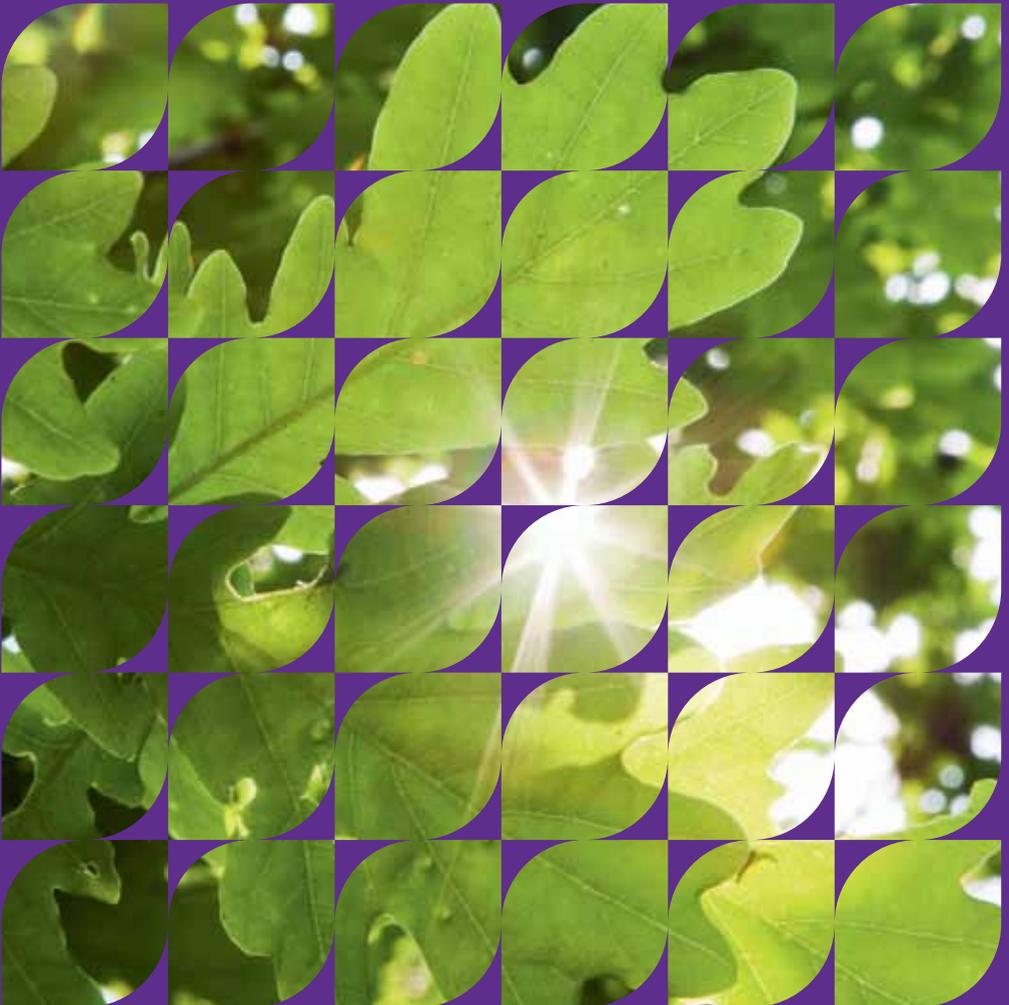




Qualifications  
& Credit  
Framework

# The Qualifications and Credit Framework: an introduction for sector skills councils, standards setting bodies and the education sector



## About this leaflet

Over the next 18 months, your organisation will have a leading role in developing fit-for-purpose, reformed qualifications that meet the needs of employers and learners in your sector, as part of the implementation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

This leaflet tells you how the QCF works and explains how you'll be getting involved over the next 18 months.

## What is the QCF?

The QCF is the new framework for creating and accrediting qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It's at the heart of a major reform of the vocational qualifications system, which will become simpler to understand and use, more accessible to a wider range of learners, and more relevant to learners' and employers' needs.

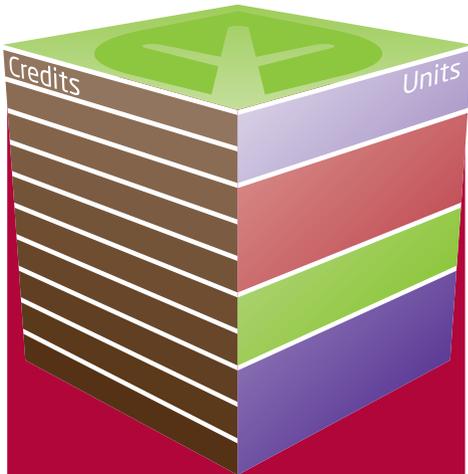
### The QCF:

- recognises smaller steps of learning and enables learners to build up qualifications bit by bit
- helps learners achieve skills and qualifications that meet industry needs
- involves a wider range of awarding organisations, including employers, opening up collaborative working opportunities between sector skills councils (SSCs), standards setting bodies (SSBs), employers and awarding organisations.

## How does it work?

In the QCF, everything learnt is valuable. All qualifications in the QCF are built from smaller units of learning. Every unit and qualification has a credit value (showing how much time it takes to complete — one credit represents 10 hours) and a level between Entry level and level 8 (showing how difficult it is).

## The structure of a QCF qualification



In the QCF, learners can accumulate credit in small steps by completing units, which can then build up into a full qualification.

