

2000

# Arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.



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# The regulatory functions

## Introduction

1. The public has a legitimate interest in the continuing availability of high-quality qualifications that are fit for purpose, command public confidence and are understood, both by those who take them and those who use them. That interest extends to the proper maintenance of consistent standards across awarding bodies and over time. To that end, new statutory arrangements came into effect in 1997 to regulate external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This guide provides the details of those arrangements and explains how the regulatory authorities propose to exercise their regulatory functions. The guide will be kept under review and its provisions updated as needs be.

## The statutory provisions

2. Responsibilities for regulating external qualifications lie with three regulatory authorities.
  - In England, the regulatory authority is the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) which regulates all external qualifications.<sup>1</sup> QCA and ACCAC work with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to ensure that National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) remain aligned.
  - In Wales, the regulatory authority is Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru/the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC) which regulates all external qualifications except for the formal accreditation of individual NVQs which is the sole responsibility of QCA.<sup>2</sup>
  - In Northern Ireland, the regulatory authority is the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) which regulates external qualifications offered to students in full-time education up to the age of 19.<sup>3</sup> NVQs are the responsibility of QCA.

Where this guide refers to ‘the regulatory authorities’, the term includes ACCAC, CCEA and QCA (as appropriate). Reference to the regulatory authorities in the section dealing with national occupational standards includes, in addition, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

3. For the purposes of statutory regulation<sup>4</sup>, an ‘external qualification’ is a qualification:
  - which is academic or vocational in nature (including a National Vocational Qualification), but not an academic qualification at first degree level or any comparable or higher level; **and**
  - which is authenticated or awarded by an outside body (that is, a body or person other than the institution or employer that provides the course of education or training leading to the qualification).

<sup>1</sup> Section 24 of the Education Act 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Section 30 of the Education Act 1997, as extended by the Education (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) (Conferment of Functions) Order 1997.

<sup>3</sup> The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Section 24(6) and (7) of the Education Act 1997.

Thus, the statutory regulation arrangements mentioned in the guide do not extend to:

- academic qualifications at first degree level or any comparable or higher level;
  - qualifications that are not authenticated or awarded by an outside body (as defined above);
  - courses of education or training which do not lead to a formal external qualification (for example, pre-entry level courses).
4. The regulatory authorities' key functions in respect of external qualifications are:
- to keep under review all aspects of such qualifications;
  - to develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of such qualifications; and
  - to accredit, where they meet such criteria, such qualifications submitted for accreditation.
5. These functions are distinct from the regulatory authorities' responsibilities to advise the respective ministers on the exercise of their powers to determine, for example, which courses of study leading to an external qualification may be provided for pupils of compulsory school age by or on behalf of a maintained school or funded for students post-16.

# The exercise of the regulatory functions

## General principles

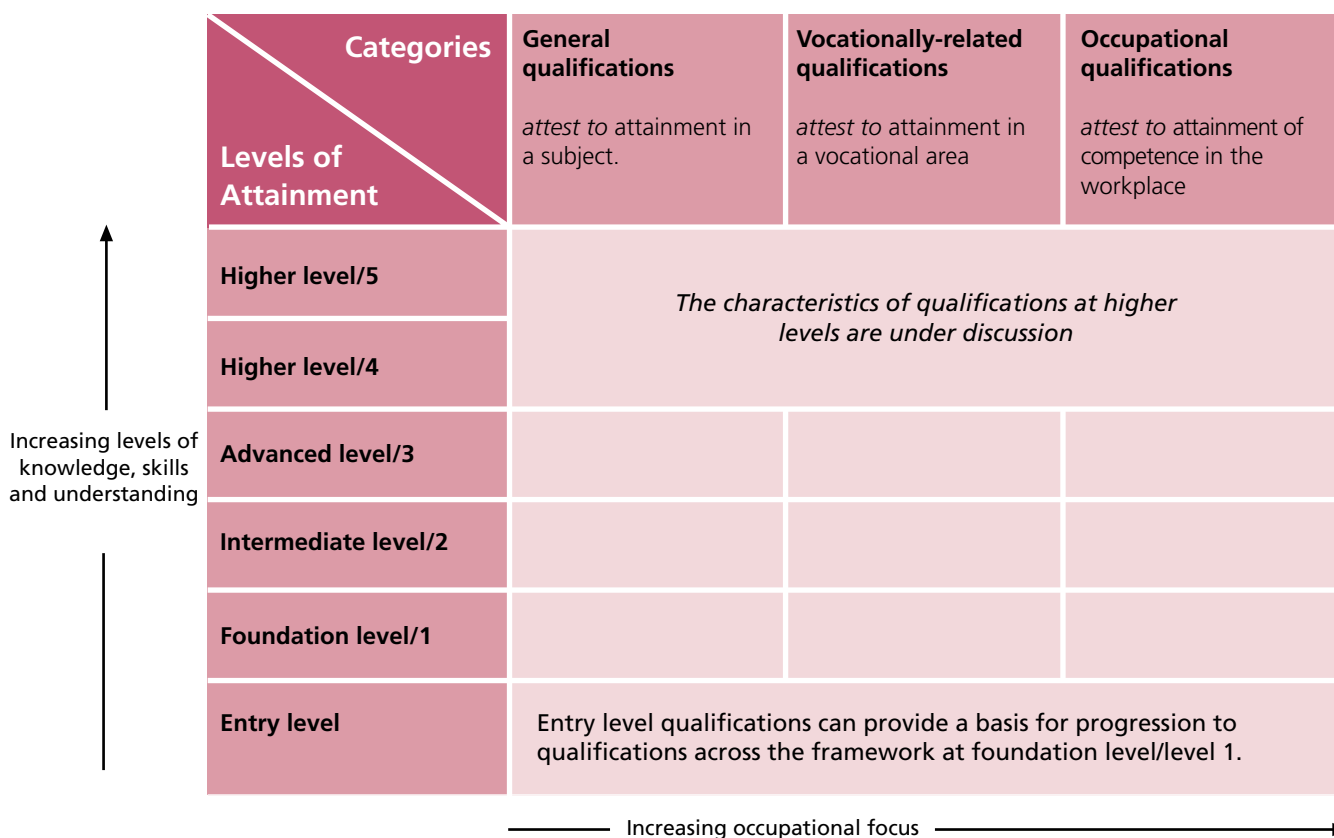
6. Statutory regulation is used to safeguard the public interest where other mechanisms – including awarding bodies' own quality assurance arrangements – would not be sufficient. Such regulation is not without cost. The regulatory arrangements must, therefore, provide value for money.
7. To ensure quality, rigour and consistent standards, the three regulatory authorities will work together, engaging closely with other key players – notably the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education, (QAA), standards-setting bodies, awarding bodies and inspection and funding agencies. Awarding bodies and others, as appropriate, may be asked by the regulatory authorities to contribute to national or country-specific initiatives designed to improve consistency, manageability and public understanding of provision.
8. In their work on the regulation of external qualifications, the regulatory authorities aim to:
  - improve access, participation, motivation, retention and attainment in education and training, thereby supporting the development of individuals and the achievement of government targets in England, Wales and Northern Ireland;
  - encourage lifelong learning by clarifying the relationships between qualifications, including broad equivalencies, so that different patterns of learning are supported and individuals can enter and progress through the qualifications framework in ways that suit their individual circumstances and needs;
  - accredit and keep under review a range of qualifications which is sufficient to meet the demands of candidates and users in education and training, providing a reasonable choice and scope for innovation where appropriate and avoiding unnecessary overlap and duplication;
  - make it easier for learners to study in breadth, combine and choose between different types of qualifications, develop their key skills and specialise where necessary;
  - promote public confidence in the quality, rigour, cost effectiveness and consistency of standards within and across qualifications through processes of accreditation, monitoring and follow-up which are efficient, effective and fair;
  - promote clear progression routes into higher education, employment and further training, achieving greater articulation and coherence with higher level qualifications;
  - ensure that effective and efficient arrangements are put in place for enquiries and appeals to be made against the decisions of awarding bodies;
  - ensure that suitable arrangements are in place for review of decisions of the regulatory authorities;
  - ensure speedy action by awarding bodies and the regulatory authorities in their dealings with one another and with those who use the qualifications system;

- provide regular public feedback in plain language on progress by awarding bodies and regulatory authorities towards specified objectives.
9. In carrying out their statutory functions, the regulatory authorities will:
- develop, publish and keep under review criteria for the accreditation of external qualifications (see paragraphs 14 and 15 below);
  - develop and publish details of the processes and procedures for considering qualifications submitted for accreditation (see paragraphs 16 to 18 below);
  - develop and publish details of post-accreditation monitoring and reporting arrangements to be undertaken by or on behalf of the regulatory authorities (see paragraphs 19 to 21 below).

