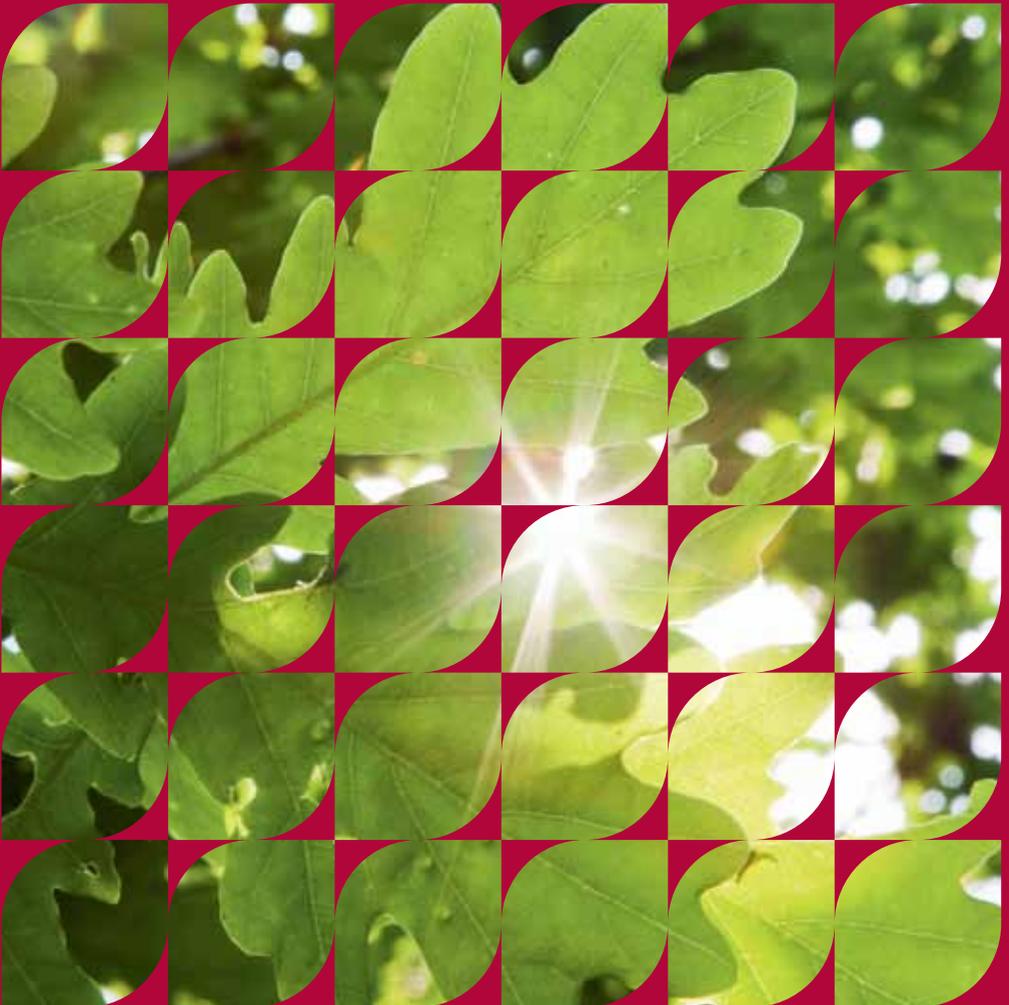




Qualifications
& Credit
Framework

The Qualifications and Credit Framework: an introduction for information, advice and guidance practitioners



About this leaflet

This leaflet tells you all about the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and gives you the information you need to advise people on how the new system works and how it can benefit them.

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
- can assess and award learners' non-certificated learning that they have already completed and put this towards recognised qualifications
- helps learners achieve skills and qualifications that meet industry needs
- is open to a wider range of awarding organisations, including employers,

which means that learners can get their work-based training recognised and formally accredited.

How does the QCF help individuals understand the qualifications system?

At the moment, you might find it hard to explain all the different types of qualification that learners hold — how difficult they are, how long they take to complete, what content they cover and how they compare to other qualifications.

The new framework presents qualifications in a way that is easy for everyone to understand and measure.

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 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 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.

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) is advising managers and practitioners on how to exploit the flexibilities of the QCF to deliver qualifications that meet the needs of employers and learners.

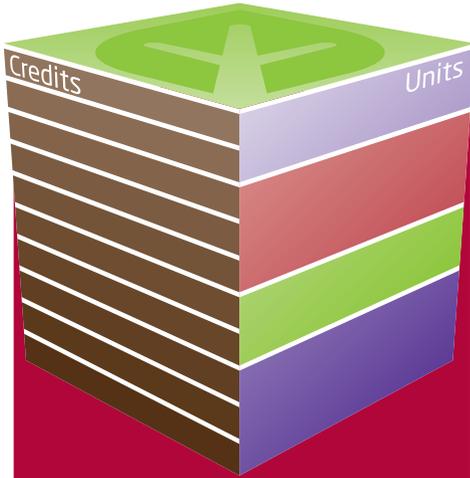
How does it work?

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.

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

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

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.

Help learners with their qualification options

On the *National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ)* website at www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk, you can search for details of accredited qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

NDAQ lists all the qualifications that learners can pursue in each subject, the QCF qualifications showing a (QCF) at the end of the title. *NDAQ* also shows each qualification's credit value, level, learning outcomes and assessment criteria, as well as a summary of its structure and its "rules of combination" – the pathways that learners can complete to achieve that qualification.

The QCF in practice

Learners can avoid redoing 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" (RPL).
- 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 is credit accumulation and transfer?

Credit is the currency of achievement in the QCF. All qualifications in the QCF are achieved by collecting credit, known as "credit accumulation". The pathways through which learners can collect credit towards a particular qualification are set out in the individual qualification's rules of combination. A qualification's rules of combination describe what

achievement is needed to gain the whole qualification.

Learners can transfer credit from one qualification and awarding organisation to another, subject to the rules of combination.

What is RPL?

Recognising prior learning considers whether a learner can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and don't need to develop through further learning.

Learners will be awarded credit when they have successfully shown that they have met the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a QCF unit.

What are exemptions?

Learners who have certificated achievements outside the QCF can claim exemption from units in QCF qualifications that are deemed to be of equal value. Exemptions can be planned by awarding organisations, and so included in the rules of combination, or individually requested by learners.

What are the 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.

For learners the QCF:

- means that they don't have to repeat what they've already learnt – it can put the learning they've already achieved, including non-certificated learning, towards a recognised qualification
- transfers their work-based skills and learning into credit that can then be put towards units and qualifications
- lets them complete units at a pace and in a way that fits around their home and work lives
- puts their learning and achievement towards recognised qualifications that meet industry needs
- makes it easy to compare how difficult each qualification is and

how much work it involves, so they can make a more informed choice about which qualification is the best option for them

- has unit-based learning, meaning they can make frequent decisions about whether to progress further with a skill or change direction and put the learning to a new use.

For employers the QCF:

- lets them get their in-house training recognised within a national framework, either as whole qualifications or single units
- helps them quickly measure the difficulty and size of prospective employees' achievements
- actively involves them in deciding what training and education is needed for their industry's future
- enables groups of smaller companies to join together to create relevant and needed qualifications for their sector
- makes training options and pathways clear, helping employers and employees find the right training for their business and learning needs.

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.

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