

Referencing the Qualifications Frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the European Qualifications Framework

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1. Introduction

In 2010, the UK presented to the EQF Advisory Group its report on referencing three UK qualifications frameworks to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The three frameworks were: the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF for England and Northern Ireland), the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW), and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

In 2017, the Council of the European Union published a Recommendation on the EQF¹ which included:

(13) National qualifications frameworks and systems change over time, therefore referencing to the EQF should be reviewed and updated, whenever relevant.

This updated report addresses this point.

The UK's qualifications frameworks have changed since 2010 and the divergence between the education, training and qualifications arrangements in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland has increased as a consequence of the devolution of responsibilities for certain civil functions from the UK government in London to the Northern Ireland Assembly and to the governments in Wales and Scotland.

In the light of these changes the UK National Co-ordination Points for the EQF (UK EQF NCPs) have prepared three updated referencing reports. These reports cover, separately, the frameworks used in England and Northern Ireland; Wales; and Scotland. This report covers the frameworks used in England and Northern Ireland.

The report is divided into three sections, plus annexes:

Section A

- The political and social context of the frameworks
- Qualifications frameworks and regulated qualifications in England and Northern Ireland
- The Education and Training landscape in England and Northern Ireland

Section B

- Responses to the EQF Referencing Criteria

Section C

- Future directions

¹ Council of the European Union, 2017/C 189/03: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2017.189.01.0015.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2017:189:TOC

Aims of the report

This updated report explains the use of qualifications frameworks in the context of the education, training and skills systems in England and Northern Ireland. The report explains how the level descriptors of our frameworks relate to those of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The report should enable a greater understanding of the systems in England and Northern Ireland and how qualifications from other countries – and in other parts of the UK - relate to those qualifications in England and Northern Ireland. Our aim is to support understanding of qualifications frameworks in England and Northern Ireland and, as a consequence, the mobility of learners and workers and the recognition and transferability of their qualifications.

In this updated report we summarise our experience of developing and managing qualifications frameworks over several decades. Our frameworks have evolved over time, changing in scope, structure and purpose, for example moving from the transformative purpose of the QCF, which promoted a particular approach to qualification development and design, to the communicative purpose² of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). We hope that readers will find our brief framework history useful.

We have taken the opportunity in this report to respond to the EQF Advisory Group's feedback on the UK's 2010 report. We have learned from the approaches other countries have, since 2010, taken to referencing their qualifications frameworks to the EQF. We have also reflected on research, peer learning and the studies of Cedefop, as we have considered the referencing criteria.

Looking to the future, we hope that the report will provide a basis to support the on-going movement of learners and workers within Europe and beyond, regardless of the UK's changed relationship with the European Union.

² UNESCO, ETF & CEDEFOP, 2015, p.7

Developments since 2010 to qualifications frameworks in England and Northern Ireland and to the context in which they operate

There have been a number of key developments relating to the frameworks and to the context in which they are used since 2010, including the following, which are referenced in the report:

- The RQF replaced the QCF and NQF in 2014 (see page 22)
- Revisions to school-based general qualifications, vocational qualifications, and new apprenticeship arrangements have been introduced in England and Northern Ireland (see Criterion 4)
- In 2016, CCEA Regulation took over the regulation of all qualifications (other than higher education qualifications) in Northern Ireland (see Criteria 1, 4, and 5)
- Ofqual was established in 2010 as the statutory regulator of qualifications (other than higher education qualifications) in England, and developed a new statutory regulatory framework (see Criteria 1, 4, and 5)
- The Office for Students was established as the regulator of higher education in England in 2018 as a result of the Higher Education and Research Act of 2017
- The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, introduced in 2013, was revised and republished in 2018 (see Criteria 1, 4, and 5)
- Changes to government departments in England and Northern Ireland (see Criteria 1)
- The network of sector skills councils, which were responsible for the National Occupational Standards (NOS) used as a foundation for many vocational qualifications, ceased to receive automatic public funding in 2016 (see page 35)

In addition, this report now formally references the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) to the EQF (see Criterion 2).

Collaborative approach to producing the report

In 2010, we published a single report in three separate sections covering the frameworks used in the different jurisdictions of the UK. This updated report covers the frameworks used in England and Northern Ireland only. However, the UK EQF NCPs have worked closely together on the production of their respective reports. Scotland submitted its updated report to the EQF Advisory Group in December 2018. Wales, like England and Northern Ireland, plans to submit its updated report in June 2019. England, Northern Ireland and Wales made initial presentations to the EQF Advisory Group in February 2019.

We have worked together through the UK Coordination Group for European Vocational Education and Training Initiatives (UKCGVETI) to improve on our joint 2010 report. We have sought, in particular, to respond to the feedback from the EQF Advisory Group on the 2010 report, including on the presentation and completeness of the report, for example on the balance of information in the main body of the report and the annexes to the report.

More fundamentally, in this report, we have referenced the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) to the EQF. In 2010 we referred to the self-certification exercise that had been conducted to verify the compatibility of the FHEQ to the FQ-EHEA. This report references the FHEQ to the EQF, covered in Criterion 2, and presented in detail in Annex 2.

Support from Steering Group and International Experts

We have been supported and guided in the writing of this report by members of a steering group, including two International Experts. We have benefitted from their rich wealth of experience. They have advised us on how to present the report so that it is clear and accessible to readers from different backgrounds and with different degrees of experience of the frameworks.

Key terms

We recognise some of the terms used in the report might be unfamiliar to readers from outside of the UK. We have therefore compiled a glossary of the key terms we have used.

Apprenticeship	A job which includes a required element of training to reach an industry standard.
Awarding organisations (AO)	Organisations recognised by one or more of the qualifications regulators in England, Wales or Northern Ireland to develop, deliver and award qualifications. AOs offering academic qualifications can also be referred to as 'exam boards'.
Education and training providers	Organisations such as schools, colleges and universities that teach and train learners, and often deliver assessments on behalf of awarding organisations.
Further Education (FE) Colleges	Colleges offering qualifications in a wide range of vocational and academic subjects at many levels. Some specialise in particular industry sectors such as art and design, catering, engineering or finance. They often have links with employers, so that students studying vocational courses can combine classroom learning with work experience.
Higher Education (HE) Institutions	Education institutions, such as universities and colleges, offering higher education and degree level study. Some colleges offer higher education courses but are not recognised to award degrees, while others are recognised as degree awarding bodies.
Learning outcomes	Statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, often defined in terms of knowledge, skills and understanding.
General qualifications	There are a variety of general (academic) qualifications including the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Level (AS and A level) and international GCSEs. The most widely studied general qualifications are GCSEs, AS and A levels. These qualifications are referred to as general qualifications throughout the report.
Total qualification time	The number of notional hours which represents an estimate of the total amount of time that could reasonably be expected to be required, in order for a Learner to achieve and demonstrate the achievement of the level of attainment necessary for the award of a qualification.

Abbreviations

Frameworks

CQFW	Credit and Qualifications Framework Wales
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
NCP	National Coordination Point
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
QF-EHEA	Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area
RQF	Regulated Qualifications Framework
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework

Organisations

CAFRE	College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise, Northern Ireland
CCEA Regulation	Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment Regulation
Cedefop	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
DE(NI)	Department of Education, Northern Ireland
DfE	Department for Education
DfENI	Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland
EA	Education Authority, Northern Ireland
ESFA	Education and Skills Funding Agency
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate, Northern Ireland
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
OfS	Office for Students
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
STA	Standards and Testing Agency
The Institute	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
UCAS	Universities and College Admissions Service
UKSCQA	UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment

2. The political and social context of the frameworks

Education, training and skills policy in the United Kingdom

There are four jurisdictions in the UK. Education, training and skills policy is a devolved matter. Responsibility for this area of policy is as follows:

- the UK Government is responsible for education, training and skills policy in England;
- the Northern Ireland Executive is responsible for education, training and skills policy in Northern Ireland;
- the Scottish Government is responsible for education, training and skills policy in Scotland;
- the Welsh Government is responsible for education, training and skills policy in Wales.

Devolution allows for tailored decision-making. Locally developed policies can reflect the needs and priorities of the individual parts of the UK. People move freely within the UK, including as students and as workers. The UK's qualifications frameworks support such movement.

