

Handout to accompany Qualifications and Standards session

What is the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)?

The QCF has two primary functions:

1. It sets out a series of 'levels' to provide users with an indication of the relative complexity of the qualification and the capabilities of an individual. These levels may reflect purely practical or theoretically focused qualifications. Levels are set by comparing the content of a proposed qualification against a set of detailed level descriptors.
The 8 levels and 3 'Entry levels', are benchmarked against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to enable qualification holders to be able to easily explain the level of their qualification to employers within the EU, and of course vice versa. A simple way to imagine this is to consider how we compare Imperial and Metric measurement: both measure distance, but on slightly different scales.
2. It sets out 'rules' which qualification developers follow, no matter what the subject content of the qualification is. This common approach to design enables comparison and interchange between different components of qualifications.
One key feature of all QCF based qualifications is that they are structured into what are referred to as 'Units of Assessment'. Each unit can be assessed independently and may be used in isolation should the learner, employer or organisation wish it. This enables individuals to build a portfolio of units which reflect their specific skills. This is particularly useful for individuals working in **highly specialist roles**.
In most cases, individuals will work towards achieving a group of units, which when combined together will form larger, complete 'qualifications'. Examples of these qualifications are identified in the accompanying diagram linked to each level.

Who develops the qualifications?

QCF qualifications can be developed by a range of different organisations. This may include Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), such as Lantra (for land based industries), Creative and Cultural Skills, Construction Skills, SEMTA (for engineering and sciences) or any of the 23 who make up the network of SSCs.

Awarding Organisations (for example, City & Guilds, EDI, Edexcel) also develop qualifications, following the QCF development rules. Again, a number of their qualifications are listed in the accompanying diagram as examples of the huge range that are available in the heritage sector.

Heritage Organisations may identify specific development needs where a qualification would be of benefit. In these instances, they may work with either an Awarding Organisation and/or an SSC to achieve this. Heritage Organisations, should they so wish, can embark on becoming an awarding body in their own right and subsequently develop and deliver their own qualifications. It should be noted that this entails a great deal of work and may be outside the remit of the organisation. However, it is an opportunity that may be appropriate in some situations.

What is the relationship to Higher Education qualifications?

The QCF has been developed to incorporate the levels assigned to Higher Education qualifications. Therefore, the frameworks illustrated on the diagram are complimentary to each other. This enables individuals to, for example, complete a Bachelors degree, and then progress to achieve shorter, vocational qualifications at the same level, but which may be focused on implementation and practical aspects.

Where can I go for more information regarding the QCF?

In England, the QCF is regulated by 'Ofqual' which is responsible for maintaining the quality of organisations who submit qualifications to the QCF framework. Its website also contains a link to a database which lists all current QCF qualifications: **www.ofqual.gov.uk**

It is important to note that being listed on the Ofqual database is no guarantee that the qualification will qualify for receiving government funding:

In Wales, the framework is regulated by the DCELLS: **www.wales.gov.uk**

In Northern Ireland, the framework is regulated by CCEA: **www.ccea.org.uk**

The QCF does not operate in Scotland. Qualifications are listed on the 'Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework' (SCQF) and is regulated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Despite being a different framework, many of the features and concepts are very similar to the QCF. More information regarding the SCQF can be found at: **www.scqf.org.uk**

How do 'Apprenticeships' fit with these frameworks?

Apprenticeships are not a qualification. They are a group of qualifications for which government funding can be gained for young people between the ages of 16 and 21. Apprenticeships are either set at level 2 or 3. The qualifications used to make up the programme are required to conform to a set of standards set by the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS). All apprenticeships in England contain the following components:

- A qualification focusing on technical and practical skills at either level 2, 3 or 4 – typically this may be a level 2, 3 or 4 QCF Diploma
- A qualification which emphasises the knowledge needed in relation to the job role. This is commonly referred to as a 'technical certificate' and is often delivered on a day release basis
- Smaller certificates which ensure that the young person has attained a working capability of numeracy and literacy skills
- A 'Employer Rights and Responsibilities' certificate which demonstrates that the young person understands the potential career opportunities that are available in the job role, that they have a contract of employment and understand their employment rights and responsibilities

As the emphasis of the Apprenticeship programme is upon long term employment, apprentices are required to be employed.

More information about Apprenticeships in England can be found at: **www.apprenticeships.org.uk**