

An employer's guide to the changes taking place in vocational qualifications

Over the next 18 months there are set to be significant changes to the vocational qualifications that are developed to raise the skills of the UK.

What is the Qualification and Credit Framework?

The QCF is the new Government framework which sets out how all regulated vocational qualifications should be structured, titled and quality assured. It is replacing the existing National Qualifications Framework across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

What changes will we notice?

The QCF introduces a more flexible approach by recognising units of credit rather than just full qualifications. This means learners and employers can pick and choose units and 'build' their qualifications at their own pace.

It also means that all current vocational qualifications such as NVQs will be redeveloped and renamed. The aim is to bring greater standardisation, consistency and understanding across all vocational qualifications.

The new qualifications will be called an Award, Certificate or Diploma and this indicates the size of the qualification i.e. the number of hours it takes the average learner to complete. The size of a unit is measured in credit where one credit is equal to 10 hours of learning. An Award is 1-12 credit qualifications, a Certificate is 13-36 credit qualifications, and a Diploma is 37+ credit qualifications. Award, Certificate, Diploma do not equate to difficulty - this is indicated by the level.

The different types of qualifications that existed in the NQF - NVQs, Certificates etc – will be redeveloped for the QCF. Where these brands add value they will continue to be used. For example: some areas may choose to keep NVQ in the title of occupational competence qualifications, while others may choose to lose it all together.

How do levels of vocational qualifications compare against traditional routes?

The level of a unit and qualification benchmarks the difficulty of the knowledge and skills required. Levels run from entry to level 8. The table below shows comparisons at entry to level 4. Level 8 is equivalent to a PHD.

NQF/QCF Level (1-8)	City & Guilds qualifications	General/Academic/Other vocational
4	Licentiate (LCGI) Higher Professional Diploma Level 4 vocational (NVQ/VRQ/QCF)	Certificate of Higher Education
3	Level 3 vocational (NVQ/VRQ/QCF) Advanced Apprenticeship (England and NI) Modern Apprenticeship (Scotland and Wales)	A Levels Advanced National Certificate in Education BTEC National Certificate/Diploma
2	Level 2 vocational (NVQ/VRQ/QCF) Apprenticeship (England and NI) Foundation Modern Apprenticeship (Wales)	GCSE grades A*-C BTEC First Certificate
1	NVQ Level 1 Level 1 vocational award	GCSE grades D-G
Entry (1, 2 and 3)	Entry level vocational qualifications Progression Awards	

What are the benefits of the QCF?

Recognises more quality training - In-house training programme can be easily mapped, accredited and awarded on the QCF, meaning staff can get their training nationally recognised – helping their progression even further.

Demand-led - You can influence what qualifications are right for your sector through your Sector Skills Councils (SSCs). Find your SSC and their plans at www.sscalliance.org/SSCs/LinkstoSSCs.aspx

Increased chances for progression - Learners can take more flexible routes and smaller steps progressing at their own pace but still working to build full qualifications.

Flexibility - The QCF will allow more flexibility for learners or staff to build credit at a pace, place and time that suits their personal circumstances.

Online learner records - From the end of 2010 all QCF credit will be recorded on a centralised online learner record (LR). Learners will be able to give you access to their online record showing up to the minute evidence of their achievements. For further information please refer to our dedicated webpage www.cityandguilds.com/uln

How do I know QCF qualifications will give learners the skills we need?

City & Guilds works in partnership with the SSCs and other industry bodies to ensure that our qualifications meet the needs of your industry.

How will the QCF affect public funding available to train our staff?

The move over to QCF is significantly affected by public funding. Funding will begin to shift from NQF qualifications to the QCF versions once they are developed. It is expected that all new starters will be on a QCF qualification by 2011. For the latest information on funding go to <http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support>

What happens to the qualifications of learners who completed prior to the QCF?

These will continue to remain valuable to both learners and employers and will not diminish in value - just as O-levels are still understood today as an equivalent for GCSEs.

Who are City & Guilds?

City & Guilds is the UK's leading organisation responsible for awarding work-based qualifications including over 50% of the UK's NVQs. We have 130 years' experience in vocational education and we're the largest awarding organisation solely focused on vocational skills. This means we have the deep sector insight and the experience required to deliver relevant qualifications and support for your industry.

Over 2 million learners achieve a City & Guilds qualification each year and we work in partnership with many large employers, including Orange, London Underground, Waitrose, Royal Mail, British Airways, B&Q and Tesco. We also work with FE colleges in the UK, and thousands of training providers large and small, who are supported by our network of 12 UK regional and national offices. Find your local office at www.cityandguilds.com/employers

What are my next steps?

At this stage you do not need to anything other than look out for updates on our dedicated webpage www.cityandguilds.com/qcf. If you have any additional questions you can contact a QCF expert on our dedicated email address – qcf@cityandguilds.com