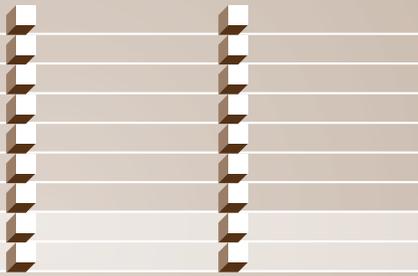
CHALLENGE

	8	
	7	
	6	
	5	
	4	
<b>Level</b>	3	
	2	
Foundation learning tier	1	
	<b>Entry</b>	
		<b>Award</b> 1–12 credits

The qualification name — Award, Certificate or Diploma — represents the size of a qualification, not how difficult it is. To understand how difficult a unit or qualification is, it might

There are three sizes of qualification in the QCF:

- **Award** (1 to 12 credits)
- **Certificate** (13 to 36 credits)
- **Diploma** (37 credits or more).



### Certificate

13–36 credits

### Diploma

37+ credits

## SIZE

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

This consistent way of describing what subject the qualification covers, how difficult it is and how much work it involves will help learners and employers compare different qualifications.

## Examples of QCF qualifications

Level 1	Certificate	in sport and active leisure
Level 4	Diploma	in buying and merchandising for fashion retail
Level 8	Award	in strategic direction and leadership

### Each qualification title contains the following:

- the level of the qualification (from Entry level at the bottom to level 8 at the top)
- the size of qualification (Award/Certificate/Diploma)
- details indicating the content of the qualification.

## When's it happening?

The implementation of the QCF has already begun. The process of bringing all vocational qualifications into the new framework is now well under way, with growing numbers of learners taking units and qualifications through the system.

By 2010, it's expected that all vocational qualifications (approximately 6,000) will be accredited to the QCF, and by that point the QCF will have replaced the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) for vocational qualifications.

The QCF has been designed as an inclusive framework for all regulated qualifications. All vocational qualifications within apprenticeships will be on the QCF by the end of 2010.

The new Diploma for 14- to 19-year-olds has been designed with the QCF in mind and is expected to be fully included within the framework in the future. Some parts of the Diploma (vocational qualifications in the additional and specialist learning component) are already being included in the QCF. We're also working with partners in the higher education sector to ensure alignment between the QCF and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

The QCF will be linked with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning. This common European reference tool will enable European countries to easily compare achievements within qualifications systems across countries.

## Who's involved?

The former Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills asked the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and Ofqual to implement the QCF in England.

QCA, now operating as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA), is working with partner organisations to get the education sector ready for putting the QCF into practice.

The LSC is responsible for implementing funding, planning and performance measures to support qualifications within the QCF in England. It's also delivering the QCF Service Layer, which stores learners' achievement data from awarding organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It also provides information, advice and guidance practitioners in England with information to help them advise learners and employers about QCF qualifications.

Ofqual, together with its partner regulators in Wales (DCELLS) and Northern Ireland (CCEA), is responsible for regulating the QCF.

## Support for SSCs and SSBs

QCDA is working with the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils to ensure that SSCs and SSBs are ready to roll out the QCF. We're also working with other partner organisations to ensure awarding organisations and learning providers are ready for the QCF.

The Alliance is advising technical staff in SSCs and SSBs on:

- how to operate within the QCF as a recognised unit or "rule of combination" submitter (rules of combination set out the combinations of units and credit needed to achieve a qualification)
- how to work with awarding organisations to develop fit-for-purpose vocational qualifications
- how to work with awarding organisations to convert national occupational standards into QCF units of assessment
- how to approve vocational qualifications in their sector that have been developed by awarding organisations.

It is also advising field-based staff in SSCs and SSBs on the benefits and key features of the QCF so that they can explain these to their employers.

The Alliance is advising research-based staff in SSCs and SSBs on how the QCF will affect the ways qualifications are achieved, and how this may change the way they collect and use information in the future.

Finally, the Alliance is advising marketing and communications staff in SSCs and SSBs on how to communicate and market the benefits, aims and objectives of the QCF to their sector stakeholders. This will ensure they can fully engage with the framework, leading to a genuine reform of the vocational qualifications landscape.

To find out more about the project to get SSCs and SSBs ready for the QCF, email [info@sscalliance.org](mailto:info@sscalliance.org) or visit [www.sscalliance.org](http://www.sscalliance.org).

## Benefits of the QCF for SSCs and SSBs

**Units and qualifications in the QCF are beneficial to all of its users as they're:**

- transferable
- flexible
- quality assured
- easy to understand
- geared towards progression.

Through the QCF, SSCs and SSBs can help reform qualifications in their sector so that they meet employer and learner needs by:

- including a wider range of learning and achievement – including content developed directly by employers
- allowing the design of more flexible qualifications, which can respond quickly to changing needs.

The QCF will also help benefit learners and employers within sectors by:

- allowing learners to build up credit for a wide range of achievements throughout their working lives
- offering units and qualifications more tailored to needs of particular learners and/or employers.

## Where to get more information

To watch an animation on how the QCF works, and for all sorts of other useful information about the new framework, visit [www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf).

Subscribe to monthly email updates at [www.qcda.gov.uk/subscribe](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/subscribe).

For more information on the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils and its involvement with the QCF, visit [www.sscalliance.org](http://www.sscalliance.org).

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Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (England)  
83 Piccadilly  
London W1J 8QA  
Telephone 0300 303 3011  
Email [info@qcda.gov.uk](mailto:info@qcda.gov.uk)  
[www.qcda.gov.uk](http://www.qcda.gov.uk)

Find out how the QCF is being implemented in Wales and Northern Ireland at:

Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (Wales)  
[www.cqfw.net](http://www.cqfw.net)  
[cqfwenquiries@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:cqfwenquiries@wales.gsi.gov.uk)

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (Northern Ireland)  
[www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk)  
[info@ccea.org.uk](mailto:info@ccea.org.uk)

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