer advisers need to be knowledgeable not just about the products we sell but also their application and aftercare.

This home improvement qualification will benefit both new employees, who will get access to top quality training, and our more experienced staff, whose knowledge will be rewarded with a nationally recognised qualification. ”

Gill Lewis, B&Q

“ Investing in qualifications will help B&Q further achieve its aim of having friendly expert staff of all ages, and give our customers confidence that they are being advised by staff who are knowledgeable and able to offer trusted advice.

If you walk into B&Q and meet a friendly person with a badge saying they've got a City & Guilds qualification, you're going to know you're getting expert advice: City & Guilds is a powerful brand. This level of expertise gives our people a real point of difference in the marketplace. ”

Euan Sutherland, CEO of B&Q and Kingfisher UK

## PLASA

The Professional Lighting and Sound Association (PLASA) was formed over 30 years ago to look after the interests of the entertainment, conference, architectural and communications industries.



### Working with the QCF

Over the past few years, the rigging sector has been affected by increased external regulation and tougher levels of health and safety. This was becoming more of a problem due to the lack of qualifications aimed at the specialist and potentially dangerous work that riggers carry out when setting up live events.

A lot of riggers are freelance workers, which means they have to fund their own training and assessment. PLASA knew that for any qualification to be successful it would not only have to meet the riggers' needs but also be flexible, time efficient and cost effective.

To solve the problem PLASA became an official awarding organisation, which gave it the ability to offer regulated QCF qualifications and set the standards for the sector.

### Sharing the experience

PLASA now works with businesses in the industry to develop qualifications that meet employers' needs and help candidates get the skills they need to succeed.

“ The real benefit of us becoming an awarding organisation is that we can offer industry-led qualifications that have been developed for people who work in a specific sector by the employees of that sector. This level of input into a qualification and the fact that it sits in the QCF will guarantee that those workers who achieve their assessment will attain a credible qualification that demonstrates what they actually do, while also ensuring that it's delivered in such a way to fit in with the flexible nature of work in the industry sectors PLASA represents. ”

Nicky Greet, professional development manager at PLASA

“ As an awarding organisation PLASA represents many small- to medium-sized enterprises. Therefore it affords us the opportunity to become directly involved in generating the results that we need from qualifications for the industry as a whole. ”

Mark Surtees, managing director of Outback Rigging

# Learning provider case studies

## igen Future Pathways

igen Future Pathways offers career advice to young people and adults.

It works with both public and private organisations and aims to inspire, guide and enable individuals to reach their potential at work and at home.

### Working with the QCF

Knowing what employers look for, igen Future Pathways started a training programme that offered young people the qualifications to help them improve their mathematics, English, and information and communication technology (ICT) skills, while also giving them the social skills they'd need at work.

The training programme also includes optional QCF units. Learners can choose from these units to study on top of their mathematics, English and ICT training. They can then put these QCF units towards further training at work or college. This helps them start to think about their future goals and progression.

The pass rate at igen Future Pathways is a sign of the scheme's success. It has steadily improved since the training programme began and currently stands at 59 per cent.

### Sharing the experience

When it put the QCF into practice, igen Future Pathways looked very much at developing its organisation as a whole. This meant supporting its own staff with a more focused individual staff development plan, so they could in turn give learners a top quality service.

When we started planning the implementation of the QCF, we decided that we would take the opportunity of accessing all the support available. So, all our staff have attended a lot of support events over the last year, a lot of training as well, and this has helped.

Judy Dixon, service manager at igen Future Pathways



## Westminster Kingsway College

Westminster Kingsway College in London teaches a wide range of further, adult and higher education programmes. Its main clients include adults who are unemployed or low-skilled and employers looking for customised courses to train their staff in subjects like hospitality, and business and management.

### Working with the QCF

Employers were telling Westminster Kingsway College that they wanted short, focused training courses that were tailored to their company's needs but wouldn't break the bank. The national qualifications on offer were proving too time-consuming and costly to fit the bill.

