



Department
for Business
Innovation & Skills

VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

A statement of support for vocational qualifications offered outside the United Kingdom by awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual

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Contents

Introduction	3
Overview of the vocational qualifications system in England.....	5
Background	5
The role of awarding organisations	6
The role of Ofqual in regulating qualifications	6
The regulated qualifications system.....	7
Annex 1	8
Commitment by awarding organisations in relation to their provision of unregulated qualifications and services outside the United Kingdom.....	8
Annex B	10
List of awarding organisations that have signed up to the statement	10
Ofqual statement.....	15

Introduction

1. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), part of the UK government, has issued this expression of support to provide an explanation on the vocational qualifications system in England, including the quality assurance mechanisms which underpin the delivery of qualifications outside the United Kingdom (UK)¹ by awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual in relation to other qualifications.
2. This document is divided into the following sections:
 1. Overview of the vocational qualifications system in England, including the role of awarding organisations and Ofqual as the regulator of vocational qualifications taken in England (and Northern Ireland)
 2. A statement setting out the commitments of awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual in relation to their provision of unregulated qualifications and services outside the UK. (Annex A)
 3. A list of such awarding organisations that have voluntarily signed up to this statement. (Annex B).
3. BIS recognises that international trade is vital for England's prosperity and that education is already one of the most important sectors for export. The Government's commitment to strengthening education export has been published in its 'International Education Strategy: global growth and prosperity' in July 2013: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-global-growth-and-prosperity>.
4. Awarding organisations play an important role in education export given the international recognition of UK qualifications, and it is expected that existing awarding organisations will wish to further expand their business outside the UK.
5. BIS appreciates that many overseas governments, businesses and institutions already work or wish to work with Ofqual-regulated awarding organisations. BIS is fully committed to supporting these awarding organisations to demonstrate that their qualifications and services offered outside the UK can be trusted, whether they are also offered within the UK or solely/mainly developed for international use.

¹ Within the UK, Qualifications are regulated by a number of regulators: Ofqual for England and Northern Ireland (vocational qualifications only); the Welsh Government for Wales; The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for non-vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland; and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) in Scotland.

6. Ofqual, the qualifications regulator for England², does not have the statutory remit to regulate qualifications which are or are likely to be taken only by learners who are assessed wholly or mainly outside England. These qualifications therefore cannot be regulated by Ofqual. However Ofqual-regulated awarding organisations advise us that they use the same rigorous approach for the development and quality assurance of qualifications developed solely/mainly for use outside England as they do for those offered in England.
7. BIS has worked with the awarding organisations to develop a high level statement which consists of a set of commitments to which Ofqual-regulated awarding organisations can sign up, on a voluntary basis. It commits signatory awarding organisations to operate in line with a number of quality assurance principles, similar to some of those that Ofqual would have applied if it had regulated a similar qualification, and which underpin the delivery of qualifications and services which have been developed solely/mainly for use outside England³.

A copy of the statement can be found in Annex A of this document.

The list of awarding organisations who have signed up to this statement is enclosed in Annex B.

8. We hope that this expression of support, the overview of the vocational qualifications system and the statement will provide you and your partners with a better understanding of the English vocational qualifications system and enable you to have confidence in the quality of the qualifications and services offered by the signatory awarding organisations outside the UK.

² As noted above, Ofqual also regulates vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. References below to Ofqual regulating in England should be read wherever appropriate as also referring to Northern Ireland.

³ Questions around practices of individual awarding organisations must be addressed directly to the awarding organisations. All such queries will be dealt with by the appropriate awarding organisation. BIS or Ofqual will not be able to assist with or respond to such queries.

Overview of the vocational qualifications system in England

Background

9. The qualifications system in England differs significantly from the systems operated by most other countries. Other than in the university sector, there has historically been a separation in England between:
 - the Government, whether national or local, who set the policy environment,
 - the providers of education that undertake teaching and learning, and
 - the awarding organisations who offer and award qualifications provide which confirm the knowledge, skills and understanding that a learner has demonstrated, whether through an examination or other assessment, and which leads to achievement of a qualification.
10. These 'awarding organisations' (also known as 'awarding bodies') are independent organisations, separate from the state. Some are charitable organisations and others are commercial bodies. Historically, many awarding organisations emerged either from universities or from professional or trade bodies. Unlike most countries where qualifications are provided and awarded by a Government department or agency, in England, awarding organisations are not directly accountable to the government for the delivery of their services; rather awarding organisations act as businesses offering qualifications and services to schools, colleges, training providers, employers and others.
11. This awarding model operates both in relation to academic and vocational qualifications. It applies to:
 - qualifications taken by children and young people;
 - A levels and vocational qualifications taken often prior to university entry;
 - adult vocational qualifications which include both those taken to support initial entry into an occupation (including as part of Apprenticeships as they are currently configured); and
 - qualifications used to indicate professional development or skills achieved in occupational sectors.