## **A national qualifications framework**

10. In accordance with national policy, the regulatory authorities will establish a clear, coherent and inclusive national qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland in which accredited qualifications are grouped according to purpose and level of demand. QCA, ACCAC, CCEA, SQA and QAA are working closely together in the interests of coherence to determine the shape of the national qualifications frameworks at higher levels.
11. Qualifications will be considered for accreditation in relation to three broad categories (general, vocationally-related and occupational) and a series of levels of attainment. Qualifications may incorporate the characteristics of more than one category and some may span more or less than one level, provided that the overall purpose and the function of each constituent part of the qualification is clear. Entry level qualifications provide a basis for progression to qualifications across the framework at foundation level/level 1.
12. General qualifications include GCSE (in which grades G to D are at foundation level and grades C to A\* are at intermediate level) and GCE (both AS and A level are at advanced level). Vocationally-related qualifications include GNVQs at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels. Occupational qualifications include NVQs at levels 1 to 5. Key skills at appropriate levels can be built into qualifications across the framework and may also be certificated as free-standing qualifications. These examples are chosen for their familiarity but other provision that meets the applicable accreditation criteria is admissible to the framework.
13. The framework is represented as a diagram on the next page. Accredited qualifications will normally be listed by category and level. The structure and representation of the framework shown below reflects current practice in relation to types and categories of qualification, but will be kept under regular review and updated as necessary.

## The National Qualifications Framework



Key skills at appropriate levels can be built into qualifications across the framework and also certificated as free-standing qualifications.

### Criteria for the accreditation of external qualifications

14. A qualification will be accredited only when that qualification is judged to have met the necessary accreditation criteria. The criteria are developed in consultation with key interest groups and designed to ensure that accredited provision meets the full range of needs, while maintaining quality and coherence. The criteria will be kept under review and, where necessary, updates on published criteria will be published in advance of fully-revised versions.
15. The current accreditation criteria consist of:
  - (i) criteria setting out the required characteristics of qualifications, namely:
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ common criteria (Appendix 1)</li> <li>■ category-specific criteria (Appendix 2)</li> <li>■ qualification-specific criteria (Appendix 3)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>specifying the characteristics necessary for any proposed qualifications to be accredited.</li> <li>specifying additional characteristics for qualifications of a particular category or type.</li> <li>specifying the characteristics essential for accreditation under a particular title denoting subject, sector or skill area. (For occupational qualifications, the criteria will be consistent with national occupational standards).</li> </ul>
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(ii) criteria – normally in the form of codes of practice – setting out the necessary standards in the processes and procedures leading to awards, namely:

- common code of practice (Appendix 4) specifying for any proposed qualification the processes and procedures required to ensure high quality, consistency and rigorous standards in assessment and awarding.
- category-specific codes of practice (Appendix 5 – in preparation) specifying additional requirements for qualifications of a particular category or type.

## **The processes and procedures for accrediting qualifications**

16. Except for the accreditation of individual NVQs (which is the sole responsibility of QCA), the regulatory authorities will work together in the accreditation of external qualifications. The detailed arrangements will be set out in a procedural handbook that will be kept under review.
17. The regulatory authorities may require a qualification to be piloted with a suitable range of candidates and centres before it can be accredited and made generally available. A regulatory authority may specify a period of time after which the accredited status of qualifications will be reviewed.
18. The regulatory authorities will maintain a register of accredited qualifications.

## **Post-accreditation monitoring arrangements**

19. Following the accreditation of a qualification, the regulatory authorities will systematically monitor awarding bodies' practice against the requirements set out in the accreditation criteria. The regulatory authorities will jointly plan coherent and comprehensive monitoring programmes which will provide the means for keeping accredited qualifications under review and supply the evidence for taking any necessary action to maintain quality and standards across provision and over time.
20. The post-accreditation monitoring arrangements will focus on quality and probity in the work of particular awarding bodies. The arrangements will also include cyclic reviews and investigations focusing on consistency and standards in particular subjects or sectors across awarding bodies and over time. Awarding bodies will be informed of the outcomes of work which impacts on their activities. The regulatory authorities will publish separately their arrangements for monitoring and reporting.
21. The regulatory authorities will report publicly, on a regular basis, on the outcomes of their post-accreditation monitoring work, and on their regulatory functions more generally.

# **Appendices**

## **The accreditation criteria**



# Common criteria

## Qualification design

1. Each proposal submitted for accreditation must specify:
  - titles for the proposed qualification and constituent units which are concise, distinctive, appropriate, clearly indicative of content, and consistent with conventions communicated to the awarding bodies by the regulatory authorities, including requirements regarding location in the national framework;
  - the level(s) within the national framework at which the qualification will be awarded;
  - the accreditation criteria which the qualification is designed to meet;
  - any restrictions on multiple entry – within or across qualifications – as a consequence of overlap or other specified reason.
2. Each proposal submitted for accreditation must include:
  - a rationale which sets out: aims, broad objectives and opportunities for progression, demonstrating how the proposed qualification would contribute to the quality and coherence of provision nationally and confirming the support of key interest groups, including users;
  - a statement, as appropriate, of recommended prior knowledge, attainment or experience;
  - a specification of the required knowledge, skills and understanding which is accurate, up-to-date and clearly indicative of the intended coverage and depth (see also paragraphs 3 and 4 below);
  - a statement of content identifying that which is mandatory and that which is optional;
  - a statement indicating where content is known to feature in other qualifications offered by the same awarding body in similar or identical form;
  - a reference to where details of arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements can be found;
  - where qualifications are graded, indicators reflecting different bands of attainment and providing a valid basis for differentiation of performance by users;
  - where appropriate, an indication of the expected number of guided learning hours needed to achieve the qualification.
3. At foundation level/level 1 and above, each specification should identify, as appropriate, opportunities for developing and generating evidence for the assessment of the nationally-specified key skills of *application of number*, *communication* and *information technology* at the appropriate level(s). All qualifications or units that relate directly to the key skills must be based on the content specified by the regulatory authorities.

4. Each specification should identify, as appropriate to the subject or sector, ways in which the study of the area can contribute to:
  - an understanding of spiritual, moral, ethical, social and cultural issues;
  - awareness of environmental issues, health and safety considerations, and European developments, consistent with relevant international agreements.

### **Arrangements for assessment, awarding and reporting attainment**

5. For each qualification, an awarding body must provide a suitable description of each separately-assessed part (component or unit) and details of the associated arrangements, including: the duration (where appropriate) of each assessment and its contribution to the overall award; exemplar assessment materials and associated mark schemes/assessment criteria; and references to further guidance.
6. An awarding body must ensure for each qualification that:
  - the assessment methods used are valid, reliable, manageable, safe and appropriate to the needs of candidates;
  - the assessment arrangements provide for external quality control normally taking the form of external assessment or, for occupational qualifications, another equally rigorous, independent method of assessment;
  - assessment options within a qualification, whether of content or method, make comparable demands on candidates;
  - internal and external assessment are conducted according to the codes of practice approved and published by the regulatory authorities.
7. Apart from foreign language qualifications and other particular instances recognised by the regulatory authorities (see NVQ criteria, for example), English must be used in all specifications and assessment materials in England and Northern Ireland, though assessment materials may be provided in Irish in Northern Ireland. English and/or Welsh must be used in Wales. In all cases, the language used must be plain, clear, free from bias and appropriate to the qualification.
8. An awarding body must ensure for each qualification that:
  - awarding is conducted according to the codes of practice approved and published by the regulatory authorities;
  - a clear, valid and reliable method of combining assessment outcomes to determine awards is specified.
9. An awarding body must specify clear arrangements for reporting and certifying results at unit and qualification level.

# Criteria specific to particular categories of provision

## Entry level qualifications

Each entry level qualification must meet the common accreditation criteria together with the criteria set out in paragraphs 1 to 9 below.

### *Qualification design*

1. For national curriculum<sup>5</sup> subjects, the specification must be consistent with the statutory programmes of study for that subject, where they exist, and must be presented in a form that can be adapted as necessary to meet the needs of all candidates. Each specification must provide a basis for progression to corresponding GCSEs and other relevant qualifications.
2. For literacy, numeracy and information technology, specifications must provide a basis for progression to the corresponding Key Skills, GCSEs and other relevant qualifications.
3. For religious education and religious studies, specifications must be consistent with statutory requirements and appropriate to the age of the candidate. Each specification must provide a basis for progression to corresponding GCSEs and other relevant qualifications.
4. For other areas of learning, specifications must provide a basis for progression to relevant qualifications at and beyond foundation level/level 1 of the national qualifications framework.

### *Assessment*

5. Tasks or other assessments which are independently or externally set or validated, externally marked or moderated, and conducted under supervised and specified conditions must contribute at least 50% to the overall award in the case of national curriculum subjects, literacy, numeracy, and information technology, and at least 40% in other cases. The tasks or other assessments may involve practical, oral or written work – or combinations of these – as appropriate to the area of learning.
6. Each specification must be designed to facilitate learning in practical situations that motivate candidates and are relevant to adult life, and must be capable of use in a range of settings.
7. Where there are end-of-unit tests, whether externally or internally set, they must be conducted under supervised and specified conditions. Awarding bodies must specify, where relevant, arrangements for re-taking tests.