Despite devolution, the shared policy history of education, training and skills across England, Northern Ireland and Wales is reflected in current policies and practices, aspects of which remain common.³ Students broadly follow the same key milestones through their education and learning. Many general school-level qualifications are the same or similar. For example, most 16 year olds in England, Northern Ireland and Wales take General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs), although there are different versions of the qualifications reflecting the respective priorities of the different parts of the UK.

Vocational, technical and professional learning opportunities are also largely similar. Many of the same qualifications are available in each of England, Northern Ireland and Wales, although each has different policy priorities and different public funding rules.

The similarities between England, Northern Ireland and Wales are reflected in their qualifications frameworks. England and Northern Ireland use the same

³ The education system in Scotland is quite distinct from the systems in the other parts of the UK.

qualifications framework for regulated qualifications, the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), and they all use the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ).

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) is used in Wales. The CQFW includes, as one of its three pillars, the regulated qualifications pillar, which mirrors the RQF. This pillar is regulated by Qualifications Wales.⁴ The two remaining pillars of the CQFW are the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and the Lifelong Learning pillar. The Lifelong Learning pillar acknowledges and accredits unregulated qualifications and non-formal learning.

Scotland has a different education system,⁵ its own set of school qualifications and a separate and distinct credit and qualifications framework, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), managed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership (SCQFP)⁶. The SCQF incorporates the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS).

The Policy Context in England

The UK Government is committed to using its education, training and skills policy to drive up productivity, support social mobility and to promote sustained and skilled employment for individuals, including those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds in England. This commitment is set out in the Government's Post-16 Skills plan (2016).⁷

The main general qualifications taken by 16 and 18 years olds (GCSEs and A levels respectively) have been reformed, with the first new qualifications being taught from 2015 and the others rolled out over the following three years. GCSEs and A levels are clearly placed within the RQF. The Department for Education (DfE) is currently reviewing post-16 qualifications to ensure they are high quality, have a clear purpose and lead to good progression. Ofqual will be working closely with the Department and the Institute to develop proposals for the future regulation of technical qualifications.

The Government also recognises the social and economic benefits of higher education. The independent regulator of higher education in England, the Office for Students, has a strategic objective on participation, which illustrates its focus on removing unnecessary barriers to higher education and enabling access to higher

⁴ <https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/>

⁵ For further information on the Scottish system and the SCQF, please visit: <https://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/about-the-framework/>

⁶ <https://scqf.org.uk/about-us/the-scqf-partnership/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-skills-plan-and-independent-report-on-technical-education>

education: *'All students, from all backgrounds, with the ability and desire to undertake higher education, are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from higher education.'*⁸

The Policy Context in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive acknowledges the importance of skills to developing a vibrant knowledge based economy. The Skills Strategy, 'Success through Skills – Transforming Futures' (2011)⁹ included the aspiration to enable access and progression up the skills ladder, in order to raise the skills level of the workforce, raise productivity and secure Northern Ireland's future in a global marketplace. A top priority was to transform the professional and technical education and training system, to support economic growth, and to provide learning pathways enabling people to reach their full potential.

The Northern Ireland Strategy on Apprenticeships (June 2014)¹⁰ provided the future direction of apprenticeships in Northern Ireland, and set out the new policy commitments and an implementation plan. These new apprenticeships will be available at level 3 up to level 8, with a major commitment to Higher Level Apprenticeships, and will be extended to a wider range of occupational areas, to facilitate progression to higher professional or technical training or on to a higher academic pathway.

As with England, in Northern Ireland the main general/academic qualifications studied by 16 and 18 years olds are GCSEs and A levels respectively. CCEA, the awarding organisation based in Northern Ireland, offers a range of GCSEs and A levels to schools, with revised assessments coming into effect for first teaching in 2016 (A levels) and 2017 (GCSEs).

The Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland continues to deliver the key higher education strategies¹¹ published under the 2011–2016 Northern Ireland Assembly, which set out the higher education policy up to 2020 and aim to widen participation. These higher education strategies complement other strategies that address the wider skills landscape and aim to enhance the Northern Irish economy,

⁸ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/4e36a67b-c871-4d3d-881b-bd91145fad01/ofs-business-plan-2018-19.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/success-through-skills-transforming-futures-0>

¹⁰ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/securing-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-apprenticeships>

¹¹ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/higher-education-strategies-northern-ireland>

such as the skills strategy,¹² the apprenticeships strategy,¹³ and economic and innovation strategies.

The qualifications markets in England and Northern Ireland

The market for regulated non-HE qualifications

In England and Northern Ireland regulated qualifications are developed and owned by awarding organisations (AOs) that are recognised by the appropriate regulator (Ofqual in England and CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland). AOs that award national academic qualifications to students in the age range 16-18 are generally known as exam boards. Some AOs offer and award very similar qualifications that serve the same purpose. These AOs compete for business in a market. Schools, colleges, employers, private training providers and sometimes students themselves decide which awarding organisation's qualifications they prefer.

The origins of the market approach lie in the past, when universities or groups of universities offered qualifications which served as university entrance exams. This led to a position where schools could choose which university exam board-endorsed qualifications to provide to their students.

The market model allows for AOs to specialise and to innovate. An AO can tailor its qualifications to suit certain areas of the market, for example qualifications for certain employment sectors or in certain academic areas. An AO can also decide to focus on specific geographical areas, reflecting the industrial or economic priorities of a region.

One of the key roles of the qualifications regulators is to ensure that qualifications give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding and indicate a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable qualifications. This means that while AOs can compete on the quality of the service they provide, the quality of any supporting products, on specific features of their qualifications and on their fees, they cannot compete on the standard of their qualifications.

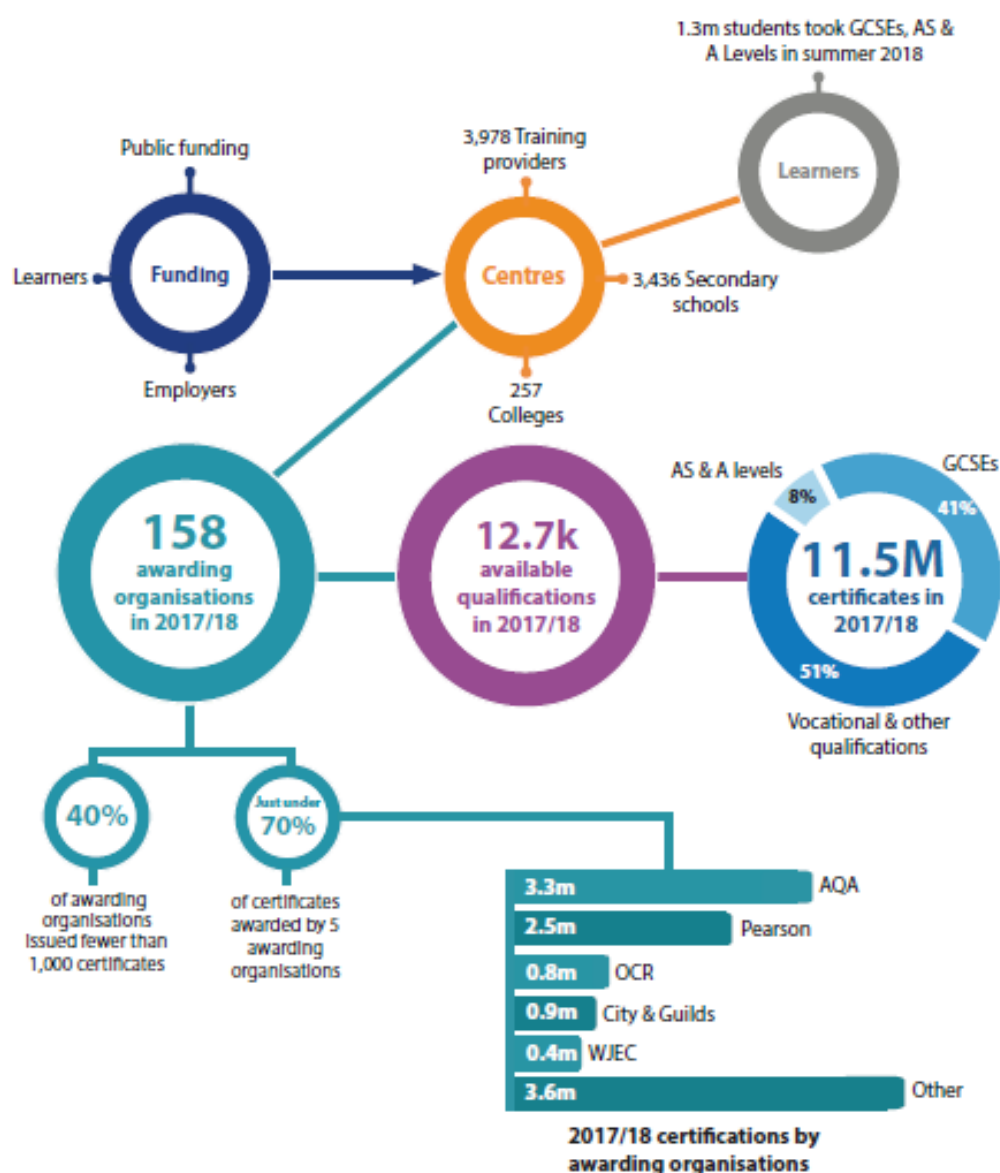
A qualification can only be regulated by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation if there are, or may reasonably be expected to be, people taking the qualification in England and/or Northern Ireland. Once a qualification meets the regulatory requirements, the AO must ensure that the standard of the award remains consistent wherever it is awarded, whether in England and/or Northern Ireland or elsewhere.

