

Vocational Qualifications Fact Sheet - for information

What learners need to know about the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

Date: 27 August 2010

Audience details: For staff offering information and advice on careers and learning options in colleges, training providers, careers services and learners aged 19 and over

Introduction

The content of this paper has been developed in consultation with the National Learner Panel. The paper is structured to provide information that starts with a prospective learner in mind and the likely stages involved leading to a learner completing a course.

The Qualifications Credit Framework (QCF)

QCF is a credit based framework for qualifications and applies to England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland also has a credit based qualification system. The QCF has been designed to align with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning.

The value of vocational qualifications

Employers across all industry sectors are playing a key role in drawing up the QCF approved vocational qualifications. The qualifications reflect what employers want and will be readily recognised when learners apply for jobs or apply to study or train for further learning.

Applying to a course or training

Finding out about courses

A new national course directory became available in August 2010 and provides detail on accredited qualifications that are available locally. The [course directory is searchable online](#).

There are lots of vocational qualifications to choose from - which will give you the skills to work in a very wide range of different industries.

If you need help you can contact [Next Step](#) on 0800 100 900 or visit the [Next Step](#) website.

If you would like to get an idea of what is available you can log onto The National Database of Accredited Qualifications ([NDAQ](#)) and you can search for the qualifications that interest you by sector - for example, health, public services and care - or by job/occupation - for example, ambulance person or zoo keeper.

Non-vocational qualifications, such as GCSEs, are a part of the National Qualification Framework (NQF), which also consists of nine levels from Entry to Level 8 - that can be broadly compared to the QCF. The equivalence information is provided by the regulator, Ofqual.

To compare two qualifications you will first need to work out whether the qualifications are accredited by Ofqual. If they are, you will need to refer to the National Database of Accredited Qualifications ([NDAQ](#)), where you will find instructions on how to search for qualifications. Please note that Higher Education qualifications are not accredited by Ofqual, but can be broadly compared. This allows learners, employers and training providers to gain information about the broad equivalence of qualifications.

Starting a vocational qualification

Understanding key differences between qualifications in the transitional phase April 2010 - December 2010

The plan is that all vocational qualifications will be on the QCF by December 2010. From April 2010 we will be in a transition phase as vocational qualifications continue to move to QCF, which means it is likely that if you enrol on a vocational course after September 2010 it will be a QCF qualification.

Units and compulsory units in a qualification

Every QCF qualification is made up of units. Some of the units might be compulsory - others might not be. The compulsory units will vary from course to course. Log onto [NDAQ](#) and you can search for particular units. If you look at the 'qualification structure summary' it will explain which units are compulsory. A learning provider or careers adviser will also be able to help.

How credit works

Each unit/qualification you work for is worth a certain number of credits. The QCF credit measure of achievement is 10 hours of learning time amounts to 1 credit. It may take you more or less time than this, but you will still get the same unit/qualification worth the same number of credits. One of the benefits of taking a QCF qualification is that you can take units that build towards a nationally recognised qualification bit by bit.

Transferring credits from one qualification to another

You can transfer credit provided the 'new' qualification is designed to 'accept' the credits that you already have. You should check with your learning provider (college) or the relevant awarding organisation to find out whether this is possible.

Determining at what level you should start

The level you start at will depend on many different factors including whether you already have any qualifications and at what level. There is an interactive animation which provides an introduction to the Qualifications and Credit Framework at: [an introduction to the QCF](#).

QCF brings a consistency to the way qualifications are described by introducing a common set of titles. This means that by simply looking at the title of a qualification, you are able to see how difficult it is and how long it takes to complete. All qualifications are placed on a level between Entry Level and Level 8, depending on the difficulty. The size of the qualification is reflected in the title and will indicate the learning time. There are three titles used to describe qualifications, Award, Certificate and Diploma. Each one describes a qualification of a certain size with Award being the smallest and Diploma being the largest. So in the QCF it is possible to have a Diploma at Level 1 or a Diploma at Level 8. Further explanation on qualifications can be found at: [explaining qualifications](#).

