

Quick guide

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

What is the Qualifications and Credit Framework?

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) recognises learning achievements through the award of credit for units and qualifications.

It provides a simple, consistent framework that presents information on qualifications in a way that is easy to understand, measure, and compare.

The QCF gives individuals the chance to learn in a more flexible way and enables a wider range of organisations, including employers, to have their training recognised.

Credit, levels, and qualifications

Every unit and every qualification in the QCF has a credit value. One credit represents a notional 10 hours of learning, showing how much time on average it takes to achieve.

The titles of all qualifications in the QCF contain the same three elements - content, level, and size.

The content identifies what the qualification is about. For example it might cover retail, or construction or sport.

The level indicates the level of difficulty. There are nine levels - from Entry level to level 8.

The size tells you how long the qualification will take to complete on average.

Under the QCF, there are three sizes of qualification; Award, Certificate, and Diploma:

- Awards are 1 to 12 credits in size
- Certificates are 13 to 36 credits in size
- Diplomas are 37 credits or more in size.

So there can be a Diploma at level 1 or at level 8, because 'Diploma' represents the size of a qualification not how difficult it is.

Some awarding organisations offer an 'extended' award, certificate, or diploma as a 'stepping stone' across a particular sized qualification. For example, OCR offer a 13-credit Entry Level Certificate in Life and Living Skills and a 25-credit Extended Certificate with many common optional units between them.

Rules of combination (RoC)

Rules of combination set out which units are mandatory or optional, how many credits are needed for the qualification and at which level, and whether or not there are any forbidden combinations. These rules are specific to each qualification, and are developed by Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), awarding organisations and other approved organisations.

Learners can build up units to achieve a qualification so long as they choose units in accordance with the rule of combination for that qualification.

Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT)

Credit accumulation is the process of building up a combination of credits to meet the achievement requirements of a qualification. Credit transfer is the process of using credit(s) awarded in the context of one qualification towards the achievement requirements of another qualification.

The rules for some qualifications may allow credit achieved at lower levels to count towards a qualification at a higher level. For example, allowing some level 1 credits to count towards achievement of a level 2 qualification. However, regulations for rules of combination specify that more than 50% of credits must be achieved at the level of the qualification or above. This mechanism can be used to support progression for learners as they can achieve credits that they may later transfer to a higher level qualification.

Where can I find QCF qualifications?

QCF qualifications can be found on the Register of Regulated Qualifications <http://register.ofqual.gov.uk> which contains all accredited qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The QCF and employers

Employers can work with the QCF to ensure that qualifications are fit for purpose and meet their business needs in a number of ways, ranging from developing a full bespoke qualification, to tailoring an existing qualification by developing a bespoke unit to fit their business needs. They can do this by becoming an awarding organisation in their own right, working with an existing awarding organisation or working with a third party (for example, FE college, training provider or trade association).

Regulation of qualifications

Ofqual regulates general and vocational qualifications in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. It has set out clear requirements of what is expected of the awarding organisations. Their new regulatory model which comes into effect from July 2011 is underpinned by:

- 'Recognition Criteria' (Ofsted, May 2011)
- 'General Conditions of Recognition' (Ofsted, May 2011).

For further details, see www.ofqual.gov.uk/for-awarding-organisations

Funding

Information on public funding for QCF qualifications can currently be found at:

- Skills Funding Agency (SFA)
<http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/>
- Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA)
<http://www.ypla.gov.uk/aboutus/ourwork/guidance/funding/>

From April 2012, The Education Funding Agency (EFA) will take over responsibility from the YPLA for the funding of young people's education and training including Academies and Sixth Form Colleges. The SFA will remain the lead funding agency for post-19 learners covering general FE colleges and specialist art and design and land-based colleges.

Further information on the QCF

- QCF iGuide (SFA)
<http://qcfiguide.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk>
- QCF Frequently Asked Questions (SFA, July 2011)
[http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/qcf - july 2011_faqs.pdf](http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/qcf_-_july_2011_faqs.pdf)
- Ofqual QCF area
www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualification-and-assessment-framework/89-articles/145-explaining-the-qualifications-and-credit-framework
- QCF 'My Development' learning resource
www.excellencegateway.org.uk/327712

LSIS QCF Support

www.excellencegateway.org.uk/qcfprovidersupport

Other LSIS QCF quick guides

- Designing programmes of study using the QCF
www.excellencegateway.org.uk/257651
- Recording and monitoring learner achievement data within the QCF
www.excellencegateway.org.uk/257658

Case studies

- QCF case studies on the Excellence Gateway
www.excellencegateway.org.uk/256246