



Qualifications  
& Credit  
Framework

# A learning provider's guide to using the Qualifications and Credit Framework



## What's happening?

The vocational qualifications system is changing for the better. It's focusing more on the skills and qualifications that employers want in their employees, as well as helping learners gain skills and qualifications in a way that suits them.

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is part of the larger UK vocational qualification reform and is being implemented across the country. It brings greater confidence, choice and clarity to vocational qualifications. The QCF and the larger reform are central to the National Skills Strategy 'Skills for growth', which focuses on helping people achieve skills that match the demands of modern work, and opens up new opportunities and choices for both learners and employers.

While it will take a number of years for the benefits of the QCF to be fully realised, learning providers should start getting ready now so they can fully exploit the opportunities the framework has to offer. The QCF is a tool that can help providers offer more flexible and personalised learning programmes.

You need to think about how best to use the QCF to build a unit-based curriculum, and how to work with employers and learners to deliver programmes and qualifications that are relevant to individual needs and that support progression.

## What can the QCF do for you?

### **You can offer more personalised learning**

The QCF enables you to offer multiple routes to vocational qualifications through the use of optional units, pathways, other units and exemptions. It means you can offer greater choice to learners through personalised programmes of study that meet individual learners' needs and aspirations. You can also build up courses using QCF units to meet particular needs, such as a new qualification that fills a skills gap for an employer, just like Honda, Toyota and BMW did (see case study).

The *National Database of Accredited Qualifications* (NDAQ) at [www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk](http://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk) shows what units are currently available and the different qualifications they can lead to.

## CASE STUDY

### Honda, Toyota and BMW – creating a qualification to fill a skills gap

With the launch of the hybrid car comes the need for mechanics to expand their skill set to maintain and repair this new technology. As a result Honda, Toyota and BMW worked with the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI) to develop two QCF qualifications in maintaining hybrid technology cars.

The flexibility of the QCF has enabled the car industry to quickly adapt its qualifications to meet these new training requirements.

These qualifications are now being taught across the country and are available for use by all car manufacturers.

### **You can attract and retain learners**

The QCF gives you the chance to offer learning that people can fit around their lives — allowing individuals to progress at a rate that suits them. They can build up units and gain a qualification over an extended period or they can complete qualifications in a shorter timeframe by taking more units in one go. Evidence suggests that more frequent, incremental recognition of achievement through the award of credit will in turn:

- improve retention rates
- improve achievement rates
- motivate learners to progress to further learning
- introduce new learner groups to vocational qualifications.

### **It builds in progression routes**

Completing QCF qualifications that include units at different levels enable learners to carry forward appropriate credits already achieved when they progress to higher-level qualifications. Likewise, when rules allow, learners may be able to transfer credits from a smaller qualification to a larger one, for example by transferring credits from an Award to a Certificate. Sometimes they can do both, for example transferring credit from an Award at level 1 to a Certificate at level 2. This means learners can avoid having to repeat learning and assessment, thereby aiding progression.

## **You can broaden your curriculum offer**

Some QCF units are shared between qualifications and awarding organisations. This means that teaching can be planned around individual units, or clusters of units, but the credits that learners achieve on these units could count towards different qualifications. This can sometimes mean that you can plan a curriculum offer that might provide

routes towards several different qualifications, rather than a single qualification. Some learners, of course, might build up skills and knowledge through credits and units rather than whole qualifications. This could support cost-effective delivery methods, help to sustain a broader curriculum offer and allow provision planning to be more responsive.

## **What makes up a QCF qualification?**

Rules of combination state the combination of credit, through units, needed to gain a qualification. Awarding organisations design rules of combination with sector skills councils (SSCs) and standard setting bodies (SSBs) to make sure the rules meet the needs of the relevant market. Qualifications can only go onto the QCF when their rules of combination have been approved by the appropriate SSC/SSB.

The rules state what mandatory and/or optional units are needed to gain the qualification, including what can be transferred from other QCF qualifications. The rules also include 'exemptions' where learners can use previous certificated achievement from outside the QCF towards the qualification – if they already have the skills and knowledge for a unit, they can be made 'exempt' from the unit and avoid having to repeat their learning. Equivalent units can also be used from within the QCF. Non-certificated learning and achievement can be assessed and awarded through recognition of prior learning (RPL).

## **You can strengthen your relationship with employers**

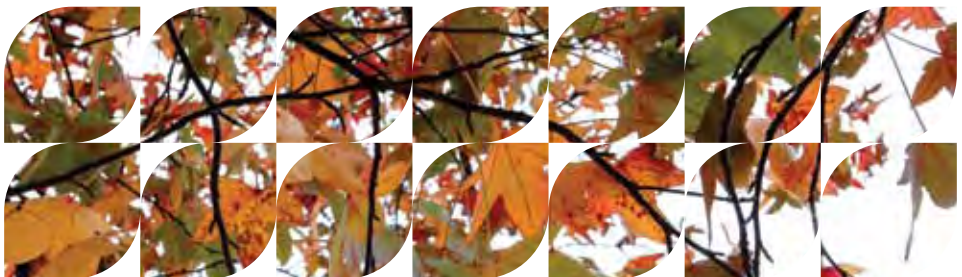
Using the QCF gives you the opportunity to rethink your employer offer and work with local employers to deliver the programmes they want.

