



Qualifications  
& Credit  
Framework

# An introduction to the Qualifications and Credit Framework



## What's happening?

Vocational and work-related qualifications are changing to become more responsive to the 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).

## What's 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.

Learners can build up their units at their own pace and put them towards a full qualification. They can bank all their achievements over time and keep them as they move from education into a job or from one job to another. They don't have to study anything they already know.

## The QCF:

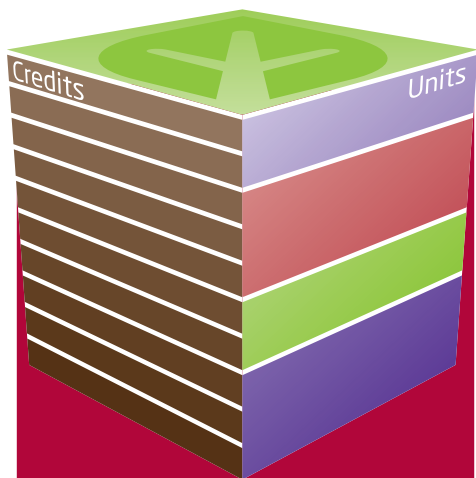
- recognises smaller steps of learning and enables learners to build up qualifications bit by bit
- helps learners achieve skills and qualifications that meet industry needs
- enables work-based training to be nationally recognised.

In the QCF, everything learnt is valuable. All qualifications in the QCF are built from smaller units of learning.

## How does it work?

Every unit and qualification in the QCF has a credit value that tells you how long it takes to complete — one credit represents 10 hours' work. Each unit and qualification also has its own level, between Entry level and level 8, to show how difficult it is.

## The structure of a QCF qualification



In the QCF, learners 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



Remember the qualification size – Award, Certificate or Diploma – tells you how long it will take, not how difficult it is. The level tells you how difficult it is. An A level is equivalent to level 3 and a PhD is equivalent to level 8 in the QCF.

Foundation Learning helps learners working at Entry level and level 1 in the QCF in England to develop their potential and prepares them to progress towards level 2 and other routes.

## What are the benefits of the QCF?

Through the QCF, learners can:

- get the skills and qualifications that employers are looking for
- find it easier to see how qualifications can help their personal and career development
- fit learning around their home and work lives
- have a better understanding of qualifications.

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

- with achievement from 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.

Through the QCF, employers can:

- have more say on what qualifications are developed — QCF qualifications are designed in response to employers' demands
- 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, which encourages progression through the company
- benefit from a more flexible qualifications system — they can shape training around their business needs using relevant QCF units
- understand qualifications more easily — all QCF qualifications have straightforward titles that state how long each one takes to complete, its difficulty and its subject matter, to give a clearer idea of employees' skills.

## When is it happening?

The implementation of the QCF is now in full swing. We're now bringing all vocational qualifications into the new framework, and growing numbers of learners are taking units and qualifications through the system.

It's expected that all accredited vocational qualifications will be on the QCF by the end of 2010.

## Who's involved

The government 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 to put the QCF in practice. We're working closely with sector skills councils, awarding organisations, learning providers and learners.

The LSC is responsible for implementing funding, planning and performance measures to support qualifications within the QCF in England. It also provides information, advice and guidance practitioners in England with information to help advise learners and employers about QCF qualifications.

The LSC is also delivering the QCF Service Layer, which stores learners' achievement data from awarding organisations in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. To find out more about the Service Layer and funding, go to <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/qcfsi>.

Ofqual is responsible for regulating the QCF in England.

## 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).



## Find out more

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).

Other useful websites where you can find more information about the QCF are:

the Learning and Skills Council at <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support>.

the Department for Business Innovation and Skills at [www.dius.gov.uk/skills/vq\\_reform](http://www.dius.gov.uk/skills/vq_reform).

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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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