### *Awarding and reporting attainment*

8. Each specification must be designed to allow attainment to be recognised and reported at standards consistent with those specified by the regulatory authorities. The standards will be below those required for awards at foundation level/level 1, and will be broadly in line with achievements at one or more of national curriculum levels 1, 2 and 3 or their equivalent in other areas of learning.
9. Attainment at Entry level must be reported as Entry 1, Entry 2 or Entry 3, where Entry 3 is the highest outcome. An individual qualification may offer access to one or more of these possible outcomes.

<sup>5</sup> References to the national curriculum should be taken to include the statutory requirements in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

## General qualifications

Each qualification in this category must meet the common accreditation criteria and such other criteria as may be agreed in due course.

GCSE and GCE qualifications must meet the additional criteria set out, respectively, in paragraphs 1 to 18 and 19 to 35 below and, where they exist, the requirements of the criteria specific to particular subjects. GCSE and GCE qualifications in subjects related to those with specific criteria must draw on the criteria as appropriate.

Advanced Extension awards for use in England and Wales must meet the common criteria, the criteria set out in paragraphs 36 to 40 and such other criteria as may be agreed in due course and disseminated by the regulatory authorities.

### General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)

#### *Qualification design*

1. General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities set out subject-specific frameworks for aims, assessment objectives and schemes of assessment required in specifications. Where subject criteria exist, they must be met by all GCSE specifications that take the subject title.
2. GCSE subject criteria specify subject titles. Where GCSE subject criteria do not exist, the title of the subject must be approved by the regulatory authorities and must be sufficiently broad to cover different specifications in the same subject area. The area of study must be comparable in substance and range to those subjects for which specific criteria exist.
3. *Each GCSE must show broad equivalence to General National Vocational Qualifications in the following terms:*
  - two GCSEs at grade D to G and two GCSEs at grade A\* to C are equivalent to one three-unit GNVQ at foundation and intermediate level, respectively;
  - four GCSEs at grade D to G and four GCSEs at grade A\* to C are equivalent to one six-unit GNVQ at foundation level and intermediate level, respectively.
4. For subjects that have statutory programmes of study within the national curriculum for two or more countries of England, Northern Ireland and Wales, the specification should normally be consistent with all of the national curriculum programmes of study for that subject. Where necessary, specifications must clearly state which aspects/options must be taken by candidates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to meet the curriculum requirements of their respective country.
5. A short-course specification must include half the content of a single-award GCSE and cover the full range of grades. Specifications must meet the relevant subject criteria. Specifications and certificates must use the title GCSE (Short Course).
6. A GCSE specification can lead to a double award if it demands a range of knowledge, understanding and other abilities equivalent to that associated with two separate GCSE awards.
7. GCSE specifications must include descriptions for the attainment of grades A, C and F. Where there are subject criteria, grade descriptions are published by the regulatory authorities.

8. In addition to the key skill requirements set out in the common criteria, where appropriate, specifications must identify (with reference to the qualification as a whole) opportunities for developing and generating evidence for the assessment of the nationally-specified wider key skills of *improving own learning and performance, problem solving and working with others*. Where appropriate, these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the criteria in Part B of the key skills specifications.
9. Specifications should normally require candidates to make effective use of ICT in ways appropriate to the subject. Where the use of ICT is integral to the subject, the scheme of assessment must make clear how credit will be given for candidates' effective use of ICT.

### **Assessment**

10. The relationship between the assessment components and assessment objectives must be set out. The proportion of marks allocated to each assessment component and, where appropriate, to individual assessment objectives or groups of assessment objectives must be specified.
11. Schemes of assessment must include question papers targeted at two tiers of grades: A\* to D<sup>6</sup> and C to G, unless subject criteria or the regulatory authorities indicate otherwise.
12. Where candidates are required to produce extended written material in English, Irish or Welsh, the scheme of assessment must make explicit reference to the assessment of the quality of written communication and must indicate which assessment objectives will include the assessment of written communication. Candidates must be required to:
  - present relevant information in a form that suits its purpose;
  - ensure text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate, so that meaning is clear.In addition, candidates may be required to:
  - use a suitable structure and style of writing.
13. Subject criteria, where they exist, specify the required balance between internal and external assessment. Where subject criteria do not exist, external assessment must normally contribute at least 80% to the award. Internal assessment must be subject to rigorous external moderation.
14. Specifications with staged assessment must normally allocate a weighting of 50% to external assessment through terminal examination(s). The remaining 50% may be allocated to either external or internal assessment, subject to any minimum and/or maximum internal assessment requirement stated in the relevant subject criteria.
15. Where assessment is staged, each assessment unit may be retaken once only. Candidates may, however, retake the whole qualification more than once.
16. Individual assessment unit results, prior to certification of the qualification, have a shelf-life limited only by the shelf-life of the specification when they are used to contribute to the qualification.

<sup>6</sup> A safety net for candidates entered for the higher tier in these specifications will be provided. In these specifications, an allowed grade E will be awarded on the higher tier. Candidates failing to achieve grade E will be reported as unclassified.



### ***Awarding and reporting attainment***

17. GCSE attainment is reported on an eight-grade scale from A\* to G, where A\* is the highest grade. The result for a candidate who fails to reach the minimum standard for a grade to be awarded is recorded as 'U' (unclassified) and does not lead to a certificate.
18. The overall grade on a double-award examination must be recorded twice on the certificate. Certificates must contain an explanatory note on the nature of short-course and double-award qualifications within the GCSE.

## **General Certificate of Education (GCE)**

### ***Qualification design***

19. GCE subject criteria specify subject titles. Where GCE subject criteria do not exist, the title of the subject must be approved by the regulatory authorities and must be sufficiently broad to cover different specifications in the same subject area. The area of study must be comparable in substance and range to those subjects for which specific criteria exist.
20. Advanced Subsidiary (AS) qualifications must be designed to provide an appropriate assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills expected of candidates who have completed the first half of a full Advanced level (A level) qualification. The level of demand of the AS examination is that expected of candidates halfway through a full A level course of study.
21. Free-standing AS specifications, without the option of progression to a full A level award, may be accredited where there is a perceived need.
22. Each GCE must show broad equivalence to General National Vocational Qualifications in the following terms:
  - one GCE Advanced Subsidiary is equivalent to a three-unit GNVQ at advanced level;
  - one GCE A level is equivalent to a six-unit GNVQ at advanced level;
  - two GCE A levels are equivalent to a twelve-unit GNVQ at advanced level.
23. The full A level must comprise the first half (AS) and the second half (A2) of the A level qualification. The AS and A2 together – equally weighted – must maintain the standard of the full A level qualification.
24. AS specifications must normally require candidates to complete three assessment units and advanced level specifications must normally require candidates to complete six assessment units which are each weighted within a range of 15-20% of the full A level qualification. The relationship between the AS and A2 assessment units and associated teaching and learning modules must be explicit in the specification. Where there are optional or compulsory assessment units, or compulsory sequences, these must be clearly specified.
25. In addition to the key skill requirements set out in the common criteria, where appropriate specifications must identify (with reference to the qualification as whole) opportunities for developing and generating evidence for the assessment of the nationally-specified wider key skills of *improving own learning and performance, problem solving and working with others*. Where appropriate, these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the criteria in Part B of the key skills specifications.

## Assessment

26. Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level specifications must normally offer candidates the opportunity to be assessed either in stages throughout the course or at the end of the course.
27. The relationship between the assessment units and assessment objectives must be set out. The proportion of marks allocated to each assessment unit and to individual assessment objectives or groups of assessment objectives must be specified.
28. External assessment must normally contribute at least 70% to the full A level award. Where the internal assessment weighting is 30% or less in the full A level, not more than 25% may be located in either the AS or the A2. Where they exist, subject criteria will specify the maximum internal assessment weighting for the full A level. Internal assessment must be subject to rigorous external moderation.
29. Advanced level specifications must include synoptic assessment, located in the A2, which tests candidates' understanding of the connections between the different elements of the subject. The synoptic element should normally contribute 20% of the marks, with a minimum of 15%. It should normally be in the form of external assessment taken at the end of the course, except in certain practical subjects where that is not appropriate.
30. Where there are optional assessment units or examination questions, the synoptic assessment requirements must be met in a comparable way for all candidates. Where synoptic assessment is spread over more than one unit of assessment, the 20% should be clearly identifiable. Specifications must define the synoptic assessment requirements explicitly.
31. Where candidates are required to produce extended written material in English, Irish or Welsh, the scheme of assessment must make explicit reference to the assessment of the quality of written communication. Candidates must be required to:
  - select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and complex subject matter;
  - organise relevant information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate; and
  - ensure text is legible, and spelling, grammar and punctuation are accurate, so that meaning is clear.

The scheme of assessment must indicate which assessment objectives will include the assessment of written communication.

32. AS and A level schemes of assessment must normally comply with the minimum external assessment times set out below. Any exceptions to the requirements will be specified in the subject criteria.