¹² <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/success-through-skills>

¹³ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/securing-our-success-northern-ireland-strategy-apprenticeships>

The figure below illustrates the scale and structure of the qualifications market in England.

Figure 1: Qualification market figures for England 2017/18



Awarding organisations (AOs)

AOs vary in their origins and structures. Some are developed from historical craft organisations, such as The Worshipful Company of Farriers, which was set up in 1356, and offers a limited range of highly specialist technical and craft qualifications in horse management and welfare. Other AOs are large bodies that offer qualifications across a wide range of occupational sectors and/or academic fields, across a number of levels, in all regions of the UK and internationally, such as Pearson Edexcel and City & Guilds. Some AOs draw on close links to universities or

professional bodies and some have their own assessment research centres and publishing divisions. Many other AOs sit in between these extremes, including those who have their origins in groupings of colleges.

In terms of their legal structure, there are three main types of regulated AO:

1. Shareholder-owned Companies (c.75 AOs)

Ranging from micro-businesses to FTSE100 companies

2. Charitable Institutions (c.45 AOs)

Including 'not-for-profit' companies such as professional bodies and Royal Charter bodies

3. Industry Bodies (c.35 AOs)

To promote skilled employment, provide consistency across employers and secure their ongoing role as the industry lead

AOs can be recognised to award a narrow or broad range of qualifications and to award qualifications at all or at just certain levels of the RQF. In order to be recognised, an AO must satisfy the relevant regulator that it:

- is appropriately constituted and governed
- is of suitable character and integrity
- is adequately resourced and funded; and
- will be able to develop, deliver and award qualifications in line with the regulatory requirements.

As illustrated in table 2, at the time of writing, there were over 15,000 qualifications on the Register of Regulated Qualifications, awarded by 158 awarding organisations recognised by Ofqual and 99 recognised by CCEA Regulation, with many recognised by both.

Table 2: Regulated qualifications market in England and Northern Ireland, 2017-18

	England	Northern Ireland
Recognised awarding organisations	158	99
Regulated qualifications available	15,094	11,562
Regulated qualifications active¹⁴	12,746	9,451
Regulated qualification certificates awarded	11.5 million	442,000
Percentage of available qualifications - academic	Around 50%	Around 59%
Percentage of available qualifications – technical, vocational and professional	Around 50%	Around 41%

Non-regulated qualifications

The national regulators are concerned with regulated qualifications that sit in the national framework. However, in England and Northern Ireland there is also a wide range of qualifications that does not sit within the RQF and is provided by employers, charities and independent training agencies.

These qualifications can take many forms, for example certificates that attest to attending programmes of training where there is no formal assessment, or qualifications that are highly specific to a company or job role. Many highly recognised and portable professional qualifications also sit outside of the RQF, managed and quality assured through their own industry bodies, for example in the fields of finance, law and medicine.

¹⁴ Active qualifications are those accepting new learner registrations. Available qualifications includes those currently being studied by learners but which are no longer accepting new registrations, usually due to updated or reformed qualifications replacing them.

The higher education market

Higher education institutions also compete with each other in a market. They compete to attract students to study at their institution, although in practice for the most selective universities, potential students are competing with each other for places on their courses. There are five higher education institutions in Northern Ireland: two universities and the Open University, and two university teacher training colleges. There are over 350 higher education institutions registered with the Office for Students¹⁵ in England. The Office for Students sets the requirements for registration that providers must meet.

Higher education institutions (HEIs)

Higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland include publicly funded universities and other higher education providers. Some universities are long established universities dating back hundreds of years, such as the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, or the so-called “red brick” universities mostly dating from the late 19th century, situated in cities across England and in Northern Ireland.

Others are “newer” universities established in the last 30 or 40 years, or developed from long-standing colleges and polytechnics, when a 1992 government act¹⁶ required all directly funded higher education institutions to be managed under the same funding and quality assurance arrangements.

Universities and other institutions that have the power to award UK degrees are legally recognised as ‘degree-awarding bodies’. All UK degree courses are approved by the university or other recognised degree-awarding body that awards the final qualification.

Other colleges that are approved to provide full higher education courses on behalf of recognised bodies are known as ‘listed bodies’. They do not in themselves have the right to award degrees.

From April 2018, all institutions in England must be registered with the Office for Students in order to apply for degree awarding powers and to maintain the right to award degrees.¹⁷

¹⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/>

¹⁶ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/13/contents>

¹⁷ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/>

Public funding of qualifications

Some, but not all regulated qualifications are publicly funded. In both England and Northern Ireland, once a qualification is approved for funding, that funding is channelled through providers (academies, colleges, independent training organisations and so on) who have an agreement with the relevant funding bodies and will work within set policy and funding rules. Providers can decide which qualifications to deliver based on the relevant funding rules, which leads to a wide range of options available to learners, particularly those aged 16 plus.

England

In England, The Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is accountable for £58bn of funding for education and training provided by schools, further education and sixth form colleges and independent training providers. The ESFA is also responsible for approving the delivery of regulated qualifications for government funding. The ESFA approves qualifications for funding for 14 to 19 learners and post 19¹⁸ learners. In order to be approved for funding (including Advanced Learner Loans) qualifications need to meet a set of approval criteria. Once a qualification is approved for funding (including Advanced Learner Loans), how it is funded, who it is funded for, and whether a learner can be fully funded, co-funded or can apply for a loan, will depend on their age, their prior achievement and their personal circumstances.

In England the main funded programmes through which a qualification may currently be approved are study programmes (for those under 19 years), the Adult Education Budget (post 19), Adult Learner Loans and the European Social Fund.

In England, there are two approaches to funding apprenticeships.¹⁹ Employers with a wages bill of over £3m each year, pay a levy which creates a resource to fund apprenticeships for contributing employers. Smaller employers who do not pay the levy share the cost of training and assessing their apprentices with government.²⁰ In

¹⁸ Information on how the ESFA approve qualifications for funding for 14 to 19 learners can be found at:

<https://section96.education.gov.uk/>

Information on how the ESFA approved qualifications for post 19 learners through the Adult Education Budget can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualifications-getting-approval-for-funding>

Information on how the ESFA designates qualifications for Advanced Learner Loans can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/designating-qualifications-for-advanced-learner-loans>

¹⁹ This is a UK government employment tax, so applies to companies in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work/apprenticeship-levy-how-it-will-work#pay-apprenticeship-levy>

England, apprentices do not necessarily study a qualification, but all apprenticeships do require an independent End Point Assessment to confirm that the apprentice has demonstrated the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for professional competence in the occupation and as specified within the End Point Assessment Plan.