Achieving these qualifications demonstrates to employers, teachers, learners and others what someone has learnt and can do
12. Awarding organisations therefore perform a function which does not have a direct equivalence in many other education and training systems elsewhere in the world.
13. A number of Ofqual-regulated awarding organisations have significant overseas operations in relation to school, academic and/or vocational qualifications.

The role of awarding organisations

14. Awarding organisations develop and award qualifications. They advertise and promote their qualifications to potential 'buyers' which may include schools, colleges, private training providers, employers and governments.
15. Awarding organisations do not in the main deliver training that leads to the achievement of their qualifications but approve educational institutions, training providers and others to do so.
16. Awarding organisations operating in England may seek recognition by Ofqual, although it is not compulsory. Ofqual-regulated awarding organisations may then submit their qualifications for regulation by Ofqual, provided that there are likely to be learners being assessed wholly or mainly in England. Un-regulated qualifications include qualifications taken solely by learners who are assessed wholly or mainly outside England or qualifications where the awarding organisation has not sought or has not been granted Ofqual recognition for specific qualifications or descriptions of qualifications.
17. Many awarding organisations offer a mixture of regulated and un-regulated qualifications both in and outside England. Awarding organisations will seek Ofqual regulation of their qualifications to be taken by learners in England for a number of reasons, one of the main ones being that often public funding is linked to qualifications being regulated.

The role of Ofqual in regulating qualifications

18. Ofqual's role is to secure the quality and standards of qualifications which are offered in England by the awarding organisations it regulates.
19. Although many of the awarding organisations which Ofqual regulates operate internationally, Ofqual can only regulate a qualification if it is also offered as a regulated qualification in England. This is set out in more detail by Ofqual here. <http://ofqual.gov.uk/news/regulation-of-non-england-ni-qualifications/>.
20. Ofqual regulates by setting the rules that awarding organisations have to meet when they design and award regulated qualifications, particularly around the validity, reliability and standards of the assessments.
21. Ofqual monitors awarding organisations and their qualifications to secure appropriate standards, and takes action where appropriate. Ofqual is independent of government ministers and reports directly to Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The regulated qualifications system

22. There are currently some 168 awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual. Any organisation that wishes to offer regulated qualifications in England has to meet Ofqual's Recognition Criteria⁴. These Criteria are designed to confirm that the awarding organisation has the governance, integrity, resources and necessary expertise to develop qualifications, and once recognised, can develop qualifications which will comply with any relevant regulatory requirements set by Ofqual.
23. The awarding organisation, once recognised by Ofqual, is required to ensure that it maintains its continued compliance with Ofqual's General Conditions of Recognition ('Conditions'): <http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/general-conditions-of-recognition> and any additional applicable Conditions⁵ that Ofqual sets.
24. The Conditions create a number of requirements. Some of these apply directly to the way that the awarding organisation is run, such as how it is governed; but most relate to the regulated qualifications that the awarding organisation offers. The Conditions require the organisation to have the resources to be able to design, deliver and award regulated qualifications which are of high quality, and to make sure that their qualifications are fit for purpose and meet the needs of those who will be using them. Ofqual does not regulate the teaching of the courses for learners taking a regulated qualification and it therefore sets no regulatory requirements on awarding organisations in relation to teaching.
25. Ofqual-regulated qualifications are listed on the Ofqual Register of Regulated Qualifications: <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>. The Register contains details of recognised awarding organisations and the qualifications regulated by the qualifications regulators in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.
26. Where Ofqual believes that a risk exists to continued compliance with its Conditions, it will take appropriate action to check and if necessary address the organisation's compliance.
27. Where non-compliance is identified Ofqual can require the awarding organisation to make changes to the way it operates by giving it a direction which is enforceable by the courts of law or by putting in place an awarding organisation-specific Condition. Ofqual can also fine the awarding organisation and if necessary withdraw its recognition. Withdrawal of recognition is the ultimate sanction available to Ofqual and is likely to mean that the organisation's qualifications are no longer used to endorse publicly funded training. For the current list of awarding organisations and any current enforcement action see the Ofqual website – <http://ofqual.gov.uk/>.

⁴ <http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/criteria-for-recognition>

⁵ Ofqual sets General Conditions of Recognition which apply to all awarding organisations and all qualifications. Ofqual also sets Qualification Conditions of Recognition which apply to just some qualifications (such as GCSEs and A Levels) or awarding organisation-specific Conditions of Recognition which apply to just one awarding organisation or type of awarding organisation.