Topping up previous qualifications as a refresher course

The new framework is extremely flexible and allows you to dip in and out of learning and training. You can do a unit of learning that builds on your existing qualifications - or update

them. You will receive the relevant credit for that unit which will be kept on your Personal Learning Record, when it becomes available after September 2010. The unit will also form part of a 'new' qualification that you can do as well if you so choose.

Studying more than one qualification

It may be possible to study more than one qualification at the same time, depending on which qualifications you would like to do. However, you will need to confirm with your college or learning provider is able to enrol you to study two qualifications at the same time and claim funding from the Skills Funding Agency for the programme of learning that you want to do.

Recognising previous experience

The learning provider (college) can carry out a 'recognition of prior learning' assessment to see how your experience measures up against a particular unit or units. The provider can then make a decision as to whether or not you will need to study the content of that unit. However, this will only be possible at a unit level and previous experience cannot be counted as *part of a unit*.

Tuition fees

Through the [Adult Entitlement to learning](#), you may not have to pay tuition fees if you want to do a full Level 2 or full Level 3 vocational qualification. Within the QCF, full Level 2 and 3 qualifications are defined as qualifications that employers in your chosen sector have identified as important. Your provider will be able to advise you about whether you are eligible, and what qualifications you can do.

Other than the change in what is meant by full Level 2 and 3 vocational qualifications, QCF does not affect the entitlement to free tuition. There is more information about entitlement to free tuition at **directgov** at: [free tuition](#).

You may be eligible for an Adult Learning Grant. You must be studying full-time for the first time a course that leads to a full Level 2 or full Level 3 qualification. There is more information about financial help at **directgov** at: [financial help](#).

Childcare costs

You can find out more on the 'help with childcare' section of **directgov** at: [childcare](#).

During courses or training

Access to information on unit options

You need to access the National Database of Accredited Qualifications ([NDAQ](#)) where you can search for a qualification, unit or awarding body. You can see the credit value, level of difficulty, learning outcomes and assessment criteria of each qualification and see the different pathways to achieve a particular qualification through the 'Rules of Combination' (RoC). Careers advisers and learning provider staff will be able to help you with making choices on QCF qualifications and units. Information on the changes has been published specifically to support advisers.

Recording learning and qualifications

A learner will have a Personal Learning Record from September 2010 which will be kept on a secure database that is protected under data protection legislation.

A learner is responsible for giving permission to designated individuals to access the data, for example, a careers adviser, Jobcentre Plus adviser or an employer.

Time limit of qualifications

Some qualifications have a time limit - particularly those that provide a licence to practice, such as door supervision. If you want to 'bank' your credits from particular units, they may have a time limit on them.

Plans after completing a course or training

QCF qualifications and university

QCF supports progression into higher education and to higher level skills. The higher education sector is aware of the Vocational Qualification Reforms and QCF qualifications will be accepted by universities.

Skilled workers in the labour market

QCF units and qualifications are designed to deliver the government and sectoral priorities in order to meet employer demand. QCF supports the ambition of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to "benefit employers, individuals and government by advising on how improved employment and skills systems can help the UK become a world-class leader in productivity, in employment and in having a fair and inclusive society".

Employer recognition of QCF qualifications

One of the benefits of QCF is that qualifications are designed and approved by Sector Skills Councils who represent employers, which means your QCF qualification will be relevant for employment. Because QCF qualifications are nationally recognised by employers you are allowed to carry your qualification from one employer to another.

Further information

Here are some useful links if you want to find out more about the:

- Government's changes to vocational qualifications visit: [VQ Reform](#).
- Skills Funding Agency's work on QCF visit: [Skills Funding Agency QCF](#). There is an interactive guide with a 'scenarios' section which gives conversations between advisers and learners on choices and options QCF offers called the [iguide](#).
- Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency's website for [QCF guidance](#).

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