Specification with up to 15% internal assessment	3 hours in the AS 3 hours in the A2
Specifications with more than 15% and up to 30% internal assessment	2½ hours in the AS 2½ hours in the A2
Specifications with more than 30% internal assessment	to be agreed with the regulatory authorities

33. Each assessment unit may be retaken once only. The better result must count towards the final award. Candidates may, however, retake the whole qualification more than once.

34. Individual assessment unit results, prior to certification of the qualification, have a shelf-life limited only by the shelf-life of the specification.

***Awarding and reporting attainment***

35. AS and full A level attainment is reported on a five-grade scale from A to E, where A is the highest grade. The result for a candidate who fails to reach the minimum standard to warrant a grade is recorded as 'U' (unclassified), and does not lead to a certificate.

**Advanced Extension Awards**

Advanced Extension awards are designed to stretch the most able advanced level candidates by demanding a greater depth of understanding than is required for the corresponding A level.

***Qualification design***

36. Advanced Extension awards must be based on the corresponding Advanced level criteria, where they exist.
37. Advanced Extension awards must be independent of individual A level specifications, and should not require candidates to be entered for a particular A level with a particular awarding body in order to be entered for the award.
38. Advanced Extension awards must be set at a demonstrably higher level of demand than the corresponding A level, requiring a greater depth of understanding, the ability to think critically and a synoptic approach to the subject.

***Assessment, awarding and reporting attainment***

39. External assessment must normally contribute 100% to the Advanced Extension award.
40. Advanced Extension attainment is reported on a two-point scale – merit and distinction – with distinction being the higher. The result for a candidate who does not meet the minimum standard for merit is recorded as 'U' (unclassified) and does not lead to a certificate.

## Vocationally-related qualifications

Each qualification in this category must meet the common accreditation criteria, the criteria set out in paragraphs 1 to 3 below, and such other criteria as may be agreed in due course.

General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) must meet the additional criteria set out in paragraphs 4 to 13 below and the criteria (currently in the form of compulsory units) specific to the subject concerned.

Design principles for higher level qualifications other than National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are in preparation, and suitable criteria will be derived from them in due course.

### **Qualification design**

1. All vocationally-related qualifications must:
  - demonstrate a clear relationship to relevant national occupational standards. Where no such standards exist, awarding bodies must show, as appropriate, how the content of such qualifications is consistent with the principles embedded in the criteria for national occupational standards;
  - be constructed of units with content expressed as assessable outcomes of learning which provide worthwhile learning goals in their own right. Single-unit qualifications may, exceptionally, be admissible;
  - enable progression directly into employment, to further learning opportunities within employment, or to further study;
  - be designed to enable individuals to progress to other qualifications, either within the same area or in related areas;
  - have the support and involvement of relevant employment and education interests which must include relevant national training organisations (NTOs) and other recognised standards-setting bodies and, where applicable, professional associations and further and higher education.
2. Where offered, optional units must:
  - extend the activities in the compulsory units within a specialist context; and/or
  - require additional skills, knowledge and understanding; and/or
  - introduce new aspects that link the area to another vocational area.

### **Assessment, awarding and reporting attainment**

3. Attainment in individual units must be assessed and certificated in a way that is consistent with the reporting of the outcome for the whole qualification. The assessment arrangements for the qualification must include provision for external quality control taking the form of external assessment. An equally rigorous alternative would be considered by the regulatory authorities only when exceptional circumstances justify it.

## General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ)

### Qualification design

4. Each General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) must:
  - be available as single and double awards at foundation, intermediate and advanced levels in each specified vocational area unless agreed otherwise with the regulatory authorities (from September 2000 the GNVQ at advanced level will be known as the vocational A level). Three-unit GNVQ advanced level awards can be provided only in vocational areas specified by the regulatory authorities;
  - show broad equivalence to general qualifications in the following terms
    - three-unit GNVQs at foundation and intermediate level are equivalent to two GCSEs at grades D to G and A\* to C, respectively;
    - six-unit GNVQs at foundation level and intermediate level are equivalent to four GCSEs at grades D to G and A\* to C, respectively;
    - a three-unit GNVQ at advanced level is equivalent to one GCE Advanced Subsidiary;
    - a six-unit GNVQ at advanced level is equivalent to one GCE A level;
    - a twelve-unit GNVQ at advanced level is equivalent to two GCE A levels.
  - offer a sufficient number of distinctive optional units to allow flexibility and choice, each option making comparable demands on students and each permitted combination of units providing a coherent approach to the vocational area.
5. At advanced level:
  - each twelve-unit GNVQ must consist of a minimum of six and a maximum of eight compulsory units. The regulatory authorities will specify the balance required for each vocational area;
  - each six-unit GNVQ must include at least three compulsory units agreed with the regulatory authorities. The regulatory authorities will specify the balance required for each vocational area;
  - each three-unit GNVQ must consist of compulsory units agreed with the regulatory authorities.
6. At intermediate level and foundation level:
  - each six-unit GNVQ must include three compulsory units agreed with the regulatory authorities;
  - each three-unit GNVQ must consist of three compulsory units agreed with the regulatory authorities;
  - compulsory units with the same title at both levels must have a clear relationship that demonstrates progression, while avoiding undue overlap.
7. Each GNVQ unit must:
  - include a brief description for the candidate of the content, purpose and vocational relevance of the unit;

- include a specification of the skills, knowledge and understanding that students will need to learn to achieve the unit;
  - specify the outcomes required of candidates for the attainment of the pass and higher grades.
8. In addition to the key skill requirements set out in the common criteria, specifications must normally identify (with reference to the qualification as whole) opportunities for developing and generating evidence for the assessment of the nationally-specified wider key skills of *improving own learning and performance*, *problem solving* and *working with others*. Where appropriate, these opportunities should be directly cross-referenced, at specified level(s), to the criteria in Part B of the key skills specifications.

### **Assessment**

9. External assessment should normally contribute at least one third to the final grade. Awarding bodies must agree the form of external assessment for both compulsory and optional units with the regulatory authorities. Internal assessment must be subject to rigorous internal consistency checks and external moderation.
10. Each GNVQ unit must:
- include amplification to assist with the accurate and consistent interpretation of national standards;
  - be assessed using demonstrably comparable assessment methods and identical standards irrespective of the qualification of which it forms a part.

### **Awarding and reporting attainment**

11. GNVQ attainment for advanced level units is reported on a five-grade scale from A to E, where A is the highest grade. Overall GNVQ advanced level results are derived from performance in the component units – using the method specified by the regulatory authorities – and reported on the same five-grade scale.
12. At intermediate level and foundation level GNVQ attainment for intermediate and foundation level units is reported on a three-grade scale – distinction, merit and pass – where distinction is the highest grade. Overall GNVQ results are derived from performance in the component units – using the method specified by the regulatory authorities – and reported on the same three-grade scale.
13. Candidates must not be required to register for a larger GNVQ in order to be eligible for the award of a smaller GNVQ in that vocational area.

## Occupational qualifications

Each qualification in this category must meet the common accreditation criteria, the criteria set out in paragraphs 1 to 4 below, and such other criteria as may be agreed in due course.

NVQs must meet the additional criteria set out in paragraphs 5 to 17.

Design principles for higher level qualifications other than National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are in preparation, and suitable criteria will be derived from them in due course.

### **Qualification design**

1. All occupational qualifications must:
  - be directly based on relevant national occupational standards. Where no such standards exist, awarding bodies must show, as appropriate, how the content of such qualification is consistent with the principles embedded in the criteria for national occupational standards (see paragraphs 4 and 5 in the next section of this document);
  - be constructed of units with content expressed as assessable outcomes of learning;
  - enable progression directly into employment, to further learning opportunities within employment, or to further study;
  - be designed to enable individuals to progress into other qualifications, either within the same area or in related areas;
  - have the support and involvement of relevant employment and education interests which must include relevant national training organisations and other recognised standards-setting bodies, and where applicable, professional associations and further and higher education.
2. Where offered, optional units must:
  - extend the activities in the compulsory units within a specialist context; and/or
  - require additional skills, knowledge and understanding; and/or
  - introduce new aspects that link the area to another occupational area.

### **Assessment, awarding and reporting attainment**

3. Attainment in individual units must be assessed and certificated in a way that is consistent with the reporting of the outcome for the whole qualification. The assessment arrangements for the qualification must include provision for external quality control, normally taking the form of independent assessment or another equally rigorous method.
4. For qualifications specified by the regulatory authorities, awarding bodies must require candidates to be registered for a minimum of ten weeks before an award can be claimed, to ensure that necessary quality assurance checks can be completed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This requirement currently covers NVQs/SVQs, key skills units (core skills in Scotland) in the context of occupational qualifications, and units for assessors and verifiers.

## National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)

The criteria for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are designed to allow flexibility in the format of qualifications, while strengthening the processes to be followed, including greater emphasis on external quality control of assessment. They should be read in conjunction with the criteria for national occupational standards set out in the next section of the document.