Annex 1

Commitment by awarding organisations in relation to their provision of unregulated qualifications and services outside the United Kingdom

Introduction

1. The purpose of the statement is to support the assurances made by the signatory awarding organisations that they apply the same quality assurance principles to the qualifications and services offered outside England as they do to those that are offered and regulated in England⁶.
2. **This statement relates to the qualifications and services that are not regulated by Ofqual because the qualifications are offered only outside England.**
3. BIS will hold a list of awarding organisations that have voluntarily signed up to the commitments set out in this statement.

Commitments

The awarding organisation will:

A. Work within relevant regulation and legislation

- Apply the same quality assurance principles in the design, delivery and assessment of its qualifications and services as those which are applied to similar qualifications offered and awarded in England.
- Operate its qualifications and services in accordance with local regulations and legislation of the countries where it operates
- Provide reasonable information on its activities to governments and/or education authorities as appropriate or required by relevant regulations or legislation in countries where it operates.

B. Manage the delivery of qualifications and services

- Provide accurate, appropriate and up-to-date information about its qualifications and services customers

⁶ Ofqual also regulates vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. References to Ofqual regulating in England should be read wherever appropriate as also referring to Northern Ireland.

- Have appropriate formal arrangements in place with centres⁷ that set out the responsibilities of both parties
- Monitor the delivery of its qualifications and services by its centres to ensure appropriate human and material resources are in place and customers are able to access prompt and accurate information once delivery of qualifications and/or services is underway.

C. Manage risks and issues

- Manage risks associated with providing its qualifications and services to maintain the appropriate standard of delivery and assessment
- Take prompt and appropriate corrective action where a centre's provision falls below the required quality standards, consistent with those that it would have taken if the centre had been in England
- Take all reasonable steps to prevent malpractice and maladministration by its centres, investigate where there is suspicion of malpractice, and apply sanctions consistent with those it would have applied if the incident had happened in relation to an Ofqual-regulated qualification.

D. Deal with complaints and appeals

- Have a published process for learners and/or centres to use to make a complaint or an appeal about the actions and/or decisions of the awarding organisation
- Deal with complaints and appeals from learners, centres or other third parties applying the same principles and rigour as those used in relation to its qualifications and services offered in England.

E. Manage withdrawal of qualifications and services

- Give centres reasonable notice of the planned withdrawal of a qualification or service
- Take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of learners who may be affected.

⁷ **Centre:** an organisation undertaking the delivery of an assessment (and potentially other activities) to learners on behalf of an awarding organisation. Centres are typically educational institutions, training providers or employers.

Annex B

List of awarding organisations that have signed up to the statement

ABC Awards (ABC)

ABMA Education Limited (ABMA)

Accounting Technicians Ireland (Accounting Technicia)

Accredited Skills for Industry (ASFI)

Active IQ

AIM Awards

Amateur Swimming Association (ASA)

AoFA Qualifications (AOFAQ)

Apt Awards

AQA Education (AQA)

Ascentis

ASDAN

Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM)

Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)

Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO)

Association of Business Executives (ABE)

Association of Certified Project Accountants (ACPA)

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

Association of International Accountants (AIA)

ATHE Ltd (ATHE)

BCS, Chartered Institute for IT (BCS)

BIIAB

Bpec Certification Ltd (BPEC)

British Driving Society (BDS)

British Institute of Cleaning Science (BICSc)

British Institute of Facilities Management (BIFM)

British Safety Council

CABWI Awarding Body (CABWI)

CCEA

Central Qualifications (CQ)

Central YMCA Qualifications (CYQ)

Certa

CFA Society of the UK (CFA UK)

Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment (CISI)

Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH)

Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport (CILT(UK))

Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM)

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS)

Chartered Insurance Institute (CII)

Chartered Management Institute (CMI)

City and Guilds of London Institute (City & Guilds)

Confederation of Tourism and Hospitality (CTH)

Constructing Excellence in Learning Ltd (CELL)

Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education (Cache)

Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body (CPCAB)

Defence Awarding Organisation (DAO)
English Speaking Board (International) Ltd (ESB)
Excellence, Achievement and Learning Limited (EAL)
FDQ Limited (FDQ)
First Aid Awards Ltd (FAA)
FPSB UK Limited (FPSB UK)
Future (Awards and Qualifications) Ltd
GQA Qualifications Limited (GQA)
Graded Qualifications Alliance (GQAL).
ICAA (Exams) (ICAAE)
iCan Qualifications Limited (iCQ)
ifs University College (IFS)
IMI Awards Ltd (IMIAL)
Industry Qualifications (IQ)
Institute of Animal Technology (IAT)
Institute of British Sign Language (IBSL)
Institute of Export (IOE)
Institute of Hospitality (Institute of Hospita)
Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM)
Institute of Operations Management (IOM)
Institute of Qualified Lifeguards (IQL)
Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE)
International Association of Book-Keepers (IAB)
International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO)
International Dance Teachers' Association (IDTA)