The Office for Students distributes government higher education funding to more than 350 providers in England. These grants do not meet the entire costs of a course. Providers receive most of this cost through student tuition fees. The grants make a contribution towards providers' teaching, research, knowledge exchange and related activities.

The funding distributed by the Office for Students supports:

- areas where teaching costs are particularly high (such as medicine)
- particular policy areas and government priorities (such as promoting equal opportunities).

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education (DE(NI)) provides funding, channelled through the Education Authority, for education in schools up to the age of 19, approves regulated qualifications for use in schools and provides funding to a number of organisations to provide enterprise, employability and innovation programmes and events, for primary and post-primary pupils, both inside and outside school.

The Northern Ireland Department for the Economy (DfENI) is responsible for the financing of post-16 Education and Training (other than post-16 education in schools), which is channelled through providers (FE colleges, independent training organisations and Universities) who have a funding agreement with DfENI to deliver approved provision. DfENI leads the apprenticeships programme, including developing the Apprenticeship Frameworks and funding their delivery. There are currently over 170 different apprenticeship frameworks which are supported by DfENI.

For apprenticeships,²¹ funding²² for the tuition element of Level 2, Level 3 apprenticeships and Level 4 and Level 5 Higher Level Apprenticeships is part funded through the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (ESF) Programme 2014-2020 and the Department for the Economy (DfE).

²¹ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/apprenticeships>

²² <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/finances-and-funding-apprenticeships>

An Employer Incentive Payment is also available to employers whose employees successfully complete their Level 2 and/or Level 3 Apprenticeship framework. Employers must contract apprentices to work at least 21 hours per week (to include day release for directed training) and are responsible for paying their apprentices at least the National Minimum Wage rate.

For apprentices aged 16-24, the costs of the directed ('off-the-job') training element of the apprenticeship are funded by the ESF and DfE. For employers aged 25 and over, 50 per cent of the costs of directed training are funded by the ESF and DfE. Adults aged 25 and over may only undertake apprenticeships in occupational areas that are economically important in Northern Ireland.

As in England and elsewhere in the UK, there are two approaches to funding apprenticeships in Northern Ireland: employers with a wages bill of over £3m each year, pay a levy which creates a resource to fund apprenticeships for contributing employers, while smaller employers who do not pay the levy share the cost of training and assessing their apprentices with government.

The Department for the Economy Higher Education Division administers funding to the Northern Ireland higher education sector, supporting education, research and related activities.

3. Qualifications frameworks and regulated qualifications in England and Northern Ireland

A wide range of qualifications is available in England and Northern Ireland. Regulated qualifications fall within the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). Higher education qualifications are within the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ). Other non-regulated qualifications exist; these sit outside of the two regulatory frameworks.

Table 3: Responsibility for establishing and maintaining the qualifications frameworks

Framework	Responsible organisation
RQF (England)	Ofqual is the statutory qualification and assessment regulator in England. Ofqual developed and used its statutory powers to establish the RQF in England, following public consultation. It uses these powers to maintain the integrity of the framework.
RQF (Northern Ireland)	CCEA Regulation regulates qualifications in Northern Ireland. It adopted the RQF into its requirements and maintains the integrity of the framework as it is used for qualifications taken in Northern Ireland.
FHEQ (England and Northern Ireland)	The shared FHEQ is managed by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA).

This chapter presents a brief overview of the introduction, evolution and present status of qualifications frameworks in England and Northern Ireland.

Introduction and evolution of national qualifications frameworks in England and Northern Ireland

Qualifications frameworks are well established and valued in England and Northern Ireland. The origins of the first national qualifications framework in England and Northern Ireland go back to 1995. At that time Lord Dearing was invited by the UK Government to consider and advise on ways to strengthen, consolidate and improve the framework of 16-19 qualifications, to help employers compare the many hundreds of qualifications available in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Lord Dearing recommended in 1996 the introduction of national qualification levels. The levels, which would be included in qualification titles and printed on qualification certificates, would enhance understanding of qualifications, and the transferability of learning and progression. His recommendations underpinned the creation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The first National Qualifications Framework went from Level 1 to Level 5. In 2004 Level 4 was replaced with Levels 4, 5 and 6 and Level 5 was replaced with Levels 7 and 8. This allowed the NQF to better align with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications²³ (FHEQ) (see Table 4). The National Qualifications Framework also had an Entry level, divided into three sub-levels (Entry 1, Entry 2 and Entry 3).

²³ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

Table 4: Evolution of NQF levels from 1996 to present with FHEQ levels

NQF levels 1996 – 2004	NQF levels 2004 – 2015 QCF levels 2008 - 2015 RQF levels 2015+	FHEQ levels
Example qualifications	Example qualifications	Qualification types
LEVEL 5 Level 5 NVQ in Construction Management Level 5 Diploma in Translation	LEVEL 8 Specialist awards	LEVEL 8 Doctorates
	LEVEL 7 Level 7 Diploma in Translation	LEVEL 7 Masters degrees, postgraduate certificates and diplomas
LEVEL 4 Level 4 NVQ in Advice and Guidance Level 4 National Diploma in Professional Production Skills Level 4 BTEC Higher National Diploma in 3D Design Level 4 Certificate in Early Years	LEVEL 6 Level 6 National Diploma in Professional Production Skills	LEVEL 6 Bachelor degrees Graduate certificates and diplomas
	LEVEL 5 Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diploma in 3D Design	LEVEL 5 Diplomas of higher education and further education Foundation degrees Higher national diplomas
	LEVEL 4 Level 4 Certificate in Early Years	LEVEL 4 Level 4 Certificate in Early Years
LEVEL 3 A levels Level 3 Certificate in Small Animal Care Level 3 NVQ in Aeronautical Engineering		
LEVEL 2 GCSE Grades A* to C Level 2 Diploma for Beauty Specialists Level 2 NVQ in Agricultural Crop Production		
LEVEL 1 GCSE Grades D to G Level 1 Certificate in Motor Vehicle Studies Level 1 NVQ in Bakery		
ENTRY LEVELS 1-3 Entry Level Certificate in Personal and Social Development		

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) was introduced in 2008 as part of the UK government's major reform of vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. At that time, the QCF did not replace the National Qualifications Framework, but sat alongside it. The QCF was an ambitious, transformative framework that incorporated qualification design rules to develop the reformed structure of vocational qualifications. It was designed to allow units of learning to be recognised and a unit based national credit transfer system for, initially, vocational qualifications in England, Northern Ireland and Wales to be introduced.

The QCF was at that time seen as the future framework for all regulated qualifications and as such, was referenced to the EQF in the 2010 report.²⁴ Following the introduction of the QCF, awarding organisations had to change many of their qualifications because of the regulations (rules) around qualification design and structure. Qualification titles also changed. The QCF required every qualification to have 'award', 'certificate or 'diploma' in its title, according to the number of credits associated with the qualification.

Following a change of government in 2010,²⁵ and an evaluation by Ofqual of the effectiveness of the QCF, Ofqual decided to replace the NQF and the QCF with a single, simpler, inclusive Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF). The QCF imposed a specific approach to qualification design that, Ofqual concluded, was not in all cases consistent with high quality qualifications that met students' and employers' needs. In contrast, the RQF allows awarding organisations greater freedom to design high quality qualifications and to be responsive to employers' needs and innovative in their approach. All regulated qualifications can sit comfortably within the RQF.

The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) replaced the NQF and the QCF in October 2015.²⁶

²⁴ http://ccea.org.uk/ga/regulation/european/european_qualifications_framework/referencing_process

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2010-to-2015-government-policy-school-and-college-qualifications-and-curriculum/2010-to-2015-government-policy-school-and-college-qualifications-and-curriculum>

²⁶ <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2015/10/01/explaining-the-rqf/>

The Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)

The statutory basis of the RQF

The RQF is a framework for regulated qualifications awarded by awarding organisations that are recognised, and therefore, regulated, by Ofqual in England, and by CCEA Regulation in Northern Ireland. Ofqual and CCEA Regulation set criteria which an organisation that wishes to award regulated qualifications must meet, and for its regulated qualifications to be included in the statutory Register of Regulated Qualifications.²⁷ Once recognised, an awarding organisation is required, by legislation, to comply with the rules set by the regulators. The requirements of the RQF are embedded within these rules.