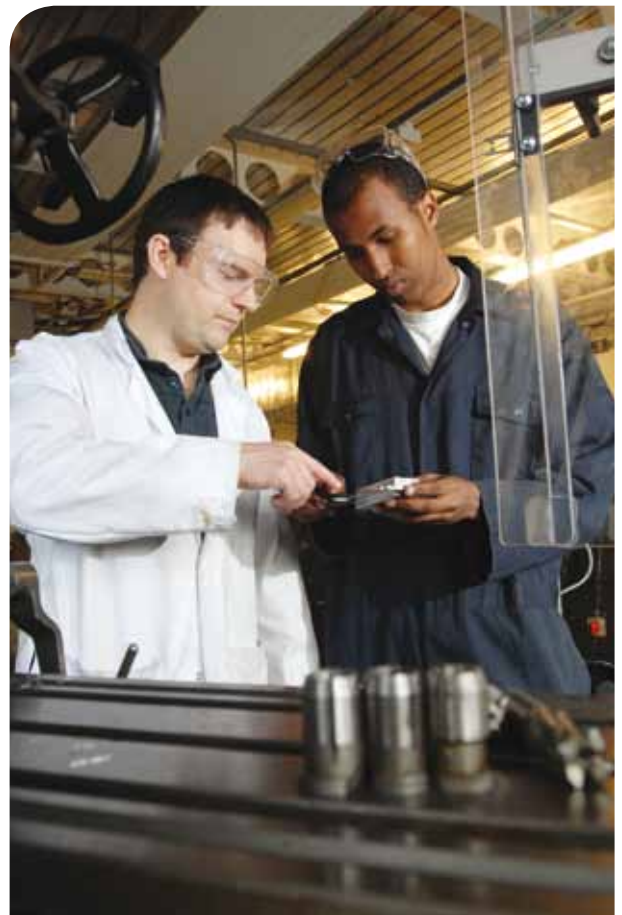
The QCF gave Westminster Kingsway College the chance to work with employers to design and accredit training that ticked all their boxes and opened the door for learners to gain national qualifications and a nationally recognised certification. Without the QCF it wouldn't have been possible to certify such training.

### Sharing the experience

Now the college has developed a set of customised courses and learning programmes for employers, it's eager to see what next steps the QCF and sector skills councils (SSCs) will take in developing qualifications. However, at the moment the QCF needs more funding before it can catch up with the qualifications system and reach its full potential.

**What we're looking for from the QCF and SSCs is the ability to really customise programmes and really put programmes of units together to meet the needs of employers and put employers in the driving seat.**

Andy Wilson, principal at Westminster Kingsway College



## Bournville College

Bournville College in Birmingham offers teaching and training to about 12,000 learners across three main sites. It offers academic, vocational and higher education qualifications to suit learners of all ages, including school-leavers, adults getting back into education and employers looking to train their workforce.

### Working with the QCF

The college used the QCF to build a tailored curriculum that lets learners of all ages plan the learning route that best suits their needs and circumstances. This gave learners the option of learning in smaller units that are certificated at each stage, helping to motivate them and build their self-confidence.

The college implemented the QCF by appointing QCF champions and setting up a steering committee made up of curriculum and business representatives. The curriculum development managers in the college were also given professional development sessions.

### Sharing the experience

The QCF is now part of the college's business planning, processes and models. Next, the college intends to embark on a review of the new curriculum structure and, in turn, optimise success rates and the learning experience.

The college still has a few hurdles to jump before the QCF can be called a success. For one, it needs to tackle the mounting cost of registration exams. It's also gearing itself for future Ofsted partial performance reviews, and making sure that all students have access to enough information, advice and guidance about the QCF and its possibilities for them.



“ Last year, we had a pilot based on Foundation Learning students, of which we have over 1,000; a number of these students have learning difficulties or a disability. The pilot was centred around meeting everyone's needs, and it allowed us to develop more coherent vocational pathways in which students could mix functional skills with vocational training. ”

Norman Kay, principal at Bournville College

### The benefits

The QCF is an attempt to simplify the curriculum on offer, to make it manageable for learners and to allow learners to meet their own expectations.

