

Joint statement, by the regulatory authorities for external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, on the revised National Qualifications Framework

The responsibility for regulating external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and for maintaining the National Qualifications Framework lies jointly with three regulatory authorities:

- the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) for England
- the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales/Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Asesu Cymru (ACCAC) for Wales
- the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) for Northern Ireland.

The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was published by the regulatory authorities in April 2004, for full implementation from September 2004. This document sets out clear principles for regulation, the revised National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the criteria for the accreditation of qualifications into the NQF.

Changes to the National Qualifications Framework

From 1 September 2004, the number of NQF levels increases from six to nine (Entry level plus levels 1 to 8). The table in Annex 1 illustrates these changes.

There are no changes to entry level or levels 1, 2 and 3. Higher-level qualifications are accommodated in the revised NQF from levels 4 to 8. This means that there is a broad indication of how the levels of different NQF qualifications align with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) levels. Level 4 qualifications in the old NQF are divided into the revised NQF levels 4, 5 and 6, and level 5 qualifications into the revised NQF levels 7 and 8.

The qualification categories for general, vocationally related and occupational qualifications no longer exist in the revised NQF.

Transition period

There will be a transition period for implementation of the revised NQF, from 1 September 2004 to 1 January 2006. The regulatory authorities have agreed arrangements for transition, which are included in this joint statement.

Accreditation of qualifications

From 1 September 2004, all qualifications (excluding NVQs) will be accredited using the revised nine-level NQF. Information and forms, together with level descriptors, have been provided for awarding bodies' use. The level descriptors set out each level's characteristic generic outcomes and provide a general, shared understanding of each level. They are not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive statements, but provide guidance on writing learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria. They will be kept under review.

Level indicators have been published in *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Northern Ireland and Wales*. They provide guidance on the level of knowledge and skills recognised at each level, and on how the knowledge and skills gained can relate to job roles.

Revised NQF levels for existing qualifications (excluding NVQs)

The increased number of levels in the revised NQF means that existing level 4 and level 5 qualifications (excluding NVQs) in the original NQF need to be assigned a revised NQF level from level 4 through to level 8. The regulatory authorities are proposing revised NQF levels to the awarding bodies which offer these qualifications, for consideration and comment. All revised levels will be confirmed by 1 November 2004, when they will be shown on openQUALS www.qca.org.uk/openquals, together with the existing titles and levels.

Certificates

Awarding bodies can issue revised level certificates for qualifications which are being launched for the first time and which have been accredited with a revised NQF level from 1 September 2004. This does not apply to existing qualifications, which have been re-levelled. No other revised level certificates should be issued before the end of the transition period on 1 January 2006. In exceptional circumstances, awarding bodies can contact the regulatory authorities to discuss potential alternatives to these arrangements for new qualifications. However, with the exception of NVQs, certificates for all higher-level qualifications in the NQF must be issued with the revised levels from 1 January 2006.

Qualification materials

Qualification handbooks, specifications, promotional and learning materials must be amended to reflect the title and level changes when they are next updated and produced, after the revised NQF levels have been confirmed.

During the transition period up to 1 January 2006, the changes must be made clear to learners in covering communications.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

The timetable for re-leveling existing level 4 and level 5 NVQs will be agreed by the regulatory authorities with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and awarding bodies, in consultation with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to maintain the relationship between NVQs and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). Therefore, NVQ titles will not currently be changed to reflect revised NQF levels.

Further information

This joint statement will appear on the regulatory authorities websites and the original and revised NQF levels for each qualification will be shown on openQUALS www.qca.org.uk/openquals A factsheet will be issued by the regulatory authorities, which will serve as a guide to the revised NQF for end-users, including individual learners, parents, teachers/tutors/trainers, careers advisers and employers. Printed and electronic versions of the factsheet will be available, and will also appear on the regulatory authorities' websites.

For more information, contact:

- in England: QCA, 020 7509 5555 www.qca.org.uk
- in Wales: ACCAC, 029 2037 5431 www.accac.org.uk
- in Northern Ireland: CCEA, 028 9026 1202 www.ccea.org.uk

Annex 1

The revised National Qualifications Framework

This table enables clear comparison between the existing levels 4 and 5 and the revised higher levels (levels 4 to 8). It also provides a broad indication of how they relate to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

National Qualifications Framework		Framework for Higher Education Qualification levels (FHEQ)
Original levels	Revised levels	
5 Level 5 NVQ in Construction Project Management*	8 Specialist awards	D (doctoral) doctorates
Level 5 Diploma in Translation	7 Level 7 Diploma in Translation	M (masters) masters degrees, postgraduate certificates and diplomas
4 Level 4 NVQ in Advice and Guidance*	6 Level 6 Diploma in Management	H (honours) bachelors degrees, graduate certificates and diplomas
Level 4 Diploma in Management	5 Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diploma in 3D Design	I (intermediate) diplomas of higher education and further education, foundation degrees, higher national diplomas
Level 4 BTEC Higher National Diploma in 3D Design	4 Level 4 Certificate in Early Years Practice	C (certificate) certificates of higher education
Level 4 Certificate in Early Years Practice		
3 <i>(There is no change to Level 3 in the revised NQF)</i> Level 3 Certificate in Small Animal Care Level 3 NVQ in Aeronautical Engineering A levels		
2 <i>(There is no change to Level 2 in the revised NQF)</i> Level 2 Diploma for Beauty Specialists Level 2 NVQ in Agricultural Crop Production GCSEs Grades A*-C		
1 <i>(There is no change to Level 1 in the revised NQF)</i> Level 1 Certificate in Motor Vehicle Studies Level 1 NVQ in Bakery GCSEs Grade D-G		
Entry <i>(There is no change to Entry level in the revised NQF)</i> Entry Level Certificate in Adult Literacy		

*Revised levels are not currently being implemented for NVQs at level 4 and level 5. For up-to-date information please visit openQUALS, www.qca.org.uk/openquals