

Recognising employer training in the 21st century:

the Qualifications and Credit Framework

Benefits of the QCF

The QCF is beneficial to all its end users as it is:

- transferable
- flexible
- quality assured
- simple
- progressive.

For employers, the QCF will:

- let them get their in-house training recognised within a national framework
- describe levels of achievement in terms that everyone understands
- help them measure quickly the level and size of achievements of prospective employees
- make training options and pathways clear, helping employers and employees find the right training for their learning and business needs.

For learners, the QCF will:

- give them more freedom, choice and flexibility in their learning
- let them build up credit at their own pace and combine them in a way to help learners get where they want to be
- let them transfer credits between qualifications to avoid having to repeat their learning
- provide easy access to information about the commitment needed for different routes to achievement
- record all learning on an electronic learner record, encouraging them and others to value their past achievements.



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In his Review of Skills in December 2006, Lord Leitch predicted that by 2020, Britain will only need half a million unskilled workers – a big drop from the six million we currently have. As a result, we need to develop the skills of the nation's workforce with an education and training system that is fit for the 21st century – one that gives individuals the opportunity and flexibility to develop necessary skills, with direction from employers on what education and training is needed for the nation's future.

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The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is developing the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) with partners as part of a major reform of the vocational qualifications system. The QCF is designed to make both the system and the qualifications offered far more relevant to employers' needs and more flexible and accessible for learners. It will go further than ever before to strengthen the role of employers within education and training to create a system that is truly reflective of 21st century needs, and help the UK to become a world skills leader by 2020.

The QCF:

- formally recognises work-based learning and employers' award schemes
- actively involves employers in deciding what training and education is needed for the future
- enables learners to build qualifications bit by bit, allowing them to control their own pace of learning.

Recognising employer in-house training

We know that industry spends millions of pounds developing employees' skills, but much of this valuable learning currently goes unrecognised and is then lost when employees move to another department or organisation.

This is not only frustrating for employers, who have no way of gaining a clear picture of the skills of their staff – it also means that employees have no way of proving the skills they have learned.

To address this, QCA aims to get this valuable in-house training captured under the QCF through the employer recognition programme, enabling employers to get their in-house training nationally accredited, and even to become awarding organisations in their own right.

There are a variety of options available for employers to provide nationally recognised training for their staff. Employers can choose to become awarding organisations in their own right, or work with further education providers or representative organisations to get their in-house training nationally recognised. The QCF gives employers the opportunity to choose the avenue that is right for them and their employees.

Among the companies involved at an early stage are McDonalds, Network Rail, FlyBe and the Ministry of Defence, who have all been accredited as awarding organisations. These employers can now develop and award their own qualifications around the training and skills needs of their own organisations.

Other companies may want to get their in-house training nationally recognised and be confident of its quality, without becoming awarding organisations themselves. Companies such as Norwich Union and Swiss RE are working with their local college or learning provider, in this case City College Norwich, to have their in-house training accredited and nationally recognised.

Recognising smaller steps of learning

Another main priority over the next 10 years is to bring more flexibility to the way learners develop their skills. It is often difficult for people in work to find time to commit to training, or to find the funds to invest in training themselves. Some find it difficult to combine work, training and a busy home schedule. We therefore need to make sure that the new system is flexible, fit for purpose and tailored to the needs of the 21st century learner.

With this in mind, the QCF will consist of qualifications made up of 'units' – smaller steps of learning – which can be accumulated and banked over time. This will enable people to move in and out of education or training, learn at their own pace and have all the learning they do throughout their career recognised.

Each of these units and qualifications will have a level and credit value to help make the system easier to understand. All qualifications will use a consistent way of describing the subject that the qualification is in, how challenging it is and how much work is involved. This will help learners and employers compare different qualifications.

The hope is that this flexible approach to developing and enhancing skills will encourage progression. It will also make it easier for employers to identify where skills gaps exist and will enable qualifications to be transferred across organisations and sectors as appropriate.

The flexibilities offered by the QCF will play an important part in enhancing the skills of the UK over the next 10 years and beyond. The framework will enable people to learn flexibly in a way that suits their increasingly demanding careers and lifestyles, as well as gaining recognition for their work-based training. The end result will be a system that is simple to use and easy to navigate.

Ultimately, QCA wants to enable more learners to gain the skills they need to get ahead. It also wants more employers to recognise the benefits of being involved in the vocational qualifications system and the role it plays in developing a more skilled workforce.

Further information on the QCF and the employer recognition programme can be found at www.qca.org.uk/qcf