You can work with awarding organisations and employers to offer the qualifications that both reskill and upskill employees, which is especially important during the current economic climate.

The QCF also relieves the tensions between employees' needs and employer needs — you can deliver a more flexible curriculum that meets both the in-house training requirements of employers and the skills development needs of staff. This builds up workforce skills and motivates and engages the workforce, as well as enabling employees to transfer credits within and across sectors.

## **You have a better understanding of what each qualification involves**

You'll already be aware that all QCF qualifications are presented in a standard format. You can look at these units on *NDAQ*, where it clearly states what the intended learning outcomes of each unit are, and what criteria will be used to assess them. The methods of assessment will be determined by the awarding organisations you work with. Many of these assessment methods will remain very similar to those used for previous qualifications.



## Find out more

The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) is helping providers to become 'ready' through the QCF Readiness Provider Support Programme. This includes a consultancy service on how to plan for the changes as well as events and information resources. You can find information on what support is available at [www.excellencegateway.org.uk/252035](http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/252035).

The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) and the Association of Colleges (AoC) support the LSIS QCF Readiness Programme by working with work-based learning providers and further education colleges to help them develop the necessary expertise and systems to get ready for the QCF by December 2010.

For more information on the provider support offered by ALP, visit [www.learningproviders.org.uk/topics/details/qualification-and-credit-framework-qcf](http://www.learningproviders.org.uk/topics/details/qualification-and-credit-framework-qcf).

To find out about the support offered to providers by AoC, visit [www.aoc.co.uk](http://www.aoc.co.uk).

Further information on the Service Layer is available on the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) website at <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/qcfsi>. Also, the LSC QCF Service Desk provides five day a week support for Service Layer queries. Call 0870 2670054 (8am to 9pm weekdays, excluding public holidays), or email [qcfservicedesk@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:qcfservicedesk@lsc.gov.uk).

For further information on the QCF, visit:

- the LSC at <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support>
- the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) at [www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf), where you'll find an animation to show how the QCF works, and interactive guides on rules of combination, recognising prior learning and writing units of assessment
- the Department of Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) at [www.dius.gov.uk/skills/vq\\_reform/nvqs\\_and\\_the\\_qcf](http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/vq_reform/nvqs_and_the_qcf).

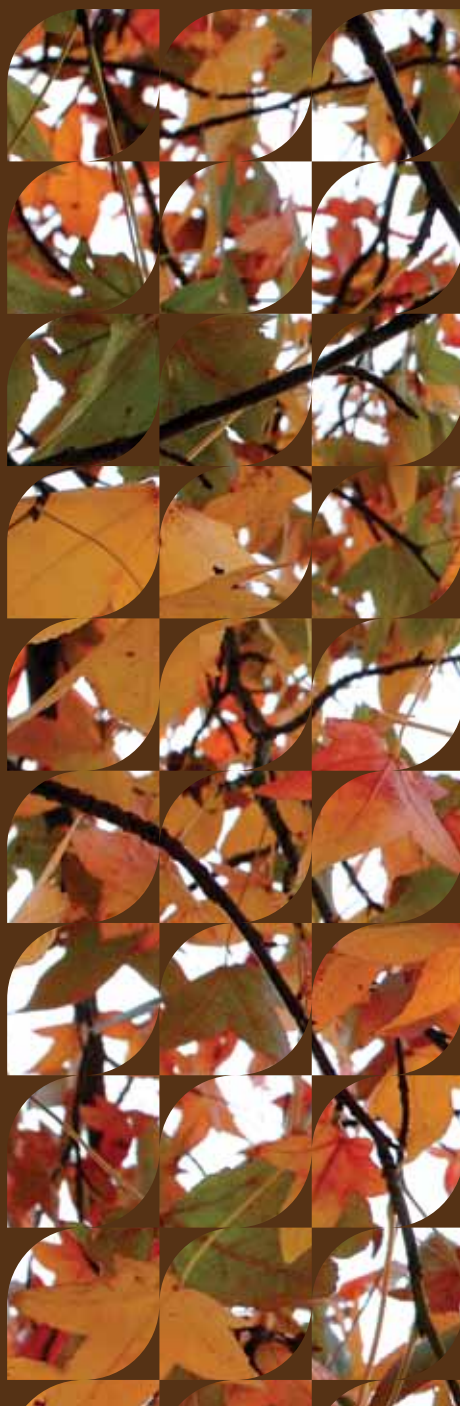
## Who's involved in Northern Ireland?

QCF implementation in Northern Ireland (NI) is overseen by the NI vocational qualifications reform programme (VQRP) board.

The NI Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) NI are helping key stakeholders in Northern Ireland to get ready for the QCF. For more information about the QCF in Northern Ireland go to [www.ccea.org.uk](http://www.ccea.org.uk) and [www.nivqrp.org.uk](http://www.nivqrp.org.uk).

## Who's involved in Wales?

In Wales, the QCF sits within the overarching Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW). The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) is leading work with key stakeholders to prepare practitioners, employers and learners in Wales for the QCF. Find out more about the QCF in Wales at [www.cqfw.net](http://www.cqfw.net).



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QCDA/10/4620  
ISBN 978-1-84962-301-8

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

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