

Qualification Equivalence: A Guide



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Introduction

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) set out the levels against which a qualification can be recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. These frameworks help learners to make informed decisions about the qualifications they need, and help employers and providers assess what qualifications a candidate has. The NQF and QCF are comprised of nine levels (Entry level to level 8).

Assessing Equivalence

Qualifications vary according to **level**, **size**, and **content**. To assess how similar one qualification is to another it is necessary to compare these as closely as possible.

Each qualification on the NQF or QCF has a level. Where qualifications share the same level this means that they are broadly similar in terms of the demand they place on the learner. Effectively this means the level of learning (or the difficulty level) is broadly similar. On the NQF, different qualifications at the same level can still be very different in terms of content and duration. On the QCF all qualifications have a credit value, so it is easy to see which qualifications are at the same level but may take longer to achieve - the difficulty and size of a qualification can therefore easily be compared. Qualification content, however, varies between each qualification.

The NQF and QCF frameworks will tell you:

- the difficulty of the qualification, represented by its level. Qualifications which share the same level can be considered broadly similar in terms of the demand they place on the learner
- the credit value of the qualification, which represents its size/duration on the QCF. A higher credit value means a larger qualification. On the NQF many qualifications have a Guided Learning Hours (GLH) value which gives some indication of the qualification size; however, GLH does not include independent study which can be a strong basis of educational achievement, and therefore this should be used as general guidance on duration but not exact equivalence. NQF qualifications do not have a credit value.

The NQF and QCF frameworks will **not** tell you:

- which jobs that qualification is suitable for
- equivalence to other qualifications in terms of their content
- equivalence to any qualifications Ofqual have not accredited.

All equivalence information provided by the regulators is based on the NQF or QCF. This allows learners, employers and training providers to gain information about the broad equivalence of qualifications. More specific information on the equivalence of qualifications that cannot be answered using information from these frameworks can often be obtained by contacting the awarding body offering the qualification.

Comparing Qualifications

Step 1: Finding your qualification

To compare two qualifications you will first need to determine whether the qualifications are accredited by Ofqual. You will need to refer to the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ) at the following link

www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk

You will find instructions on how effectively to search for qualifications. All accredited qualifications are listed on the NDAQ database. Qualifications not accredited by Ofqual cannot be compared, as they have not been assessed by Ofqual criteria. Please note that Higher Education (i.e. university) qualifications are not accredited by Ofqual, but can be broadly compared.

Step 2: Your qualification level

Once you have found a qualification, you will see the level which it has been assigned. NQF and QCF qualifications range from Entry level to level 8. Qualifications at the same level will have a broadly similar level of learning. Qualifications with a lower level cannot be considered as equivalent to those above, regardless of breadth of learning. This means, for example, that achieving a large number of level 3 qualifications would not equate to level 4.

For ease of reference a GCSE graded D-G is at level 1, a GCSE graded A*-C is at level 2, and an AS or A-level is at level 3.

Step 3: Your qualification size

QCF qualifications can easily be identified in terms of size. The credit value represents the time it takes to complete the qualification. Qualifications on the QCF are described as awards, certificates or diplomas, depending on their credit value. Awards consist of 1-12 credits, certificates 13-36 credits, and diplomas 37 credits and above. A credit represents ten notional learning hours, and credits therefore describe how long a qualification takes to complete.

NQF qualifications are less easy to compare in terms of size. Guided Learning Hours can give a general indication of the teaching time, but this is only a reliable comparison when both qualifications being compared are not expected to involve any private study. In this case it is particularly important to assess the content of the qualifications with care.

Step 4: Qualification content

Each qualification is made up of a number of units; units describe specific areas of learning within a qualification. Qualifications often have optional units, and some qualifications also have specific approved pathways; when considering how relevant two qualifications are to each other it may be important to consider which unit options and pathways have been achieved, depending on the qualification and requirements. If two qualifications contain the same unit, you can tell that part of the learning required for the two qualifications is similar.

Awarding Organisations for qualifications can provide more detailed information on qualification content than can be found on NDAQ.

Official Equivalences

Some qualifications have been specifically compared to the GCSE and A-level qualifications by the regulator to ensure parity when understanding 14-19 qualifications.

GNVQs: A foundation GNVQ is equivalent to 4 GCSEs at grade D-G. An intermediate GNVQ is equivalent to 4 GCSEs at grade A*-C. An advanced GNVQ is equivalent to two full A-levels.

The Diploma: A Foundation Diploma is equivalent to 5 GCSEs graded D-G. A Higher Diploma is equivalent to 7 GCSEs graded A*-C. An Advanced Diploma is equivalent to 3.5 A-levels.

Level indicators

The NQF and QCF levels are supported by level indicators. Level indicators provide guidance on the level of knowledge and skills which are recognised at each level, how the knowledge and skills gained can relate to job roles and examples of qualifications which are available at each level. These level indicators are detailed in 'The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2004' (NQF) which can be downloaded from <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/321.aspx>, and 'Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework' (QCF) which can be downloaded from <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/121.aspx>.

Changes to the NQF

The NQF has existed in its current format since September 2004. Prior to this, the NQF consisted of 6 levels (Entry level to level 5), with levels 4 and 5 being described as broadly comparable to 'higher education qualifications'. However, at this time, it was not possible to specify to which higher education qualifications they were comparable. The NQF was therefore revised to allow us to provide a broader indication on how qualifications at these levels compare to qualifications awarded by higher education institutions. Entry level to level 3 on the original NQF did not change. However, qualifications at levels 4 and 5 were assigned more precise levels (levels 4-8). Level 4 qualifications on the original NQF were divided into the revised levels 4, 5 and 6, and level 5 qualifications on the original NQF were divided into the revised levels 7 and 8. Revised levels were not given to NVQs at levels 4 and 5, partially to maintain comparability with the Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). It is therefore only possible to give a very broad indication of how these compare to current NQF levels and higher education qualifications. An NVQ at level 4 is therefore broadly comparable to levels 4-6 on the NQF.

Comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland

The NQF/QCF include qualifications recognised in England, Wales and Northern Ireland only. Information on how the England, Wales and Northern Ireland National Qualifications Framework compares to the Scottish Qualifications and Credit Framework and the National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland, can be found in the document 'Comparing Qualifications Across Countries', which can be downloaded from the following link:

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/ier/glacier/qual/compare/>

Comparing overseas qualifications

The NQF/QCF do not include qualifications obtained overseas. Information on how overseas qualifications compare to UK qualifications can be obtained from the organisation UK NARIC:

<http://www.naric.org.uk/>

Equivalence of childcare qualifications

Ofqual can provide equivalence information for accredited qualifications based on the NQF/QCF level. However, for people working with children there is not only a requirement for them to have a qualification at a specific level, but a requirement to have a qualification in a particular subject. You should therefore refer to the Children's Workforce Development Council Early Year and Playwork Qualifications Database for information on what specific qualifications are acceptable for working in early years settings:

<http://eypquals.cwdcouncil.org.uk/public/>

Equivalence of CSE and O levels

As CSE and O levels are old qualifications which have not been accredited onto the NQF or QCF it is not officially possible for Ofqual to provide information on equivalence. However, there is information relating to the history of GCSEs published on the QCA website which is often useful. This, in short, explains that O levels at grades A – C was used to make up the A – C at GCSE and that grades 2 - 5 in CSEs were used to make up the D – G grades at GCSE. Grade 1 in CSEs was regarded as

being equivalent to the O-level C. This information can be found on the QCA website at: http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_6210.aspx

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Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344
Textphone 0300 303 3345
Helpline 0300 303 3346

www.ofqual.gov.uk