5. For an NVQ to be accredited, there must be clear evidence of significant long-term demand for the award, identification of the target market and support from national employment interests, including any relevant standards-setting bodies.
6. An awarding body must demonstrate that proposed NVQs represent coherent targets for development and progression in employment and training, including government-approved programmes such as Modern Apprenticeships.

### **Qualification design**

7. Each NVQ must:
  - be based on approved national occupational standards of competence as set out by standards-setting bodies;
  - assess the application of skills, knowledge and understanding in a specific occupation to the standard required in the workplace;
  - be specified at a level consistent with the definitions set out in the table which follows paragraph 17.
8. An awarding body, in consultation with the appropriate standards-setting bodies, must provide a clear rationale to justify the level of the proposed qualification in the framework.
9. For each NVQ, an awarding body must adopt the qualifications structure specified by the standards-setting body and agreed by the regulatory authorities. The awarding body must indicate:
  - which units are compulsory and which are optional;
  - how the content of the national occupational standards maps to relevant key skills and whether discrete key skills units should form part of the award.
10. Exceptionally, where an awarding body considers there are particular reasons for departing from the agreed structure, the alternative must be justified in terms of significant long-term demand and support from national employment interests.

### **Assessment**

11. An awarding body must provide assessment opportunities for candidates throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. To meet the needs of Welsh medium candidates, awarding bodies must take account of the guidance material produced by ACCAC<sup>8</sup>. Arrangements for assessment in the medium of Irish in Northern Ireland may, exceptionally, be franchised or licensed to a third party who must be capable of maintaining the same level of rigour expected in assessments in Welsh or English.

<sup>8</sup> *The use of the Welsh language in the delivery and assessment of NVQs: ACCAC (1999)*



12. An awarding body must submit detailed proposals for assessment and guidance for each NVQ which must adopt the general principles for assessment and external quality control specified by the relevant standards-setting body and approved by the regulatory authorities, covering:
  - how external quality control of assessment will be achieved, normally through the use of independent assessment. Where independent assessment is not recommended by the standards-setting body, other equally rigorous measures must be specified;
  - which aspects of the standards must always be assessed through performance in the workplace;
  - the extent to which simulated working conditions may be used to assess competence and any characteristics that simulation should have, including definitions of what would constitute a 'realistic working environment' for the qualification concerned;
  - the occupational expertise requirements for assessors and verifiers;
  - the amount and type of evidence to be collected.
13. Each full proposal for accreditation must show how rigorous quality control will be applied, specifying, in particular, arrangements for:
  - ensuring the quality and consistency of assessment provided at any location and between locations. Where assessment is internally based, awarding bodies must use procedures consistent with criteria specified by the regulatory authorities when approving centres, and must ensure that centres meet requirements in full before they submit claims for certificates;
  - ensuring the system for recording evidence and for recording assessment and verification decisions is reliable, auditable and manageable;
  - maintaining a register of external verifiers.
14. Assessment carried out in a language other than English or Welsh must provide clear evidence that the candidate is also competent in English or Welsh to the standard required for competent performance throughout the United Kingdom.

#### ***Awarding and reporting attainment***

15. NVQ attainment is reported at levels 1 to 5 of the national qualifications framework.
16. An awarding body must recognise certificates of unit credit issued by other awarding bodies, where the units form part of accredited NVQs.
17. NVQs at the same level must be designed to be equivalent in demand in the broad terms set out in the table below, though the extent to which all the aspects of a level description are met will vary. Some NVQs, for example, may have a specialist technical focus, others may have a managerial focus; some may cover both aspects of competence. Level 5, for example, includes highly specialised professional practice.

## **NVQ level descriptors**

The level descriptors that follow are intended to be indicative rather than prescriptive and are used as an aid to the development of national occupational standards and qualifications. Levels apply to a qualification as a whole rather than to its constituent units, although in certain cases levels can apply to units (for example key skills units and the national language standards).

### ***Level 1***

Competences that involve the application of knowledge and skills in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine or predictable.

### ***Level 2***

Competences that involve the application of knowledge and skills in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts. At this level, there must be activities that are complex or non-routine and some individual responsibility and autonomy. Collaboration with others, perhaps through membership of a work group or team, may often be a requirement.

### ***Level 3***

Competences which involves the application of knowledge and skills in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy, and control or guidance of others is often required.

### ***Level 4***

Competences which involve the application of knowledge and skills in a broad range of complex technical or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources is often present.

### ***Level 5***

Competences which involve the application of skills and a significant range of fundamental principles across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources feature strongly, as do personal accountabilities for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.

## National occupational standards

1. National Vocational Qualifications are based on national occupational standards. The responsibility for developing national occupational standards rests with standards-setting bodies. They specify the boundaries of what is and what is not acceptable as evidence of competence and how rigorous assessment will be ensured.
2. It is the responsibility of each standards-setting body to agree with the regulatory authorities how the standards should be used in relevant qualifications. Paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 in the NVQ criteria specify what is required.
3. It is also the responsibility of the standards-setting body in collaboration with awarding bodies to recommend how external quality control on assessment should be delivered. Paragraphs 11 and 14 in the previous section specify what is required.

### *Analysis of the occupational sector*

4. National occupational standards must be based on a thorough analysis of the characteristics of the sector and in particular the nature of the main occupations within it. This must include information about:
  - the types of occupations within the sector and any anticipated changes in employment patterns;
  - opportunities for progression and clarification of the typical career routes open to individuals, including the role played by qualifications;
  - the links between the sector and other related sectors, including opportunities to work with other standards-setting bodies to identify common competences;
  - the relationship between the standards and the main roles and responsibilities of occupations identified within the sector;
  - the role played by key organisations including trade unions and any professional and statutory bodies within the sector;
  - the information sources that have been used to make the analysis which might contribute to further development of national occupational standards.

### *Characteristics of national occupational standards*

5. For the purposes of qualifications, national occupational standards:
  - identify the main roles and responsibilities within a defined occupational area;
  - take the form of units based on the occupational roles and responsibilities identified;
  - show the outcomes of competent performance, including the essential knowledge and understanding required;
  - show the standard of occupational competence to be reached for the stated outcomes. In this context, competence means the ability to apply knowledge, understanding, practical and thinking skills to achieve effective performance to the standards required in employment: this includes solving problems and being sufficiently flexible to meet changing demands;

- include relevant technical, planning and problem-solving skills, the ability to work with others, the ability to apply knowledge and understanding, and other skills which will enhance flexibility in employment and opportunities for progression;
  - ensure that the competence is broad enough to give flexibility in employment and be capable of adaptation to meet new and emerging occupational patterns;
  - include any statutory or legal obligations;
  - include any health and safety requirements;
  - include any relevant environmental aspects which are critical to competence;
  - include any relevant occupational requirements which are ethics or value-based;
  - be written in plain language and in a format which is easily understood by those who will use the standards;
  - be free from any overt or covert discrimination against an individual either in the wording or content;
  - provide a satisfactory basis for assessment;
  - meet the needs and have the support of all significant groups of employers and potential users;
  - reflect best employment practice, benchmarked against European and international standards where appropriate.
6. In developing national occupational standards for its sector, each standards-setting body must adopt, where appropriate and where they cover the same competences, national occupational standards developed by other standards-setting bodies. Any changes to these national occupational standards, other than in matters of presentation, must be justified.
  7. Each standards-setting body is required to submit its proposed national occupational standards for approval by the regulatory authority in accordance with published procedures.
  8. National occupational standards, qualification structures and assessment strategies must be made available without charge for use by awarding bodies and regulatory authorities in vocationally-related and occupational qualifications accredited and approved by the regulatory authorities and awarded in the United Kingdom.

## Key Skills

The content and structure of qualifications in key skills are specified by the regulatory authorities. Awarding bodies wishing to provide units of the key skills and the Key Skills Qualification must also meet the criteria set out below.

### *Qualification design*

1. The following titles may only be used for qualifications or units of qualifications based on the specifications developed by the regulatory authorities:
  - key skills and Key Skills qualifications;
  - application of number,
  - communication;
  - information technology;
2. The following titles may only be used for wider key skills based on the specifications developed by the regulatory authorities:
  - improving own learning and performance;
  - problem solving;
  - working with others.
3. The Key Skills Qualification consists of the three key skills units, application of number, communication and information technology.

### *Assessment, awarding and reporting*

4. The assessment of each key skill must include an externally assessed and an internally assessed component consistent with guidance provided by the regulatory authorities. Candidates must be successful in both components to achieve each key skill.
5. Centres and candidates must be provided with at least two external assessment opportunities in each calendar year.
6. Awarding bodies must cooperate with the regulatory authorities in arrangements for developing external assessment materials for key skills.
7. Certificates recognising attainment in units of key skills must record the skill assessed and the level attained.
8. Certificates recognising attainment in the Key Skills Qualification must record the level attained in each of the key skills units.