## Rathbone centre in Derby

Rathbone is a UK-wide voluntary youth organisation that gives young people the chance to transform their lives. Its founding belief is that everyone, whatever their background, can make progress through learning.

Each year, over 15,000 young people join its Train to Gain, apprenticeships, Entry to Employment (E2E) and Foundation Learning programmes.

### Working with the QCF

Derby was one of six Rathbone centres in England to join the national Foundation Learning pilot. The Derby team were keen to jump on board and get ahead of the game in finding out what the QCF was really about.

They started to recruit for the programme at the end of January 2009. At first, there were only six students, but the numbers soon began to grow and 44 students were signed up by the end of the year.

For the first 10 weeks of the programme, students went to the training centre for 16 hours a week and worked toward employability and personal development units and functional skills. They then joined work placements as and when a suitable place came up and they felt confident enough to enter the world of work.

### Sharing the experience

Working toward units and credits has really motivated Rathbone Derby's students so far, and they've thrived on the bite-sized chunks of work. Because of its direct claims status with City & Guilds, Rathbone can claim certificates as soon as students achieve units. This has led to a friendly rivalry springing up among the



students over who has the highest number of credits. A high proportion of students have progressed to an apprenticeship.

The programme's tutors are enjoying the flexibility of the QCF and find it easier to monitor and manage achievements. They can be creative in the way they design the curriculum so it really does meet the needs of individual students and is relevant to the world of work.

The employability and personal development programme is a good example. Activities like trips to the local retail centre and talks by security staff about terrorist threats have made real sense to the students.

What's more, employers are starting to sit up and take proper notice of the possibilities of the QCF and the new qualifications:

Employers have noticed a difference; they've commented on how much more focused and keen to achieve students are. They've been impressed by students' enthusiasm for collecting information from the workplace that is relevant to the qualification they're working toward.

Aaron Denton, one of the lead tutors at the Rathbone centre in Derby

## KEITS Ltd

KEITS Ltd is an independent training provider based in Hertfordshire. It works with businesses involved in horse and animal care, floristry and horticulture.

### Working with the QCF

KEITS Ltd was presented with a challenge when animal care and horticulture became the first NVQ qualifications to be replaced with the new QCF Diploma.

The team had to decide how best to handle the new qualification structure and ensure that individual learners were being offered the best routes through qualifications.

They also had to keep an eye on the cost of implementing the QCF and the cost of individual learners' programmes. Despite a much wider choice of units, time and funding were still limited. Employers needed coaxing to suggest the units that would best fit with their workforce and not be a burden to them or their employees.

### Sharing the experience

So far, KEITS Ltd has found that both employers and learners are enjoying the greater flexibility of the QCF. It allows employers to tailor programmes to suit their employees' individual development needs. For example, animal care is a diverse sector where learners once took a very general training route through an NVQ. Learners can now focus on specialisms like zoos and wildlife, and kennels and catteries.

The structure and wording of the qualifications have also become clearer and more defined, which makes them easier for employers, learners and assessors to understand.

Preparing for the introduction of QCF qualifications has been a challenging but rewarding experience for the whole team at KEITS, and a lot of lessons have been learnt over the last year:

**When changes to qualifications are on the horizon, you need to build in development time to ensure that information is prepared and available early enough for all who need it. It's easy to miss some key people out and assume that they'll be able to understand and run with the changes.**

**Making the information simple enough without losing the benefits, and getting assessors and business development teams to really take it onboard and yet be aware of the potential issues of making the qualifications too large to be able to deliver them cost effectively, proved to be a challenge, but we're getting there.**

Rebecca Diamond, KEITS director for centre awards



The team are now busy preparing to implement QCF qualifications in other sectors. They're also looking at funding opportunities for the delivery of QCF Awards and Certificates in animal care, to go with the Diplomas already on offer.

