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Department for
**Employment
and Learning**
www.delni.gov.uk

Qualifications
and Credit
Framework

QCF

AN INTRODUCTION FOR EMPLOYERS

WHAT IS HAPPENING TO VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS?

Vocational and work-related qualifications, such as National Vocational Qualifications, are changing to become more responsive to the demands of employers and learners.

An essential tool in this reform is the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), the new framework for vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The QCF is at the heart of the vocational qualifications system, which will make it:

- simpler to understand and use
- more accessible to a wider range of learners
- more relevant to learners' and employers' needs

The needs of employers are very much a central part of the new development process for vocational qualifications. Employers are represented in the system by their Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), who work in partnership with recognised awarding organisations to develop the qualifications to meet your skills needs.

As part of their important role in the reformed system, Sector Skills Councils:

- review and revise National Occupational Standards, which reflect the skills that are needed to operate effectively in today's workplace
- articulate the skills needs of their employers by developing sector qualifications strategies
- develop qualifications with awarding organisations
- approve qualifications before they are placed on the QCF

You will soon be receiving job applications from potential employees that have achieved QCF qualifications and this leaflet should provide you with the means to understand what they mean. These qualifications are more flexible than previous qualifications so learners can study for them in a way that suits their circumstances. QCF qualifications are also more up-to-date because they are based on revised national occupational standards.

There are now also more opportunities for you as an employer to get involved with the qualifications system. For example you can take advantage of the flexible nature of QCF qualifications to provide training to your employees that is shaped by your business needs, or work with other organisations to have your training recognised through the award of a QCF qualification.

HOW DOES THE QCF WORK?

The QCF recognizes skills and qualifications by awarding credit for qualifications and units (small steps of learning).

Each qualification in the QCF is made up of units which can be combined under specified rules to contribute to the award of the qualification. Every unit and qualification in the QCF has a credit value that tells you roughly how long it takes to complete — one credit represents about 10 hours of work. Each unit and qualification also has its own level, from entry level to level 8, to show how difficult it is.

The titles of all the qualifications in the QCF are set out in the same way to help you understand them more easily. The title tells you three things — how challenging the qualification is, how long it takes and what it is about.

Here are two examples of qualification titles, showing how the three parts fit together:

Level 1 Certificate in sport and leisure

Level 8 Award in strategic direction and leadership

By making sure every qualification title describes what subject it covers, how demanding it is, and how much work it involves, we can help you understand qualifications more easily.



HOW CAN EMPLOYERS GET INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF QCF QUALIFICATIONS?

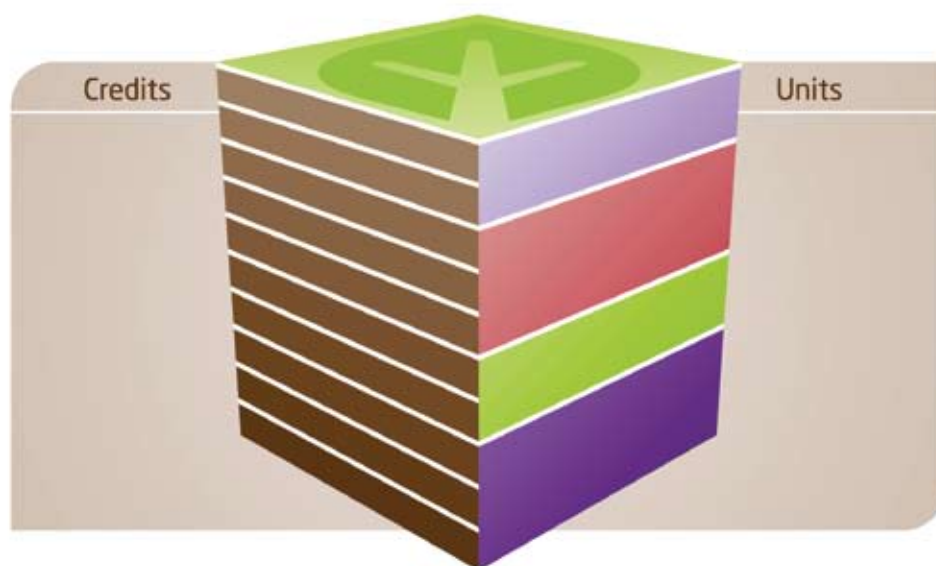
Employers can influence qualification development through Sector Skills Councils

Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are employer-owned organizations and are heavily involved in developing qualifications — they determine the qualifications that will be developed and then approve them. SSCs are also responsible for the development of National Occupational Qualifications (NOS), industry benchmark standards that form the basis of vocational qualifications.

SSCs hold consultation events for their stakeholders in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and you can voice your thoughts on NOS development or what content qualifications should include at these events or by contacting your SSC directly. This involvement means that you can be sure that learners completing QCF qualifications have the skills and knowledge that your company wants.

You can find a list of all SSCs at the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils website at **www.sscalliance.org**.

The structure of a QCF qualification



In the QCF, learners accumulate credit in small steps by completing units, which can then build up into a full qualification.

YOUR SSC CAN ALSO HELP YOU WITH YOUR IN-HOUSE TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

The Department for Employment and Learning supports the Recognition of Training in Employment Programme to enable employers to ensure that the training their employees receive leads to a qualification that is nationally recognized. There are three different approaches that employers can use, depending on company training needs and which qualifications are already available.

Use an existing qualification

There may already be a number of qualifications that suit your training needs. Your SSC can help you find relevant qualifications that may be of use, or you could visit the national database of accredited qualifications at www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk to see what is already available.

Tailor an existing qualification

There might be various existing QCF units that you can put together to create a qualification that meets your training needs. Or there might only be some relevant units in the QCF and you need to fill in the gaps. In this case, you can create your own units that fill those gaps — add these to the existing units and you've got a tailored qualification for your employees. Your SSC can help you find an appropriate awarding organisation to design and deliver this qualification.

Create a new qualification

There might not be any units that suit your company's training requirements. If so, developing a new qualification could be the right option. There could be a skills gap in your training that a new qualification could address, or you might have in-house training that doesn't quite fit into an existing qualification. In the QCF you can use your existing in-house training and turn it into a new QCF qualification.

The NI Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), in its statutory advisory and support role, is the initial contact point for you if you are interested in getting your in-house training nationally recognized. CCEA provides advice, based on each employer's particular circumstances, as to which approach is most appropriate for you and links you with the appropriate SSC. Organisations interested in getting their in-house training nationally recognized should contact their relevant SSC or Cathy Heathwood at cheathwood@ccea.org.uk.



SCOPE AND TIMESCALES FOR QCF IMPLEMENTATION

It is expected that all regulated vocational qualifications, including NVQs, will be on the QCF by the end of 2010. Regulated QCF qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland can be found on the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (**www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk**).

Further education colleges and other training providers in Northern Ireland are already delivering some QCF qualifications and more are becoming available all the time. People who engage with learning through the Apprenticeships NI, Training for Success or Steps to Work programmes will also be encountering QCF qualifications more and more during 2010. All enrolments from 2011 will be on QCF qualifications.

Discussions are also underway as to how, in the future, general qualifications such as A levels and GCSEs relate to vocational qualifications in the QCF.

WHERE TO GET MORE INFORMATION

To watch an animation on how the QCF works, and for all sorts of other useful information about the new framework, visit www.nivqrp.org.uk

The NI Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment is the statutory advisory body to the Department for Employment and Learning on all qualifications issues, while Ofqual is the body that regulates vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. For further details on their work in this area, see www.ccea.org.uk and www.ofqual.gov.uk.

Your Sector Skills Council will also be able to provide advice about qualifications and point you in the right direction if you have any queries. Sector Skills Council details can be found at www.sscalliance.org.

This leaflet is available in other formats on request.