Ofqual²⁸ and CCEA Regulation²⁹ publish the following rules and guidance, which apply to all awarding organisations and all qualifications they regulate:

- Criteria for Recognition;
- The General Conditions of Recognition;
- Guidance to the General Conditions of Recognition, (designed to help awarding organisations understand how to comply with the rules). Awarding organisations must, by statute, have regard to this guidance;
- Specific supplementary rules for certain groups of qualifications in each jurisdiction, such as GCSEs,³⁰ A levels,³¹ Functional Skills Qualifications and apprenticeship End Point Assessments³² to reflect policy considerations;
- Other general rules and guidance relating to certificate requirements, logo requirements, requirements and guidance for assigning levels to regulated qualifications and where appropriate their components, requirements for specifying total qualification time, and criteria for determining whether a qualification is relevant for the purposes of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

The regulators can take enforcement action against an awarding organisation that has breached, or that it considers is likely to breach, any of its Conditions. For example, Ofqual can direct an awarding organisation to comply with Ofqual's rules. Ofqual can impose a financial penalty on an awarding organisation that breaches its rules and has the power to withdraw the organisation's recognition to award one or more regulated qualifications. CCEA Regulation does not have the same

²⁷ All qualifications that are regulated by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation can be found on the statutory Register of Regulated Qualifications: <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

²⁹ <http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/compliance>

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-qualification-level-conditions>

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements>

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/epa-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements>

enforcement powers as Ofqual but it can withdraw the recognition status of an awarding organisation in Northern Ireland if it does not comply with the rules.

The RQF provides a single, simple system for cataloguing all qualifications regulated by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation. Central to this system, are the regulatory requirements around the level and size of a qualification.

Level

The regulations require an awarding organisation to assign an RQF level to each of its regulated qualifications. It must have regard to the relevant regulator's requirements and guidance when assigning a level and, in particular, match the learning outcomes for the qualification to the level descriptors of the framework.

Qualification level indicates the difficulty and complexity of the knowledge and skills associated with any qualification. There are eight levels supported by three 'entry' levels. While most qualifications will be assigned a single level some, such as GCSEs, can span more than one (GCSEs span levels 1 and 2)³³.

Qualification levels are widely recognised and understood in England and Northern Ireland. Job descriptions, school and college prospectuses and statutory licences to practice requirements typically describe the level of demand of a qualification and explain progression opportunities with reference to the appropriate level in the qualifications framework.

If the regulator decides an awarding organisation has assigned the wrong level to a qualification, the awarding organisation must revise the level in accordance with the regulator's instruction.

Level descriptors

The level descriptors for the RQF were based on those for the QCF and the NQF; Ofqual took care to make sure that introducing the RQF would not require any recalibration of the levels of existing qualifications.

The RQF requires qualifications to be designed on the basis of demonstrating achievement of learning outcomes. The level descriptors are simple to interpret and present a clear hierarchy of demand.

The RQF level descriptors are expressed in terms of Knowledge and Skills categories only. The descriptors do not address a learner's autonomy and accountability, which was previously included in the QCF and is covered in the EQF in the Responsibility and Autonomy component. Ofqual decided to simplify descriptors in this way following consultation. The level descriptors for the RQF must

³³ GCSEs are graded qualifications taken by most 16-year olds following two years of study in each subject. They have been designed to target a wide range of student ability: allowing them to span two levels ensures they are accessible to the full range of students and provide challenge to the most able.

be used by all recognised awarding organisations. The Knowledge and Skills descriptors define specific requirements, using command verbs that can be monitored by the regulators through reviews of qualification documents, such as specifications and specimen assessment materials.

Ofqual made clear that the removal of the Autonomy and Accountability descriptor does not prohibit a qualification from seeking to recognise levels of autonomy and accountability: the framework describes requirements for knowledge and skills but does not constrain what qualifications are designed to achieve. Instead, Ofqual noted that where a qualification objective is to recognise a particular level of autonomy and accountability in the workplace, this should be assessed as part of the qualification and the qualification level should be determined by reference to the Knowledge and Skills descriptors.

The level descriptors allow the widest range of qualifications, including academic qualifications, to be accommodated within the framework.

Qualification design is strongly informed by regulatory criteria backed by enforcement powers, National Occupational Standards (particularly in Northern Ireland), and input from sector experts. The system is designed to not be overly prescriptive and to allow awarding organisations to be innovative in how they design qualifications to meet the changing demands of learners and employers.

Size and credit

Qualification size refers to the estimated total amount of time it will typically take a learner to study and be assessed for a qualification. For some qualifications this will be a matter of hours (minimum of 10 hours), for others it will be several years of study.

Qualification size is expressed in terms of Total Qualification Time (TQT), which includes supervised or taught learning (known as guided learning hours) as well as non-supervised learning.

An awarding organisation can assign a credit value to a component of a qualification, (as well as to a qualification as a whole), although this is not a requirement of the RQF. Where credit is assigned, the awarding organisation must also assign a level to that component. The credit value of a component or whole qualification is simply obtained, by dividing the TQT for the component or qualification by 10.

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

UK degree-awarding bodies,³⁴ typically Universities, University Colleges and some Further Education Colleges with Foundation Degree Awarding Powers, award their own qualifications. Consequently, degree-awarding bodies are responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards and quality of their qualifications. The FHEQ was first published in 2001 and was revised in 2008. All higher education qualifications awarded for courses commencing in or after 2003 are expected to be designed, delivered and achieved in accordance with the framework. All degree-awarding bodies are required to:

- use the framework in setting and maintaining academic standards
- ensure that the requirements of the framework are met
- demonstrate that their qualifications are awarded in accordance with the FHEQ.

The framework is also used by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies in defining and using qualifications in the context of their professional recognition and accreditation processes as well as to inform international comparability of academic standards.

The fundamental premise of the FHEQ is that qualifications are awarded on the basis of demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding and abilities, and attainment: it is an outcomes-based approach to qualifications.

The FHEQ levels are based on qualification descriptors, which set out, at each level, the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a particular type of qualification e.g. bachelor's degree with honours. They set out the threshold academic standard for each qualification type. Courses of study in higher education that lead to an award are described in terms of learning outcomes; the learning outcomes are required to align to the relevant qualification descriptor for the award being made.

The FHEQ is also based on the principle of consistent nomenclature for the main qualification types e.g. degree, postgraduate diploma, to convey trustworthy information about the level, nature and subject of study.

Higher education providers that do not have degree-awarding powers can work in formal partnership with degree-awarding bodies to deliver higher education courses leading to higher education qualifications. Those that offer higher education courses

³⁴ The power to award degrees is regulated by law in the UK. Those organisations granted the power to award higher education degrees are referred to as Recognised Bodies and as Degree Awarding Bodies. It is an offence for an organisation to purport to award, or to offer, a UK degree unless it is authorised to do so.

on behalf of degree-awarding bodies are responsible for maintaining the quality of the courses while ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of the required academic standards rests with the degree awarding body.

The FHEQ is a significant component of the quality assurance for UK higher education. The UK Quality Code for Higher Education³⁵ is the definitive reference point for all UK higher education providers. It explains how academic standards are set and maintained for higher education qualifications in the UK. It covers all providers of UK higher education within the four nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and where UK higher education is delivered internationally. Degree awarding bodies, as autonomous institutions, are responsible for assuring their provision against the expectations set out in the Quality Code and the FHEQ.

The Quality Code protects the interests of all students wherever and however they study i.e. whether they are full-time, part-time, undergraduate, postgraduate, apprentices, distance/blended/on-line learners.

The QAA manages the Quality Code and the FHEQ on behalf of the UK higher education sector, and working under the guidance of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment, to ensure a co-regulatory approach to its on-going management, use and development.

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education was significantly revised by the sector in 2018 to make the expectations more outcomes focused. The revised UK Quality Code sets out a sector-agreed series of expectations: two for standards and two for quality. These are underpinned by Core Practices, which are mandatory across the UK, and Common Practices, which are mandatory across the UK, except for England where they are not part of the regulatory requirements. In England, all registered higher education providers are required to meet registration conditions on quality and standards which map across from the expectations set out in the UK Quality Code.

