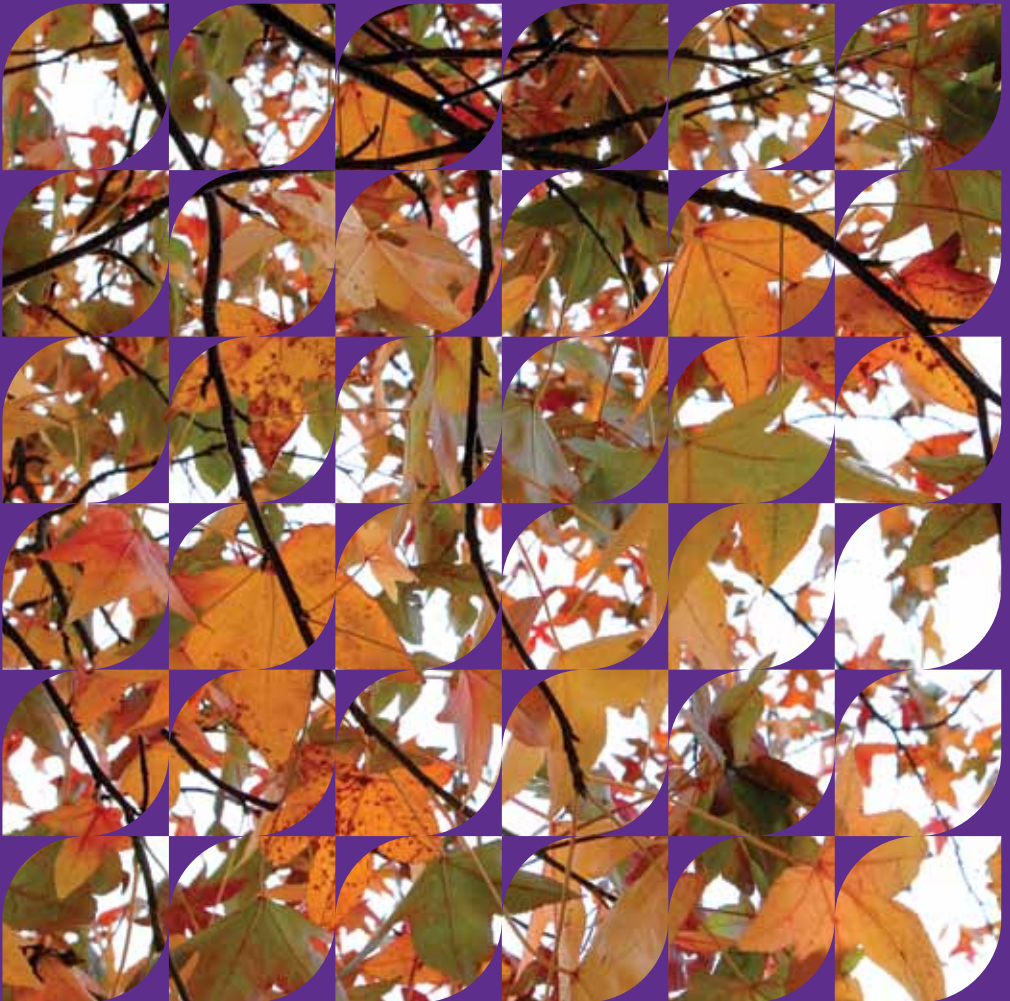




Qualifications
& Credit
Framework

An employer's guide to using the Qualifications and Credit Framework



What's happening?

Vocational and work-related qualifications are changing to become more responsive to the specific demands of employers and learners. They will be more relevant to employers' needs and more accessible to a wider range of learners.

An essential tool in this reform of vocational qualifications is the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Qualifications and units in the QCF reflect the skills that employers want, because employers are involved in designing them. The QCF gives you clarity, choice and confidence in the vocational qualifications system so that you can take a leading role in developing qualifications that are right for your industry.

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.

How do I get involved?

Your sector skills council (SSC) can give advice and guidance on how you can get involved. You can find a list of all SSCs at the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils website at www.sscalliance.org. SSCs are heavily involved in developing qualifications — they decide on the qualifications that will be developed and then approve them. Through your SSC, you can voice your thoughts on what content qualifications should include, so you can be sure that learners completing QCF qualifications have the skills and knowledge that your company wants. As well as making sure your industry has the qualifications it needs, your SSC can also help you with your in-house training requirements.

Take a look at www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf where you'll find a number of case studies showcasing how employers across the country are already involved in the QCF.

How will the QCF benefit me?