# Criteria specific to particular subject areas and sectors

The regulatory authorities prepare title-specific criteria specifying the characteristics essential for a qualification to be accredited under a particular title (denoting subject, sector or skill area). The criteria, which are published separately, cover the areas set out below. They are currently available on the regulatory authorities' websites. The website addresses are: QCA; [www.qca.org.uk/ACCAC](http://www.qca.org.uk/ACCAC); [www.accac.org.uk/CCEA](http://www.accac.org.uk/CCEA); [www.ccea.org.uk/](http://www.ccea.org.uk/) Criteria for GNVQ subjects currently take the form of compulsory units. Criteria for occupational qualifications, including NVQs, take the form of national occupational standards.

## **GCSE subject criteria**

Art	Mathematics
Business Studies and Economics	Modern Foreign Languages
Classical Subjects	Music
Design and Technology	Physical Education
English	Religious Studies
English Literature	Science
Geography	Social Sciences
History	Welsh
Home Economics	Welsh Literature
Information and Communication Technology	Welsh Second Language

## **GCE Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level subject criteria**

Art	History
Biology	Law
Business Studies	Latin and Classical Greek
Chemistry	Mathematics
Classical Civilisation	Modern Foreign Languages
Computing	Music
Design and Technology	Physical Education
Economics	Physics
English Language	Psychology
English Language and Literature	Religious Studies
English Literature	Sociology
General Studies	Welsh
Geography	Welsh Second Language
Government and Politics	

## **Key Skills**

Application of number	Improving own learning and performance
Communication	Problem solving
Information technology	Working with others

**GNVQ criteria and level**

Title	Levels available		
	Foundation	Intermediate	Advanced
Art and Design	✓	✓	✓
Business	✓	✓	✓
Construction and the Built Environment	✓	✓	✓
Engineering	✓	✓	✓
Health and Social Care	✓	✓	✓
Hospitality and Catering	✓	✓	✓
Information and Communication Technology	✓	✓	✓
Land and Environment	✓	✓	
Leisure and Recreation			✓
Leisure and Tourism	✓	✓	
Manufacturing	✓	✓	✓
Media: Communications and Production		✓	✓
Performing Arts	✓	✓	✓
Retail and Distributive Services	✓	✓	✓ (6 unit only)
Science	✓	✓	✓
Travel and Tourism			✓

**NVQ criteria (levels 1 to 5)**

Occupational qualifications including NVQs must be based directly on relevant national occupational standards. Details of occupational sectors for which national occupational standards exist are available from the NTO National Council and individual standards-setting bodies.

# Common code of practice

The criteria specified in the common code of practice apply to all accredited qualifications. They specify the processes and procedures required to ensure high quality, consistency and rigorous standards in assessment and awarding. Section A deals with general matters; Sections B, C, D and E set out in more detail the criteria that govern assessment, awarding and other matters affecting quality and standards.

The common code of practice is complemented by category-specific codes of practice specifying additional requirements for qualifications of a particular category or type.

## Section A: General matters

1. An awarding body must have:
  - a thorough knowledge and understanding of the national qualifications framework and a high level of expertise in the intended areas of provision, appropriate assessment methods and the languages to be used in assessment, principally English and, where relevant, Welsh or Irish;
  - the capacity to make provision generally available, avoiding unnecessary barriers to achievement, ensuring access and equality of opportunity wherever possible, and guaranteeing fair assessment for all candidates, including those with particular assessment requirements.
2. An awarding body may be a single organisation or a consortium. For a consortium, there must be a clear written statement of the responsibilities of each member organisation.
3. An awarding body must have robust and transparent arrangements for organisation, management and governance and for resolving any conflict of interest, together with sufficient resources to implement the necessary arrangements.
4. An awarding body must designate a single, named point of accountability for the quality and standards of each qualification, and set in place systematic arrangements for ensuring comparability over time, across options and, where appropriate, across qualifications.
5. An awarding body must have a plan of proposed provision available, in confidence, for scrutiny and review against targets agreed with the regulatory authorities.
6. Awarding bodies should co-operate with the regulatory authorities to ensure adequate national provision and must inform the regulatory authorities of any intention to withdraw a qualification from the national framework. Adequate notice of such withdrawal must be given to centres so that the interests of candidates are protected.
7. Where an awarding body is also a standards-setting body, it must take robust measures to manage the potential for a conflict of interests between these roles. A clear distinction must be established between its awarding body activities and its other roles. These roles should constitute neither a barrier to access nor a restrictive practice.
8. Where an awarding body provides training or instruction for candidates in respect of its own qualifications, it must have a clear separation of governance arrangements. A clear distinction must be established between its awarding body activities and its other roles. These roles should constitute neither a barrier to access nor a restrictive practice.



9. An awarding body must inform the regulatory authorities of any arrangements to franchise or license other organisations to offer its qualifications. Agreements between awarding bodies and the franchised or licensed organisation must be approved by the regulatory authorities. Any organisation offering qualifications on behalf of an awarding body must meet the requirements of the common code of practice, and the awarding body must guarantee compliance.
10. An awarding body must, on request, provide the regulatory authorities, in confidence, with information and supporting evidence regarding any fees which are demanded in respect of any award or authentication of an accredited qualification.

### ***Assessment and quality assurance***

11. An awarding body must maintain rigorous quality assurance and quality control arrangements which include:
  - thorough procedures for appointing, training, deploying and monitoring specialists to oversee assessment and awarding in all accredited qualifications and ensure consistency of standards, as applicable, across options, centres and time;
  - the provision of guidance and support and, where appropriate, training opportunities to ensure that centres can meet their obligations regarding the security and robustness of both independent and internal assessment (see Section B);
  - a customer service statement which specifies, according to guidelines provided by the regulatory authorities
    - the quality of service customers can expect in relation to qualifications provision, information and guidance, and complaints procedures
    - relevant points of contact and communication mechanisms
    - the fee structure that will apply to the award or authentication of qualifications
    - associated performance measures and feedback arrangements, focusing particularly on manageability, responsiveness and value for money;
  - systematic arrangements for monitoring and reporting on all aspects of its own work in respect of accredited qualifications and acting decisively and promptly to maintain quality and standards.
12. An awarding body must provide access, in confidence, to premises, meetings, documents and data to the regulatory authorities in order that they may satisfy themselves that the appropriate standards are being met in the awarding or authentication of qualifications.
13. An awarding body must ensure for each qualification that:
  - it retains (or its centres retain) assessment materials and representative samples of candidates' work sufficient to monitor provision over time and contribute, under the guidance of the regulatory authorities, to national archives;
  - data requirements, including those of the regulatory authorities are specified and met;
  - any requirements for centres to maintain records and evidence and to provide data are expressed clearly with suitable guidance. The requirements must involve a minimum of bureaucracy while guaranteeing the integrity of the qualification and associated awards.

### ***Awarding bodies' relationships with centres***

14. An awarding body's arrangements for the management of qualifications must ensure that:
  - the administrative obligations for centres are as clear and streamlined as possible;
  - centres and candidates are systematically registered;
  - candidates who complete the requirements for an award promptly receive a certificate in the format and within the period agreed with the regulatory authorities;
  - adequate safeguards exist against fraudulent or mistaken claims for certification;
  - replacement certificates, whatever their form, are explicitly labelled as such and only issued subject to all reasonable steps being taken to authenticate the claim.
15. An awarding body must work to guidelines set by the regulatory authorities in administering and publishing details of:
  - arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements (see Section C);
  - enquiry and appeals procedures (see Section E).

## **Section B: Assessment and awarding**

### ***Principles of assessment***

16. All qualifications must be awarded on the basis of rigorous, accurate and consistent assessments of candidate performance conducted in accordance with published criteria and the standards specified for each accredited qualification.
17. An awarding body's assessment procedures and systems must be capable of establishing:
  - whether or not there is evidence to determine that candidate performance meets defined standards;
  - the validity, authenticity and sufficiency of that evidence.
18. An awarding body must ensure that assessments guarantee the consistency and integrity of the standards of each accredited qualification.
19. The chosen format and method of assessment must be appropriate to the qualification. The method(s) of assessment used for each qualification is (are) the responsibility of the awarding body or, where appropriate, the awarding body in consultation with the standards-setting body, taking into account any accreditation criteria that apply. Any variations to assessment methods specified in criteria must be agreed in advance with the regulatory authorities.
20. Assessments must be based on published specifications of the required skills, knowledge and understanding and, where appropriate, competence, and must provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their ability to meet the full range of specified assessment requirements.
21. Where qualifications offer candidates alternative routes or methods of assessment, awarding bodies must ensure that the level of demand is comparable.
22. Assessments must be manageable and cost-effective for centres and awarding bodies to operate with minimum disruption and bureaucracy. The minimum equipment and material requirements for any assessment must be specified by the awarding body in advance of the assessment taking place.