IoL Educational Trust (IoLET)

ITC First (ITC)

ITEC

LAMDA

Lantra Awards

Laser Learning Awards (LASER)

Learning Resource Network (LRN)

Lifetime Awarding (LAO)

McDonald's

Mineral Products Qualifications Council (MPQC)

National Association of Licensed Paralegals (NALP)

National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ)

NCC Education Services (NCC Education)

NCFE

NOCN

OCN Eastern Region

OCN London (OCNLR)

Open Awards

Open College Network West Midlands Region (OCNWMR)

Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality Management (OTHM)

Oxford Cambridge and RSA (OCR)

PAAIVQSET

Pearson Education Limited (Pearson)

Prince's Trust

ProQual Awarding Body (ProQual)

Qualifications Network (QNUK)

Qualifi Ltd (QUALIFI)

Register of Play Inspectors International (RPII)

Rockschool Ltd (RSL)

Royal Academy of Dance (RAD)

Safety Training Awards (STA)

SFJ Awards

Signature

Skills First Awards Ltd (Skillsfirst)

Sports Leaders UK

The Learning Machine (TLM)

Training Qualifications UK Ltd (TQUK)

Trinity College London (TCL)

University of the Arts London (UAL)

University of West London (UWLQ) London College of Music Examinations

VTCT

WAMITAB

WSET Awards (WSET)

Ofqual statement

Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications (other than degrees) in England and of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Ofqual regulates qualifications where:

- we have recognised an awarding organisation to award such qualifications, and
- those qualifications fall within certain parameters set out in legislation (see below), and
- those qualifications meet Ofqual's requirements.

This note describes when Ofqual can regulate qualifications that are taken by learners outside England and Northern Ireland, and what the regulatory position is in relation to other qualifications offered to learners in other countries.

Ofqual is a qualifications regulator: we do not regulate the teaching of the courses that prepare learners to take assessments.

Section 130 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 sets out which qualifications Ofqual can regulate. A qualification is regulated by Ofqual when:

- it is awarded by an awarding organisation that Ofqual has recognised to award the qualification; and
- there are, or there are likely to be, learners who are assessed for the qualification wholly or mainly in England and/or (for vocational qualifications) Northern Ireland.

This means that there are three scenarios as regards whether Ofqual regulates qualifications being taken by learners in other countries and the relevant awarding organisation. (Local regulatory arrangements may of course also apply.)

1. Ofqual regulates an awarding organisation and its qualification

Where a qualification is regulated by Ofqual, the awarding organisation and the qualification will need to meet the same regulatory requirements regardless of where in the world the learner takes an assessment. This means that if a regulated qualification is taken by learners in a country outside England or Northern Ireland, it is still a regulated qualification when it is taken by those learners. Such a qualification must be delivered and awarded in line with:

- the General Conditions of Recognition,⁸ which are the on-going requirements to which the awarding organisation is subject, and

⁸ <http://ofqual.gov.uk/documents/general-conditions-of-recognition>

- any other Conditions relevant to that qualification or awarding organisation that we have set.

The level of assurance about the standard of the qualification and the body awarding it should be the same where the qualification is taken in England or Northern Ireland or in that other country.

2 (a) Ofqual does not regulate the awarding organisation and cannot regulate the qualification

Some awarding organisations and training institutions provide their expertise and bespoke services to customers outside England and Northern Ireland. Where the awarding organisation has not sought, or not achieved, Ofqual recognition for the award of any qualifications, the awarding organisation and training institution are solely responsible for the quality assurance under these types of arrangements.

2 (b) Ofqual cannot regulate the qualification, although it does regulate other qualifications offered by the awarding organisation

If an awarding organisation is recognised by Ofqual to award certain qualifications but one of the organisation's qualifications is taken only by learners outside England or Northern Ireland, Ofqual cannot regulate that qualification. Ofqual's only requirements that affect such provision are to help customers understand that the qualification is not regulated. We require:

- awarding organisations not to make any statement that would be likely to lead customers of qualifications to believe that a qualification is regulated by Ofqual when it is not; and
- the use of our logo to be limited to qualification certificates and credit certificates that refer exclusively to qualifications published on Ofqual's Register of Regulated Qualifications.⁹ Awarding organisations may not use Ofqual's logo on any other certificates, nor (without permission) for any other purposes.

⁹ <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

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