## City College Norwich

City College Norwich (CCN) is one of the largest colleges of further and higher education in the UK. It offers young people, adults and employers a comprehensive range of courses, from Foundation Learning and Entry level to postgraduate and professional qualifications.

The college has a strong commitment to lifelong learning and to promoting learning in the community.

### Working with the QCF

CCN was the first provider to be accredited as an awarding organisation under the QCF, which meant it could fill any gaps it came across in the qualifications market. For example, after noticing a lack of banking qualifications in England, the college worked with the Financial Services Sector Skills Council to develop a suite of new banking qualifications (level 5 and level 7 units) to plug the gap.

CCN also kept talking to local employers, putting education in direct contact with business. One of its main priorities has been to set up a curriculum that develops the knowledge, skills and understanding needed by employers.

One of the original qualifications CCN explored was an induction programme for new recruits to the financial services sector in Norwich. Insurance companies Marsh, Norwich Union (now Aviva) and Swiss Re were among the contributors to the programme's design. The course runs over a number of days at CCN's National Skills Academy and includes a range of units relevant to the organisations taking part.



### Sharing the experience

CCN has a plan for taking the QCF forward and has created a number of units in the last six months. Next, it will carry out a curriculum review of all qualifications, looking at ways it can take advantage of the QCF's flexibility to make the qualifications more personalised for students.

CCN's students have gained a valuable insight into the world of work out of this close working relationship between college and employer.

By accrediting providers like CCN, the hope is to nurture the gradual development of more courses that have the local community at heart and are more relevant to learners.

**“ The potential for the QCF is unlimited really because of the number of units, the flexibility, the different options and combinations of units. It's really up to us to create and develop, so its true opportunity is the personalised learning for individuals and employers. ”**

Dick Palmer, principal at CCN



# Find out more

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Visit the QCDA website for a comprehensive list of guidance and support materials on the QCF at [www.qcda.gov.uk/qcfreadiness](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qcfreadiness).

More information and support is also available:

- for learners — search for 'QCF' at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk)
- for awarding organisations — search for 'QCF' at [www.jcq.org.uk](http://www.jcq.org.uk) or click on 'QCF capacity building' at [www.awarding.org.uk](http://www.awarding.org.uk).
- for learning providers — search for 'QCF' at [www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk)  
[www.learningproviders.org.uk](http://www.learningproviders.org.uk)  
[www.excellencegateway.org.uk/qcf](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/qcf)  
<http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk>
- for employers and sector skills councils — go to [www.businesslink.gov.uk/vocationalqualifications](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/vocationalqualifications).

For information about the regulatory arrangements of the QCF visit [www.ofqual.gov.uk/qcf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/qcf).

For more information about vocational qualification reform visit [www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk).

Further information about the organisations in this booklet can be found at their websites:

Honda: [www.honda.co.uk](http://www.honda.co.uk)

DnA Awards Ltd: [www.dna-awards.co.uk](http://www.dna-awards.co.uk)

Skillsmart Retail: [www.skillsmartretail.com](http://www.skillsmartretail.com)

McDonald's: [www.mcdonalds.co.uk](http://www.mcdonalds.co.uk)

B&Q: [www.diy.com](http://www.diy.com)

PLASA: [www.plasa.org](http://www.plasa.org)

igen Future Pathways: [www.igengroup.co.uk](http://www.igengroup.co.uk)

Westminster Kingsway College: [www.westking.ac.uk](http://www.westking.ac.uk)