23. Assessment materials must be presented in clear and unambiguous language and must differentiate only on the basis of a candidate's skills, knowledge and understanding. They must be free from any overt or covert discrimination against an individual, either in wording or content.
24. Where relevant, an awarding body must ensure that adequate mechanisms are in place to guarantee the consistency of assessment decisions across the languages of English, Welsh and Irish.
25. An awarding body must specify the knowledge, understanding, skills and – where appropriate – competence required for assessors to be acceptable in the area being assessed, following principles established by the standards-setting body where appropriate. The awarding body must provide information, guidance and, where appropriate, training to enable assessors to meet their responsibilities in relation to standards and assessment.

***Independent assessment, including external assessment***

26. Assessment must be carried out in a manner that is demonstrably independent of anyone who might have a vested interest in the outcome. The method must be appropriate to the qualification and include one or more of:
  - assessment carried out by a visiting assessor who is independent of the centre;
  - tasks designed by the centre according to awarding body guidance and assessed by the awarding body;
  - tasks set or defined by the awarding body, taken under specified conditions (which must include details of supervision and duration) and assessed by the awarding body (external assessment);
  - assessment taking another equally rigorous form acceptable to the regulatory authorities.
27. An awarding body must ensure, where it sets tasks, that the materials are evaluated by individuals not involved in their development to check that the tasks meet the assessment requirements set out in the specification. Tasks must be evaluated alongside associated assessment criteria or mark schemes.
28. An awarding body must maintain the demand of independent assessment year on year with reference, where appropriate, to materials from previous years.
29. An awarding body must set down assessment criteria, including mark schemes where relevant, to ensure valid and consistent assessment. The awarding body must provide external assessors/markers, with exemplar work where feasible, showing clearly how defined standards are to be met.
30. In the interests of reliability, an awarding body must ensure that independent assessment is undertaken by the minimum number of assessors that is consistent with high-quality work. In establishing this minimum, awarding bodies must consider the number and distribution of candidates and centres, the nature of the assessment requirements and the assessors' previous experience.
31. Independent assessors will normally assess the performance of candidates from a number of centres. They must not normally assess work from any centre in which they have a personal interest. Where this requirement cannot be met, the awarding body must make arrangements to ensure that assessment decisions are scrutinised.

32. The work of each independent assessor must be checked by the awarding body to ensure accuracy and consistency, including consistency across the languages of English, Welsh and Irish. Assessors who do not meet requirements in these respects must not be allowed to continue assessing and their work must be re-allocated.

### **Internal assessment**

33. Assessment must be conducted in accordance with the standards and procedures specified for the qualification. To this end, awarding bodies must:
- provide centres and internal assessors with a full assessment specification;
  - provide guidance to ensure that any tasks set are consistent with the demands of the specification and enable candidates to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding and, where appropriate, competence against the defined standards;
  - provide guidance on the nature and type of acceptable evidence;
  - provide guidance to ensure that assessment requirements can be interpreted consistently;
  - specify arrangements, appropriate to the qualification concerned, to be made by centres to ensure the assessment decisions and practices within centres are standardised;
  - set out the arrangements for external moderation.
34. An awarding body must set down assessment criteria, including mark schemes where relevant, to ensure valid and consistent assessment. The awarding body must provide centres with exemplar work showing clearly how defined standards are to be met.
35. Where a centre wishes to use assessment arrangements or methods other than those defined by an awarding body, it must seek written endorsement for the use of any specified alternative. The awarding body must ensure that alternative arrangements do not:
- reduce the validity and reliability of the assessment in any way;
  - compromise the integrity of assessment and the standards required of the award.
36. An awarding body must require confirmation that assessment evidence provided by candidates has been produced and authenticated according to specified requirements.
37. An awarding body must require centres, as appropriate to the qualification, to arrange training and guidance to ensure that assessors within a centre have a common understanding of the standards and other assessment requirements that apply.
38. Where a serious problem or weakness is identified in the assessment of a particular qualification within a centre, the awarding body must institute procedures to maintain the integrity of the award. In such circumstances one or more of the following actions by the awarding body may apply until the awarding body is satisfied that appropriate corrective measures have been taken:
- approval of assessment tasks and assessment criteria or mark schemes proposed by the centre;
  - an increased level of monitoring activities;
  - a moratorium on candidate registrations and claims for certification;
  - suspension or withdrawal of a centre's registered status.

### ***Moderation of internal assessment***

39. All internal assessment must be subject to moderation to ensure alignment of assessment decisions with required standards. An awarding body must specify, for each qualification, internal and external moderation arrangements that will ensure that internal assessment is valid, reliable, fair and consistent with required standards. For NVQs, the processes are known as internal and external verification.
40. An awarding body must specify the size and nature of any sample for moderation. Samples for external moderation must cover the full range of attainment within a centre, all assessors involved and the different types of assessment used, providing sufficient evidence for secure decisions. If initial samples indicate that required standards are not being applied but provide insufficient evidence to determine appropriate remedial action, additional samples must be taken.
41. An awarding body must specify the knowledge, understanding, skills and – where appropriate – competence required for moderators to be acceptable in the area being assessed following principles established by the standards-setting body, where appropriate. The awarding body must provide information, guidance and training to enable moderators to meet their responsibilities in relation to standards and moderation.
42. External moderators must not check work from any centre in which they have a personal interest. Where this requirement cannot be met, the awarding body must make arrangements to ensure that decisions are scrutinised.
43. In the interest of reliability, an awarding body must ensure that moderation is undertaken by the minimum number of moderators that is consistent with high-quality work. In establishing this minimum, awarding bodies must consider the number and distribution of candidates and centres, the nature of the assessment requirements, and the moderators' previous experience.
44. An awarding body must ensure that the work of each moderator is checked for accuracy and consistency. The awarding body must ensure remedial action is taken to adjust moderation decisions in cases judged to be unsatisfactory. Where moderation determines that internal assessment decisions are inconsistent, the awarding body must ensure that all relevant work is reassessed.
45. Where relevant, an awarding body must ensure that adequate mechanisms are in place to guarantee the consistency of moderation decisions across the languages of English, Welsh and Irish.
46. An awarding body must compile reports on the work of each external moderator. The regularity of such reports will depend on the frequency of assessment and the prior experience and performance of the individuals concerned. In cases where the accuracy and consistency of decisions is in doubt, the awarding body must take appropriate action to safeguard the integrity of the moderation process.
47. An awarding body must through suitable channels provide written feedback to centres on the accuracy and consistency of their assessment decisions. This feedback may also cover the adequacy of centres' internal quality assurance arrangements.

## Arriving at an overall result

### *Principles of awarding*

48. An awarding body must, through its awarding procedures:
- ensure that the basis on which judgments are made is transparent and open to monitoring by the regulatory authorities;
  - ensure that standards are maintained from year to year, across centres and across specifications with the same title;
  - ensure that awarding decisions are based on a sufficiently large sample of candidate performance;
  - keep comprehensive records of decisions taken and standards achieved;
  - ensure that awarding personnel are expert in the area being assessed and are fully conversant with the required standards;
  - ensure that awarding personnel are adequately supported by the awarding body;
  - minimise errors in the awarding process;
  - review awards and adjust assessments in cases where errors are identified;
  - conform to other specific requirements as laid down in qualification-specific codes of practice.
49. An awarding body must provide information to centres on how the overall award will be derived from candidate performance. This information must indicate how elements of assessment will be combined as part of that process.
50. An awarding body must make every effort to ensure that assessments are accurate and consistent, recognising that there may be occasions when decisions made by assessors need to be changed to secure these objectives. Adjustments to the outcomes of assessment may be made at any appropriate stage before or after overall results have been determined.

## Section C: Arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements

### *Principles*

51. An awarding body must ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to assessment which prevent candidates from effectively demonstrating their attainment. Arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements (special arrangements) must also ensure that such candidates are not given, or do not appear to be given, an unfair advantage. Special arrangements are generally not appropriate where the candidate's particular difficulty directly affects performance in the actual attributes that are the focus of assessment.
52. An awarding body must make special arrangements according to the needs of the individual candidate, reflecting the candidate's usual method of working, the assessment requirements as set out in the specification and any guidelines set down by the regulatory authorities.
53. An awarding body must ensure in making special arrangements that the validity, reliability and integrity of the assessment are preserved and that certificates accurately reflect candidate attainment.

### ***Procedures***

54. An awarding body must provide centres with details of its arrangements for authorising special arrangements. This information must specify procedures for:
- arrangements which must be determined by the awarding body, indicating how and when applications should be made on behalf of candidates;
  - those arrangements which give the centre some discretion, indicating the associated requirements for decision-making and record keeping.

### ***Monitoring and reporting***

55. An awarding body must have procedures in place for monitoring, evaluating and reporting annually on the use of special arrangements. Relevant data must be shared with the regulatory authorities on request.

### ***Special consideration***

56. An awarding body must make provision for special consideration to ensure that candidates who suffer temporary illness, injury or indisposition at the time of independent (including external) assessment are treated fairly in accordance with any guidelines from the regulatory authorities particular to the qualification.
57. An awarding body must specify conditions for eligibility and application procedures for special consideration. The awarding body must also specify the minimum requirements for an award to be made.

