



Qualifications
& Credit
Framework

The European Qualifications Framework and the QCF

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What's happening?

Vocational and work-related qualifications are changing to become more responsive to the specific demands of employers and learners. They're becoming more relevant to employers' needs and more accessible to a wider range of learners.

An essential tool in this reform of vocational qualifications is the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) — 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 has been referenced against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The EQF links European countries' qualifications systems to each other and makes it easier to cross-reference qualifications between countries.

What's the EQF?

The key aims of the EQF are to help develop a European-wide workforce that is mobile and flexible and to aid lifelong learning. The EQF will work as a translation device that makes qualifications easier to cross-reference between countries. This will help workers and learners who are moving between countries, from job to job and from one educational institution to another. It will also help workers to explain their competence to employers in different countries and learners to understand their further education and training opportunities in other countries.

For employers and learning providers, the EQF will make it easier to compare the level of qualifications from different national systems. This will support labour market mobility both between and within countries and sectors, and enable a much better match between supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competence.

How does it work?

The EQF uses eight different levels that are based on the knowledge, skills and competence required to achieve the qualification. The eight levels cover the entire span of qualifications from basic (level 1, for example school leaving certificates) to advanced (level 8, for example doctorates) levels. Each level should, in principle, be achievable through a variety of education and career paths. The focus is on learning outcomes — what a person holding a particular qualification actually knows and is able to do — rather than on inputs such as the length of study.

It's important to note that:

- the EQF doesn't replace existing national qualifications systems or require them to be adjusted in any way
- it doesn't include qualifications or describe specific qualifications or an individual's competence
- referencing to the EQF is a voluntary process
- the EQF has no regulatory function
- individual qualifications aren't referenced to the EQF — the levels of a country's qualifications framework are referenced to the EQF's levels.

How is the UK involved in the EQF?

The QCF has been referenced to the EQF by the national coordination point (NCP) established in the UK. A country's NCP is the official body responsible for referencing their framework to the EQF. An NCP was established to reference the QCF to the EQF, jointly led by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) in England, and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland, with membership from across the education, training and skills sector.

The table below shows the NCPs in the UK.

National coordination point	Country	Framework
QCDA/CCEA	England & Northern Ireland	Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)
Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) Partnership	Scotland	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
The Welsh Assembly Government	Wales	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

How does the QCF align with the EQF?

In England and Northern Ireland the referencing process has been completed, using criteria issued by the European Commission, and a report on the outcomes published (www.qcda.gov.uk/19302.aspx).

The report sets out the stakeholders involved, the methodology for the referencing process, including the consultation that was undertaken, and the way in which the criteria were addressed. The table below shows the results of the process and the final alignment:

QCF level	E1	E2	E3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF level	-	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		

What happens next?

The NCP for England and Northern Ireland will complete the final part of the referencing process by 2012 by exploring how all new qualification certificates, diplomas and 'Europass' documents contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

Once the NCP has related the QCF to the EQF, individuals, employers, and education and training providers across the UK will be able to compare individual qualifications both from different countries and from different education and training systems.

Find out more

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.

To find out more about how the QCF aligns to the EQF, visit www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf.

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QCDA/10/4621
ISBN 978-1-84962-302-5

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

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