The UK Quality Code Expectations were designed, primarily, for 'academic' qualifications. The expectations are:

- Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students, and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed;
- From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education;
- The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.

³⁵ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualifications and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.³⁶

The relevant national qualifications framework comprises the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies;³⁷ the two key frameworks included are:

- The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications of Degree-Awarding Bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), and
- The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS).

The FHEQ in Wales forms part of the CQFW and the FQHEIS in Scotland part of the SCQF. Neither framework functions as a register of qualifications.

Table 5 presents the main types of higher education qualifications awarded by UK degree-awarding bodies within each level. It shows the FHEQ and FQHEIS. Within each level, the various qualifications involve different volumes of learning and hence differences in the range of intended learning outcomes.

The list of qualification titles and acronyms indicated in brackets is not exhaustive but gives typical examples. Degree-awarding bodies have the autonomy to determine their own qualification titles.

³⁶ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

³⁷ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

Table 5 also presents the FHEQ level to which each qualification type is assigned, and indicates the alignment between the frameworks; framework levels placed alongside each other are deemed to be broadly comparable. Column 4 gives the corresponding cycle of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). The shaded cells in this column indicates where FHEQ qualifications such as postgraduate diplomas and postgraduate certificates do not meet the expectations for QF-EHEA end of cycle qualifications. The table presents, in a European context, points of integration and overlap between different qualification types awarded by UK degree-awarding bodies, and indicates routes (and barriers) for progression.

Table 5: Example qualifications in the UK Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications and the QF-EHEA cycles

Typical higher education qualifications awarded by degree-awarding bodies	FHEQ level	Corresponding QF-EHEA cycle
Doctoral degree (e.g. PhD, DPhil, EdD, DBA, DClinPsy)	8	Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Master's degrees (e.g. MPhil, MLitt, MRes, MA, MSc)	7	Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
Integrated master's degrees (e.g. Meng, MChem, MPhys, MPharm)		
Primary qualifications (or first degrees) in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science (e.g. MB, ChB, MB BS, BM BS, BDS, BVSc, BVMS)		
Postgraduate diplomas		
Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)		
Postgraduate certificates		
Bachelor's degrees with honours (e.g. BA Hons, BSc Hons)		6
Bachelor's degrees		
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland		
Graduate diplomas		
Graduate certificates		
Foundation degrees (e.g. FdA, FdSc)	5	
Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)		
Higher National Diplomas (HND) awarded by degree-awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under licence from Pearson		
Higher National Certificates (HNC) awarded by degree-awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland under licence from Pearson	4	
Certificates of Higher Education		

Qualifications in England and Northern Ireland

In England and Northern Ireland qualifications are awarded to individuals who have demonstrated, through one or more assessments, that they have achieved the learning outcomes to the required standard for that qualification.

This is in line with the Council of the European Union's 2017 definition which aims to improve the transparency and understanding of qualifications and qualifications systems in member states:

*Qualifications are the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process by a competent authority and typically take the form of documents such as certificates or diplomas. They determine that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.*³⁸

The range of regulated qualifications

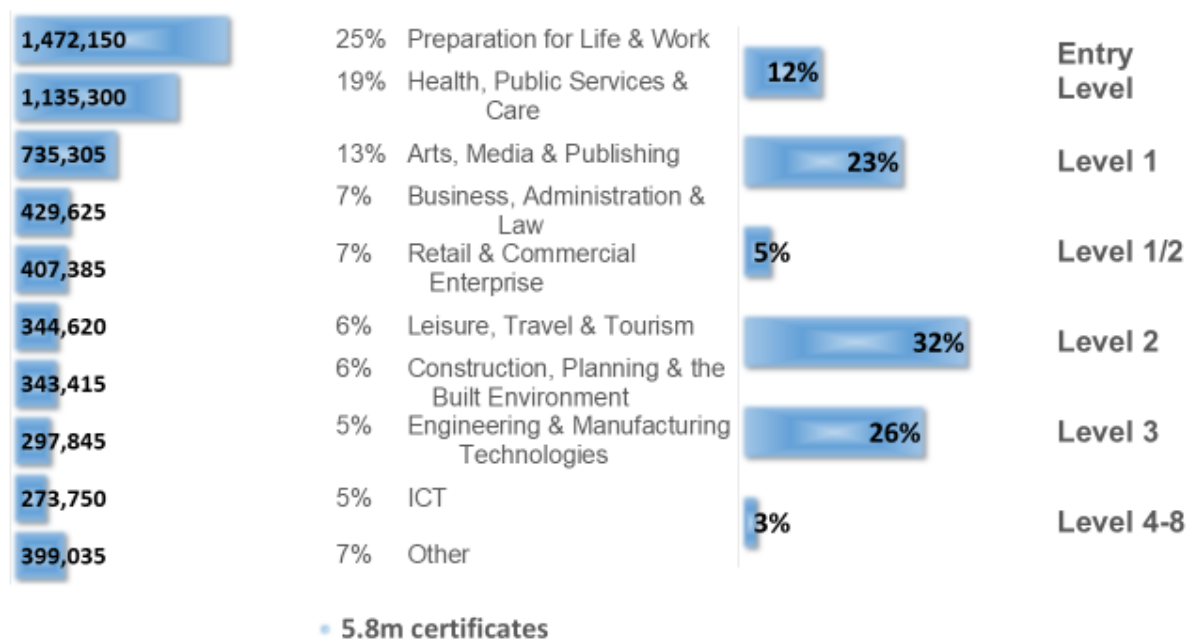
In 2017/18, there were about 15,000 regulated qualifications available across England and over 9,000 in Northern Ireland.

Many regulated qualifications are designed to meet the needs of particular occupations, for example in the construction industry, business and administration, retail, engineering, hair and beauty and agriculture. Some of these qualifications serve as a licence to practice, meaning a person is not allowed to perform in a particular function or occupation unless they hold a specific qualification. These qualifications are mainly taken after the age of 16. Employers and professional and/or representative bodies in the relevant sector will typically play a part in designing such qualifications.

There are also qualifications that provide broader preparation for work, either generally or in a specific occupational sector, but without preparing students for any particular role or occupation, as shown in Figure 6. Such qualifications are often taken in schools or colleges by students in the 16-19 age range.

³⁸ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9620-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

Figure 6: Vocational and other qualification certificates awarded in England in 2017/18 by sector subject area and level³⁹



A number of UK Government reviews to inform English policy were undertaken. While England-focused they affected the other devolved administrations to varying extent. Following the Wolf Review of Vocational Education,⁴⁰ the UK Government reduced the range of vocational qualifications available to school pupils to address concerns that some qualifications that had previously been taken in schools offered little value to young people or employers. A further review conducted by the Independent Panel on Technical Education,⁴¹ led by Lord Sainsbury, proposed an ambitious new framework for change.

A new suite of two-year technical courses, known as T Levels, is now being developed for students in the 16-19 age range, the first of which will be taught from 2020. The content for T Levels is being designed by employers and will cover 25 employment areas. T Levels will offer students a mixture of classroom learning and 'on-the-job' experience during an industry placement of at least 45 days. Students will take a Technical Qualification during the course, which will be a regulated qualification within the Regulated Qualifications Framework at level 3.

