How Different Qualifications Compare

Qualification levels are contained in three qualification ‘frameworks’:

- National Qualifications Framework
- Qualifications and Credit Framework (the new framework for vocational, or work-related qualifications)
- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

The frameworks group together qualifications that place similar demands on the learner. However, within any one level, qualifications can cover a wide mix of subjects, and take different amounts of time to complete.

The frameworks can demonstrate how one type of qualification can lead on to other, higher levels of qualifications.

National Qualifications Framework

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) sets out the level at which a qualification can be recognised in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Only qualifications that have been accredited by the three regulators for England, Wales and Northern Ireland can be included in the NQF. This ensures that all qualifications within the framework are of high quality, and meet the needs of learners and employers.

Qualifications and Credit Framework

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) contains new vocational (or work-related) qualifications, available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

These qualifications are made up of units that are worth credits. Units and qualifications also range in difficulty, from entry level to level 8 (similar to the levels in the NQF).

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) has been designed by the higher education sector, and describes all the main higher education qualifications. It applies to degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic awards granted by a university or higher education college (apart from honorary degrees and higher doctorates).

The FHEQ broadly corresponds with levels 4 to 8 of the National Qualifications Framework, in terms of the demands the qualifications place on learners.
## Qualifications by level across the NQF and QCF

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Examples of NQF qualifications</th>
<th>Examples of QCF qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Entry | - Entry level certificates  
- English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)  
- Skills for Life  
- Functional Skills at entry level (English, maths and ICT) | - Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at entry level  
- Foundation Learning at entry level  
- Functional Skills at entry level |
| 1     | - GCSEs grades D-G  
- BTEC Introductory Diplomas and Certificates  
- OCR Nationals  
- Key Skills at level 1  
- Skills for Life  
- Functional skills at level 1 | - BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 1  
- Functional Skills at level 1  
- Foundation Learning Tier pathways  
- NVQs at level 1 |
| 2     | - GCSEs grades A*- C  
- Key Skills level 2  
- Functional skills at level 2  
- Skills for Life | - BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 2  
- Functional Skills at level 2  
- OCR Nationals  
- NVQs at level 2 |
| 3     | - A levels  
- GCE in applied subjects  
- International Baccalaureate  
- Key Skills level 3 | - BTEC Awards, Certificates, and Diplomas at level 3  
- BTEC Nationals  
- OCR Nationals  
- NVQs at level 3 |
| 4     | - Certificates of Higher Education | - BTEC Professional Diplomas Certificates and Awards  
- HNCs  
- NVQs at level 4 |
| 5     | - HNCs and HNDs  
- Other higher diplomas | - HNDs  
- BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FHEQ level</th>
<th>Examples of qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4          | - certificates of higher education  
 |            |   - higher national certificates |
| 5          | - diplomas of higher education  
 |            |   - Foundation Degrees  
 |            |   - higher national diplomas |
| 6          | - bachelors degrees  
 |            |   - bachelors degrees with honours  
 |            |   - graduate certificates and diplomas  
 |            |   - Professional Graduate Certificate in Education |
| 7          | - masters degrees  
 |            |   - integrated masters degrees  
 |            |   - postgraduate certificates  
 |            |   - postgraduate diplomas |
| 8          | - doctoral degrees |