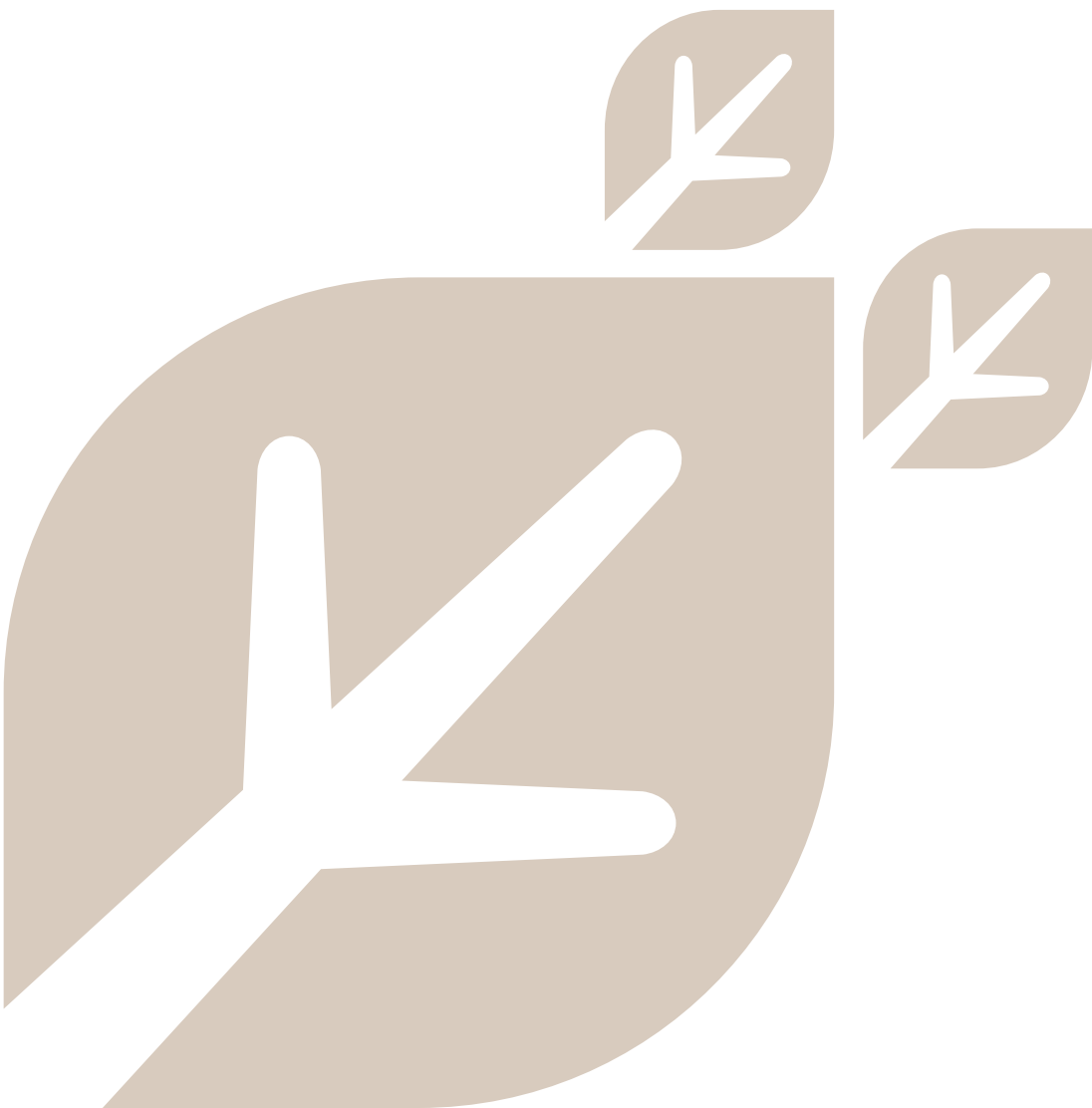
Bournville Centre: [www.bournville.ac.uk](http://www.bournville.ac.uk)

Rathbone: [www.rathboneuk.org](http://www.rathboneuk.org)

KEITS Ltd: [www.keits.co.uk](http://www.keits.co.uk)

City College Norwich: [www.ccn.ac.uk](http://www.ccn.ac.uk)





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We want our website and publications to be widely accessible, so please contact QCDA if we're not meeting your needs.

The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency is the non-regulatory part of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, an exempted charity under the Charities Act 1993.

QCDA is developing the QCF with partners as part of a major reform of the vocational qualifications system.

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First published in 2010

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QCDA/10/4794  
ISBN 978-1-84962-393-3