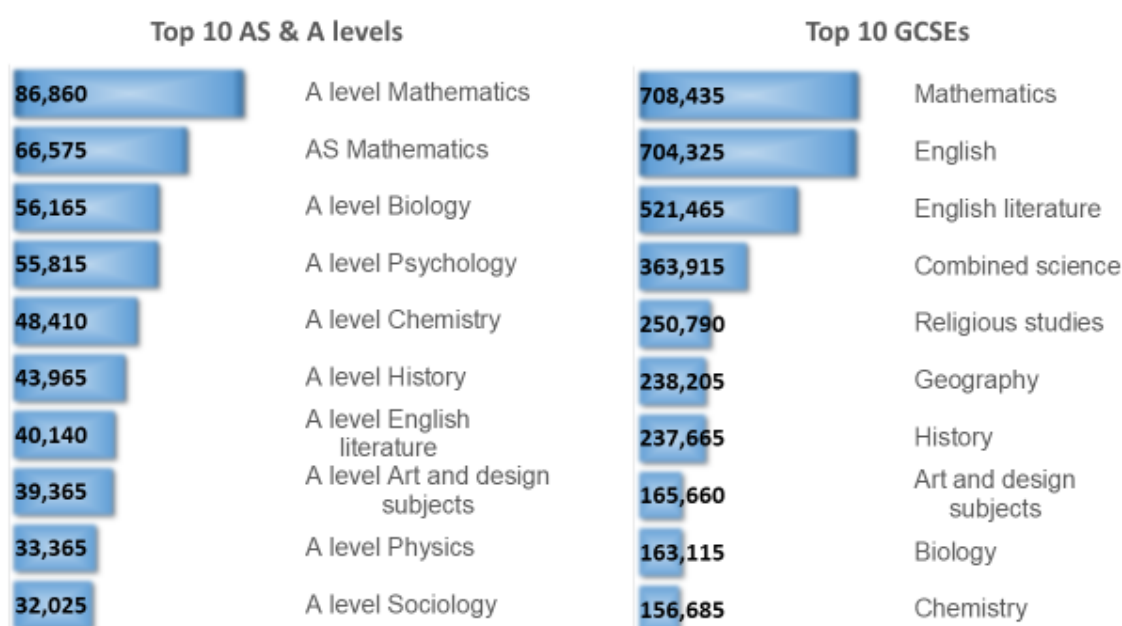
³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-qualifications-market-report-academic-year-2017-to-2018>

⁴⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/180504/DFE-00031-2011.pdf

⁴¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/536046/Report_of_the_Independent_Panel_on_Technical_Education.pdf

Other regulated qualifications are general or academic in nature, for example in subjects such as English, mathematics, the sciences, history and modern foreign languages. These qualifications are widely taken by students in 16-18 age range in schools and colleges to prepare for further or higher education and for employment generally. Most students in England and Northern Ireland take a number (typically 8-10) of General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) at age 16 and many take General Certificates of Education (GCEs or A levels) at age 18 (in, typically, 2 or 3 subjects), as shown in Figure 7. These are national regulated qualifications.

Figure 7: Qualification certificates awarded in England in 2017/18 in the top 10 most widely studied GCSEs and A levels⁴²



Finally, there are regulated qualifications that attest to popular skills, such as in music, dance or sport and there are qualifications that might have a particular value for individuals working in a range of community settings as volunteers.

⁴² <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/annual-qualifications-market-report-academic-year-2017-to-2018>

The range of FHEQ Qualifications

The FHEQ shows the levels at which qualifications can be made by degree awarding bodies and common titling conventions for those awards e.g. Diploma of Higher Education, Bachelor's degree, Doctorate (see Table 5). The subject areas for these awards are varied, many are covered by Subject Benchmark Statements (SBS)⁴³ which are managed by the QAA. There are over 80 statements, covering a wide range of subject areas ranging from Accountancy to Youth and Community Work; most are at Bachelor's degree level, some are at Masters. The SBS are developed by the QAA working in collaboration with key stakeholders, for instance academics, professional bodies, employers and students. They describe the nature of study, the academic standards expected of graduates in each subject area and what graduates might reasonably be expected to know, do and understand at the end of their studies.

The QAA's Characteristics Statements⁴⁴ describe the distinctive features of qualifications at particular levels within the FHEQ. They describe the qualifications in terms of their purpose, general characteristics and generic outcomes, but do not include subject level detail.

The title of qualifications awarded will normally include the dominant subject or subjects studied e.g. BA (Hons) English, BSc (Hons) Mathematics. Where more than one subject is studied the title of the award will reflect this e.g. BA (Hons) English and History (where each subject is 50%) or BA (Hons) English with History (where English is the majority of study, typically up to 75%). Titling conventions allow up to three subjects to be named, although two is more common. Where a wider range of subjects is studied the award is suffixed with e.g. General Studies.

The use of credits to describe notional learning times is not compulsory in higher education. Where it is used (which is more common than not) a credit is aligned to 10 hours of notional study time; this includes time in taught sessions, workshops, presentations, practical, research, assessments etc. The number of credits for each type of award in higher education is set out in the Higher Education Credit Framework for England.⁴⁵

The use of the FHEQ, SBS, Characteristics Statements and Credit Frameworks allow degree awarding bodies to maintain their autonomy whilst ensuring equity and comparability of awards from different organisations and in different subject areas.

⁴³ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/subject-benchmark-statements>

⁴⁴ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/supporting-resources>

⁴⁵ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

Qualification development

Qualifications are reformed and updated from time to time. New qualifications are introduced to prepare students for new occupations and to provide wider choice to providers. The qualifications frameworks in England and Northern Ireland provide consistent reference points that enable students, providers and employers to understand at a high level how qualifications relate to each other.

General/academic qualifications

In England, the development of subject content for regulated general / academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels is managed by the Department for Education,⁴⁶ in consultation with subject experts and stakeholders (higher education representatives for example). Ofqual sets the rules for how these qualifications must be assessed, in order for the qualifications to sit within the RQF. Public consultations on the subject content and the assessment rules are then held, with the resulting final versions published on DfE's and Ofqual's websites. The four exam boards that are recognised to award such qualifications then use the subject content and the assessment rules to design a qualification. They develop a specification for the qualification together with samples of the assessment materials they plan to use. When the regulator, Ofqual, is satisfied that the specification meets its rules it accredits the qualification, allowing the exam boards to market it to schools and colleges.

In Northern Ireland CCEA Regulation, acting on behalf of the Department of Education, develops GCSE and GCE Design Principles.⁴⁷ All GCSEs and A levels developed by the awarding organisation part of CCEA must meet these criteria⁴⁸ and CCEA Regulation, in consultation with subject experts, accredits these qualifications which can then be placed within the RQF. Northern Ireland has an open market policy, so that (with some limited exceptions) GCSEs and A levels developed for the market in England (or Wales) can be taken by students in Northern Ireland too subject to the awarding organisation complying with DE(NI) policy and assessment requirements.

⁴⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

⁴⁷ http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/compliance/general_conditions_recognition

⁴⁸ http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/accreditation/compliance/n_ireland_gce_and_gcse_qualifications_criteria.pdf

Vocational, Technical and Professional Qualifications

In England and Northern Ireland there is significant engagement with employers, employees and public authorities in the design and development of vocational, technical and professional qualifications. When designing and developing qualifications, awarding organisations will consult with, for example, individual employers, trade bodies, professional associations, individual employees, learners and other stakeholders in the economy and society.

Regulators require that an awarding organisation can only make a regulated qualification available when it has consulted with users⁴⁹ of the proposed qualifications and has evidence of sufficient support for it. Trade unions representing teachers are among the unions most likely to engage in qualification design and development, especially of national qualifications.

As an example, Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT), a medium-sized vocational awarding organisation in the UK personal services sector, engages heavily with the following organisations, in the design of vocational and technical qualifications in the personal service sectors:

- The Institute of Hospitality
- WorldSkills, a global organisation promoting skills development
- UK Active, which aims to get more people, more active, more often
- The Register of Exercise Professionals (REPS)
- The British Association of Beauty Therapy and Cosmetology (BABTAC)
- The Federation of Holistic Therapists (FHT)
- The National Hairdressers' Federation (NHF)
- The Hair Council
- The British Barbers Association
- The Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC)

One specific area where trade unions have been particularly involved in qualification development in England, relates to a range of Trade Union Congress (TUC) qualifications. These were developed by the TUC with an Ofqual regulated awarding organisation (NOCN) to support the work and progression of trade union representatives. Where these meet the appropriate criteria they are approved for

⁴⁹ Users of qualifications typically include: students and their representatives, schools and colleges, teachers, employers and their representatives, further and higher education institutions, government departments and professional bodies.

government funding in England and are available to eligible adult learners within funding rules.⁵⁰

In Northern Ireland in particular, vocational qualifications are often strongly informed by National Occupational Standards (NOS). NOS are set by professional representative bodies, including employees and employers. NOS are reviewed regularly and any changes are consulted on.⁵¹ In England, NOS played a key role in vocational qualification design until 2016, when government reforms led to the closure of the sector bodies, called sector skills councils, who were responsible for developing and reviewing the NOS for their relevant sectors. However many awarding organisations continue to draw on the NOS in their qualification design.

