

A learner's guide to the changes in vocational qualifications

Over the next few years there are going to be big changes to vocational qualifications in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. One of the main changes is the introduction of a new qualification system called the Qualifications and Credit framework (QCF). The QCF offers you a more flexible and simpler structure to build the qualification of your choice. It allows you to complete qualifications in small chunks of learning at a pace that suits you.

Why do I need to know?

The names of the qualifications you may have heard of already, such as NVQs or Certificates, may change when they go on to the new system. The new titles of qualifications will always contain the same three elements of 'subject content', 'level' and 'size'.

The content tells you what the qualification is about, for example, hairdressing or IT. The level explains how difficult the qualification is (these haven't changed – see diagram below), from entry level to level 8.

The size tells you how long the qualification will take to complete and is described as an Award (10-120 notional hours), Certificate (130-360 notional hours) or Diploma (over 370 notional hours). Notional means that the hours include all your learning time not just time sitting in a classroom or workshop, but those gained through hands-on experience, reading and research.

Levels run from entry to level 8. The table below shows the comparisons of qualifications between entry and level 4.

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	

Table 1 Level comparisons

What happens to the qualifications completed prior to the QCF?

Qualifications taken pre-QCF will continue to be valuable to both you and employers, just as O-levels are still understood today as an equivalent for GCSEs.

So, what's different?

Qualifications will be more flexible and help progression

QCF qualifications are all made up of units or smaller steps of learning. These units can be added over time. This means you can learn at your own pace and continue to have skills and knowledge recognised throughout your career. It will allow you to fit your learning around your home and work life.

Learning is more transferable

The good news is that learning is not lost as you move in and out of education or between jobs. Work-based skills and college training that you have done already can be put towards other recognised qualifications.

They're easier to understand

You can now quickly look at a title and see how long a qualification or unit would take to complete and how difficult it is.

You'll get your own online record of achievement

From the end of 2010 all of the credit you collect through your learning will be recorded on a centralised online learner record (LR). You will be able to let potential or current employers have access to your record showing up to the minute evidence of your achievements. Of course, it also means you will always have an ongoing, on-line record, so no more hunting for certificates!

What is credit?

QCF qualifications are made up of a number of small 'chunks' of learning called units, each of which has a credit value. Credit is achieved on meeting all the requirements of the unit where **each credit represents 10 hours of notional learning**.

The total credit value of a qualification will then tell you how long it will take to complete.

Who are City & Guilds?

- City & Guilds is the UK's leading awarding organisation for vocational qualifications
- We are recognised by 99% of employers.
- We've got 130 years of experience in providing learners and employers with the skills they need.
- We work with learning providers all over the UK who run courses that lead to City & Guilds' qualifications.

How do I find out more about the changes to qualifications?

Please speak to your local college or training provider.

How do I find a college or training provider for my qualification?

City & Guilds qualifications are geared towards getting what you want, whether it's a dream job, a certain skill or a bulging pay packet! If you would like to find a qualification that interests you and where you can study it, visit www.cityandguilds.com/whatiwant

