



Qualifications
& Credit
Framework

The Qualifications and Credit Framework: an introduction



About this leaflet

Do you:

- find the current qualifications system confusing?
- want a system that enables qualifications to be achieved in small, measurable steps?
- want to find out more about the development of a flexible and inclusive qualifications system?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, please read on.

This leaflet tells you about the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and gives you the information you need to understand how it works and how it can benefit learners, employers and learning providers.

What is the QCF?

The QCF is the new framework for accrediting and awarding 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.

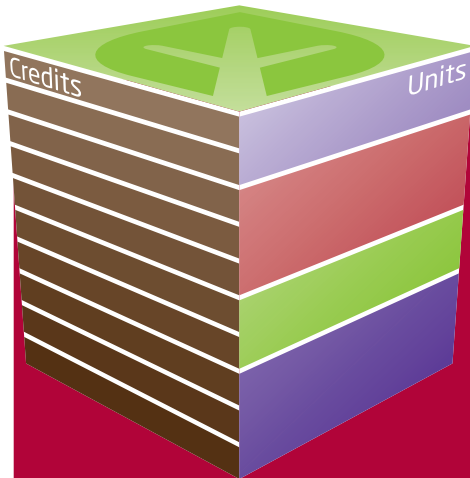
The QCF:

- 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
- enables work-based training to be recognised and formally accredited.

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.

There are three sizes of qualification in the QCF:

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

Each qualification title contains the following:

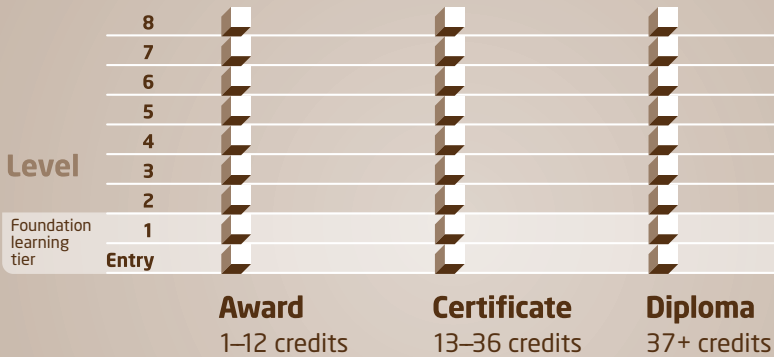
- **the level of the qualification** (from Entry level at the bottom to level 8 at the top)
- **the size of qualification** (Award/Certificate/Diploma)
- **details indicating the content of the qualification.**

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

Examples of QCF qualifications

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

CHALLENGE



SIZE

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

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

The QCF in practice

Learners can avoid duplicating the learning and assessment they have already done in three ways:

- For achievement within the QCF, learners can transfer credits between units and qualifications.
- Other learning and achievements that haven't been certificated can be assessed and awarded through 'recognising prior learning'.
- Learners with certificated achievements outside the QCF, who already have the skills and knowledge for a unit, can claim 'exemption' and not have to repeat their learning.

When's it happening?

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

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

Who's involved?

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

QCA, now operating as the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA),

is working with partner organisations to get the education sector ready for putting the QCF into practice. It's working closely with sector skills councils, awarding organisations, learning providers and learners.

The LSC is responsible for implementing credit-based 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.

What are the benefits of the QCF?

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

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

For learners the QCF:

- enables them to complete units at a pace and in a way that fits around their home and work lives
- allows them to build up all their learning towards units and qualifications, and avoid repeating what they've already learnt
- means they can use their previous learning and achievement towards recognised qualifications that meet industry needs
- makes it easy to compare how hard each qualification is and how much work it involves

- has smaller steps of learning that make it possible to take new paths to success, either by progressing further with a skill or by changing direction and putting the learning to a new use.

For employers the QCF:

- actively involves them in deciding what training and education is needed for their industry's future
- enables them to get their in-house training recognised as a qualification within a national framework
- can be tailored to suit their company's needs – they can get single units of training recognised as well as whole qualifications
- enables them to join forces with other employers to create qualifications relevant to their sector
- helps them quickly measure the difficulty and size of achievements of prospective employees
- enables them to target their training to the needs of individual employees.

For learning providers the QCF:

- enables them to design more tailored learning programmes, suitable to individual learners' needs
- means they can easily see what learners have already achieved and how that learning can be put towards other units and qualifications
- is quality assured – the QCF is a regulated framework
- lets them present courses and qualifications in a way that everyone understands
- offers the chance to work with employers and learners in new and innovative ways.



Where to get more information

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

Subscribe to monthly email updates at www.qcda.gov.uk/subscribe.

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