Employer influence is key to QCF qualifications. Through the QCF you can:

- have more say on what qualifications are designed — QCF qualifications are developed in response to employers' needs
- have a more appropriately skilled workforce — all QCF qualifications must be approved as robust and fit for purpose
- attract and retain employees by being able to offer nationally recognised qualifications that support progression through your business
- benefit from a more flexible qualifications system — you can shape training around your business needs using relevant QCF units

- understand qualifications more easily — all QCF qualifications have straightforward titles that tell you how long each one takes to complete, its difficulty and its subject matter, so you'll have a better idea of employees' skills.

Examples of QCF qualifications

Level 4	Certificate	in strategic direction
Level 2	Award	in merchandising

How to make the QCF work for you

Employers can be involved in the QCF in a variety of ways — it depends on your company's training needs and which qualifications are already available. The QCF helps employers future-proof their businesses. It's more flexible and responsive to the future needs of an industry. Your SSC will help you figure out the best way for you to make the most of the opportunities that the QCF presents.

Three ways you can get involved

Use an existing qualification

There may be a number of awarding organisations that offer a qualification that suits your training needs. If so, you're encouraged to use one of these. Your SSC can help you find existing qualifications that may be of use, or you could visit the *National Database of Accredited Qualifications* (NDAQ) at www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk to see what's already available.

Tailor an existing qualification

There might be various appropriate QCF units that you can put together to create a qualification that meets your training needs. Or there might only be some relevant units in the QCF and you need to fill in the gaps. In this case, you can create your own unit(s) that fill those gaps — add these to the existing units and you've got a tailored qualification for your employees. Your SSC can help you find an appropriate awarding organisation to design and deliver this qualification. This approach gives you the opportunity to change and design units based on the changing business needs that might arise from the growth and development of your industry.

Create a new qualification

There might not be any units that suit your company's training requirements. If so, developing a new qualification could be the right option. There could be a skills gap in your training that a new qualification could address, or you might have in-house training that doesn't quite fit into an existing qualification. In the QCF you can use your existing in-house training and turn it into a new QCF qualification. All QCF qualifications need to go through a rigorous approval process so you can be assured that you're offering high quality, fit for purpose units and/or qualifications, helping you attract and retain staff.

The European Qualifications Framework

The QCF has been referenced against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It's a tool that links European countries' qualifications systems to each other and makes it easier to cross-reference qualifications between countries. This translation device will make it easier for you to interpret the qualifications of foreign applicants. It will also support labour market mobility in Europe by simplifying how qualifications are compared, and enable a better match between supply and demand for knowledge, skills and competence.

Find out more about how the EQF is being referenced across the UK and Europe at www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf.



Case studies

Creating a qualification to fill a skills gap

Honda, Toyota and BMW

With the launch of the hybrid electrical car comes the need for mechanics to expand their skill set to maintain and repair this new technology. 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 qualifications to meet the new training requirements. These qualifications are now being taught across the country and are available for use by all car manufacturers.

Beverly Lilley, IMI development manager for automotive skills commented: 'Our job has been to assist these manufacturers in developing the qualifications for the QCF and ensuring they meet the rigorous standards set by the regulator, Ofqual. A lot of hard work used to go unrecognised and now, crucially, many technicians — who may have no formal qualifications since leaving school — gain increasing motivation and confidence. As well as helping to increase the skill level of the UK workforce, it encourages progressive steps towards further learning and empathy with environmental concerns.'

Tailoring an existing qualification to suit training needs

Skillsmart Retail

Skillsmart Retail is the sector skills council for retail — the largest private sector employer in the UK. Retailers currently spend £1.8 billion a year on training their employees, but much of this training is not formally recognised.

In its review of retail qualifications, Skillsmart Retail learnt that learners and employers ignored existing qualifications or felt disengaged from them — there were so many, often with little meaning conveyed by their titles. Many of these qualifications also failed to meet business needs.

For these reasons Skillsmart Retail has used the QCF to combine and reduce these qualifications so they all fall under just nine sector-endorsed qualification titles, eliminating much of the confusion previously felt by employers and setting a national benchmark across the industry. Now retail employers find it easier to understand and compare the skills of their staff, especially those who have had more varied learning.

As employers are best placed to identify a particular skills gap, a unit of study may be all that is required, rather than a much wider qualification that would duplicate training employees had already undertaken. Employers may also find that an existing qualification almost fulfils their requirements, so that they only need to create a unit to add on to the qualification to make it meet their business needs.

Find out more

Your SSC can give advice and guidance on how you can get involved. You can find a list of all SSCs at www.sscalliance.org.

For information on employer engagement, including an animation about the QCF and an interactive guide on the different ways you can get involved, visit www.qcda.gov.uk/qcf.

For information on vocational training, visit www.businesslink.gov.uk.

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We want our website and publications to be widely accessible, so please contact QCDA if we're not meeting your needs.

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

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