## **Section D: Malpractice**

58. An awarding body must have procedures in place for dealing with malpractice on the part of candidates, centre staff or others involved in providing a qualification, and must ensure that all centres, its own staff and the regulatory authorities receive copies of those procedures.
59. An awarding body must require centres to report to it any malpractice suspected after candidates have been registered, making clear any possible implications of a failure to cooperate for the issue of certificates and the future acceptance of entries.
60. An awarding body must report significant cases of malpractice to the regulatory authorities automatically, and report all cases on request. The awarding body must initiate investigations, and co-operate fully with any follow-up investigations required by the regulatory authorities, sharing information with other awarding bodies or with other agencies as necessary.
61. An awarding body must inform the regulatory authorities whenever it finds evidence that certificates may be invalid and agree appropriate remedial action with the regulatory authorities.

## **Section E: Enquiries and appeals**

62. An awarding body must provide and publish information on its enquiry service. The service must provide for centres to seek a check on assessment decisions affecting candidates' results and, where appropriate, other decisions affecting centres and individual candidates.

63. An awarding body must provide and publish information on its appeals arrangements. The arrangements must provide for appeals to be made against assessment decisions and, where appropriate, other decisions affecting centres and individual candidates. The published arrangements must explain how an unresolved appeal can be put to independent review.
64. An awarding body's appeals mechanism must include the involvement of at least one independent member (who is not and has not been a member of that awarding body's board or committees, or an employee or examiner at that awarding body, at any time during the past seven years).
65. Appeals against assessment decisions must focus on whether the awarding body:
  - used procedures which were consistent with the relevant codes of practice;
  - applied procedures properly and fairly in arriving at judgements.
66. An awarding body must ensure that fees are set at a level that does not deter those with reasonable grounds from submitting an appeal. A full refund of fees must be made in respect of any candidate whose result improves following an appeal. In the case of a group appeal, the awarding body must refund either the total fee or a proportion appropriate to the outcome.
67. The awarding body must send all centres or individual candidates who submit an appeal a written acknowledgement of receipt of the application and an indication of the period within which the appeal will be heard. On completion of the appeals process, applicants must be sent a written account of the outcome. The awarding body must keep records of all appeals.
68. Where the outcome of an appeal against an assessment decision is such as to bring into question the accuracy of results for other candidates in the same assessment, an awarding body must take appropriate steps to protect the interests of all candidates and the integrity of the qualification.
69. An awarding body must have arrangements in place for monitoring, evaluating and reporting annually on the operation of its enquiry service and appeals arrangements. The work must cover the number and nature of enquiries and appeals submitted and the outcomes. Relevant data must be shared with the regulatory authorities on request.



# Glossary of selected terms

## Bodies contributing to quality and standards in qualifications

<b><i>Awarding body</i></b>	An organisation or consortium recognised by the regulatory authorities for the purpose of awarding specified qualifications.
<b><i>Centre</i></b>	An organisation (such as a school, college, employer or training provider) accountable to an awarding body for the assessment arrangements leading to an award. Assessment may take place in one or more than one location within a centre.
<b><i>Regulatory authority</i></b>	An organisation designated by Parliament to establish national standards for qualifications and to secure consistent compliance with them.
<b><i>Standards-setting body</i></b>	An organisation – usually a national training organisation – recognised by the regulatory authorities as responsible for formulating standards of competence for an employment sector and keeping them under review.

## Aspects of the national qualifications framework

<b><i>Grade</i></b>	A point on a scale of performance used to differentiate achievement within a qualification (for example, grade A* indicates the highest GCSE achievement on a scale which runs from A* to G).
<b><i>Level</i></b>	A broad measure of the overall demand of a qualification (for example, a candidate may gain an NVQ at level 4).
<b><i>Qualification</i></b>	A certificate of achievement or competence specifying awarding body, qualification type and title (for example, Britboard GCSE History).
<b><i>Qualification category</i></b>	A group of qualifications with broadly similar purposes (for example, occupational qualifications).
<b><i>Qualification type</i></b>	A group of qualifications with distinctive structural characteristics (for example, GCSE).

## Regulatory processes

<b><i>Accreditation</i></b>	The process through which the regulatory authorities confirm that a qualification and associated specification conform to the relevant accreditation criteria.
<b><i>Appeal</i></b>	A process through which an awarding body may be challenged on the outcome of an enquiry about results or, where appropriate, other procedural decision affecting a centre or individual candidates.

<b><i>Approval (centre)</i></b>	A process through which a centre wishing to offer particular qualifications is confirmed as being able to maintain the required quality and consistency of assessment and comply with other expectations of the awarding body.
<b><i>Enquiry about results</i></b>	A process through which an awarding body may be asked to check one or more of the steps leading to an awarding decision.
<b><i>Registration (centre)</i></b>	A process through which a centre wishing to offer particular qualifications is recorded as having committed itself to maintain the required quality of consistency of assessment and comply with other expectations of the awarding body.
<b><i>Standards review</i></b>	An investigation and report on the consistency of standards of awards across awarding bodies or over time in a particular subject or sector.

## **Regulatory instruments**

<b><i>Accreditation criteria</i></b>	Requirements published by the regulatory authorities against which qualifications are designed and evaluated. The criteria specify the characteristics necessary for the accreditation of a qualification and include codes of practice, criteria common to all qualifications and standards specific to a qualification category or type, subject or occupation.
<b><i>Code of practice</i></b>	Criteria specified by the regulatory authorities against which the practices and procedures of awarding bodies are designed and evaluated. The criteria include a common code of practice and category-specific codes of practice.
<b><i>National occupational standards</i></b>	Standards of occupational competence developed by a standards-setting body and approved by the regulatory authorities.

## **Aspects of qualifications**

<b><i>Aims</i></b>	The broad educational or vocational purposes of a qualification.
<b><i>Assessment</i></b>	The process through which evidence of candidate attainment is evaluated against assessment criteria, including mark schemes, to provide the evidence for an award.
<b><i>Assessor</i></b>	An individual responsible for the initial judgement of candidate performance against defined standards expressed as assessment criteria or mark schemes.
<b><i>Awarding</i></b>	The process through which an awarding body uses evidence from assessment to determine the award which each candidate's performance merits.

<b>Content</b>	The knowledge, understanding, skills and competences that are assessed for the purpose of awarding a qualification.
<b>External assessment</b>	A form of independent assessment in which tasks are set or defined by an awarding body, taken under specified conditions (including details of supervision and duration) and assessed by the awarding body.
<b>Guided learning hours</b>	A notional measure of the substance of a qualification. It includes an estimate of the time that might be allocated to direct teaching or instruction together with other structured learning time such as directed assignments, assessments on the job or supported individual study and practice. It excludes learner – initiated private study.
<b>Independent assessment</b>	Assessment carried out in a manner that is demonstrably independent of any individual who might have a vested interest in its outcome.
<b>Internal assessment</b>	A form of assessment that does not meet the definition of external assessment for a general or vocationally-related qualification or the definition of independent assessment for an occupational qualification.
<b>Moderation</b>	The process through which internal assessment is monitored by an awarding body to ensure that internal assessment is valid, reliable, fair and consistent with required standards. The term includes, for NVQs, the processes known as internal and external verification.
<b>Module</b>	Specified teaching and learning requirements associated with an identifiable part of a qualification.
<b>Specification</b>	The complete description – including mandatory and optional aspects – of the content, assessment arrangements and performance requirements for a qualification.
<b>Staged assessment</b>	Assessment arrangements in which assessment units are taken throughout a period of learning.
<b>Synoptic assessment</b>	A form of assessment which tests candidates' understanding of the connections between the different elements of a subject.
<b>Title</b>	The field of study or occupational area associated with a qualification.
<b>Unit</b>	The smallest part of a qualification that can be separately certificated.







## About this publication

<b>Who's it for?</b>	This document is for awarding bodies, national training organisations, standards-setting bodies, professional bodies and organisations involved in the delivery of accredited qualifications.
<b>What's it about?</b>	This document specifies, in the form of criteria, the characteristics necessary for any qualification to be accredited and admitted into the national qualifications framework. It also specifies the processes and procedures required to ensure high quality, consistency and rigorous standards in assessment and awarding across all qualifications within the framework and over time.
<b>It replaces</b>	The March 1999 working draft of <i>A guide to the arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland</i> .
<b>Related material</b>	The <i>Procedures Handbook for Awarding Bodies</i> details the processes and procedures to be followed by awarding bodies in submitting a qualification for accreditation by the regulatory authorities.
<b>What's it for?</b>	To establish transparent and consistent arrangements for the regulation of qualifications and promote public confidence in the quality, rigour, cost effectiveness and consistency of standards within and across qualifications.
<b>What next?</b>	Qualification specific codes of practice which specify additional quality assurance and control requirements for particular qualification types are being developed. These will complement the requirements of the guide and form part of the overall regulatory package.

### ***This publication has been sent to:***

Awarding bodies, national training organisations, standards-setting bodies, the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education and inspection and funding agencies.

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