Learner progression

People take qualifications at different stages of their lives and for a wide variety of reasons. With very few exceptions, school pupils take a range of qualifications during their compulsory education. Since 2013 individuals in England must continue to engage in education or training until they are 18. They can choose between staying in full time schooling or college, taking an apprenticeship, or going into employment during which they must engage in part-time study or training.

In Northern Ireland, individuals can chose to complete their education and training at 16, although most will continue to engage in learning beyond the compulsory age. The Entitlement Framework is the Post-14 curriculum which puts the needs of pupils first. It aims to provide access for pupils to a broad and balanced curriculum to enable them to reach their full potential no matter which school they attend or where they live.

In Northern Ireland, the Entitlement Framework guarantees that all pupils in schools have access to a minimum number of courses from age 14-16 and between 16 and 19, of which at least one third must be general and one third applied. These courses should be economically relevant and individually engaging with clear progression pathways.

After their compulsory education and training, individuals in England and Northern Ireland can then take qualifications for a wide range of reasons, often linked to their jobs and career aspirations or for personal interest and growth.

Funding routes exist to support disengaged learners to get back into employment, with training available for learners yet to achieve a Level 2 qualification. Funding

⁵⁰ For more information: <https://www.tuceducation.org.uk/mod/page/view.php?id=49462>
<https://www.nocn.org.uk/>

⁵¹ http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/guidance/qualifications_action

regimes are often set based on national targets for the achievement of qualification levels.

There is also a wide choice of the ways an individual can prepare for a qualification, eg through traditional teaching, work-based or on-the job training, distance learning including on-line learning and self-directed study.

Awarding organisations are also able to follow an approach to the recognition of prior learning should they wish.

Higher Education

A range of stakeholders are involved in the development of curricula for higher education. Subject Benchmark Statements are developed by subject specialists from the academic communities, employers, professional bodies, community groups, as relevant to set out graduate outcomes for a subject area. Additional requirements may be set by regulatory bodies e.g. the Nursing and Midwifery Council, the General Medical Council, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors.

Individual courses within a higher education provider are developed by the subject academics in conjunction with other specialists e.g. learning and teaching experts, technology enhanced learning developers, as well as external input from other academics, professional bodies, past/current students etc. Awards within Apprenticeships must also meet the requirements set out in the Apprenticeship Standard or Apprenticeship Framework.

Modes of study will vary and include: full-time, part-time (e.g. day release, block study, evening study), distance learning, on-line studies, work-based learning.

Where an award is developed and 'approved for delivery' by a degree awarding body it will be regularly or continuously monitored and reviewed with the aim of ensuring that the award continues to meet required outcomes for its graduates.

Transferability of qualifications across the UK and Ireland

Qualifications in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales are usually transferable, being recognised by employers and higher education institutions across the UK.

This also applies, albeit to a lesser extent, between the qualifications taken in the UK and Ireland, which is important given the significant movement of people between the countries. With this in mind, the qualifications regulators and quality assurance bodies in the UK and Ireland work together as a 5-country group to identify and seek to address issues arising from cross border recognition of qualifications. This group has developed a reference leaflet, *Qualifications can cross boundaries*,⁵² which is updated on a regular basis. This leaflet presents the relevant national frameworks mapped against the EQF and the FQ-EHEA, as illustrated in Table 8.

Table 8: Correspondence of levels established between national qualifications frameworks and the EQF

Regulated qualifications framework (RQF)	Framework for higher education qualifications (FHEQ)	European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	Credit and qualifications framework for Wales (CQFW)	Scottish credit and qualifications framework (SCQF)	National framework of qualifications for Ireland (NFQ IE)
8	8	8	8	12	10
7	7	7	7	11	9
6	6	6	6	10	8
				9	7
5	5	5	5	8	6
4	4		4	7	
3		4	3	6	5
2		3	2	5	4
1		2	1	4	3
E3		1	E3	3	2
					1
E2			E2	2	
E1			E1	1	

⁵² <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/qualifications-can-cross-boundaries.pdf>

Data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency⁵³ (HESA) shows the numbers of students graduating from each level in England and in Northern Ireland. The most recent published data, for 2017/18, is shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Higher Education Qualifications awarded by level of qualification⁵⁴

		England	Northern Ireland
Level of Qualification	Level	2017/18	2017/18
Postgraduate			
Doctorate research	8	20,630	495
Other postgraduate research	7/8	3,980	50
Total postgraduate research	7/8	24,615	550
Masters taught	7	154,955	2,110
Postgraduate Certificate in Education	7	17,635	260
Other postgraduate taught	7	40,230	1,775
Total postgraduate taught	7	212,820	4,150
Total postgraduate	7	237,435	4,695
Undergraduate			
First degree	6	349,190	9,185
Foundation degree	5	10,790	170
HNC/HND	4/5	2,400	*
Professional Graduate Certificate in Education	6	1,750	*
Other undergraduate	4/5/6	42,710	1,445
Total other undergraduate		57,650	1,615
Total undergraduate		406,840	10,805
Total all		644,275	15,500

**These qualifications are awarded in NI but data is not collected on certifications*

⁵³ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/outcomes>

4. Education and training landscape in England and Northern Ireland

Within the UK, education and skills policy, funding, regulation and student support are devolved matters and thus the responsibility of the relevant administration. The context for the delivery of education therefore varies. Some organisations operate across the devolved administrations. While they might have different responsibilities within each administration there are often common elements.

This section sets out the roles and responsibilities of the relevant bodies, with specific reference to those operating in England and/or Northern Ireland. It then explains the landscape for Education and Training from pre-school through compulsory education and on to further, higher and vocational education and training.

Key public bodies in the education and training sector

Key organisations with a role in qualification policy, funding, education inspection and regulation in England and/or Northern Ireland are described below.

Government Departments

The UK government is responsible for education and skills policy in England. The Department for Education takes overall responsibility. Some specific responsibilities, including statutory responsibilities, reside with 'arm's length' organisations.

The devolved government for Northern Ireland (NI) is responsible for education and skills in NI. Two Departments have responsibility for Education and Training policy - the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy.

The Department for Education⁵⁵ (DfE) (England)

The DfE is a ministerial department supported by 18 agencies and public bodies and non-ministerial departments. DfE's main areas of responsibility cover early years, primary and secondary education, apprenticeships, further education and higher education.

Department of Education, Northern Ireland (DE(NI))

DE(NI) is responsible for Northern Ireland's education policy, with the exception of the higher and further education sectors. DE(NI)'s main areas of responsibility cover pre-school, primary, secondary and special education; the youth service; the promotion of community relations within and between schools; and teacher education and salaries.

⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments-for-education>

The Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (DfENI)

DfENI is responsible for further and higher education in Northern Ireland. Unlike other parts of the UK, DfENI fulfils the roles of both a government department and a funding body (see pages 16 and 40 for more details on education and training funding in England and Northern Ireland). In further education, DfENI is responsible for policy and strategic development and financing, including the community and voluntary sector. In higher education, DfENI formulates policy and administers funding to support education, research and related activities in the NI higher education sector.

Education Inspection Bodies

Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted)⁵⁶ (England)

Ofsted is independent of the DfE and reports directly to Parliament. Ofsted inspects and regulates services that care for children and young people, and services providing education and skills for learners of all ages, covering schools and further education and skills provision. Ofsted inspects the quality of apprenticeship training provision from level 2 to level 5. Apprenticeship providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) and delivering apprenticeship training provision at level 4 or 5, are inspected by Ofsted.

The Education and Training Inspectorate⁵⁷ (Northern Ireland)

The ETI is a 'unitary' inspectorate, providing independent inspection services and policy advice for DE and other government departments. ETI is responsible for inspecting educational and youth provision and inspects a range of providers, including pre-schools, primary, secondary and special schools, education other than at school, the youth service, institutes of further education, initial teacher education and educational provision within the prison service.

Qualifications Regulatory Bodies

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)⁵⁸ (England)

Ofqual is a rule-making regulatory body with statutory supervisory and enforcement powers. It is independent of government and reports directly to Parliament. Ofqual is accountable for the regulation of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. Where qualifications which are listed on the Register of Regulated Qualifications are part of an apprenticeship, they are subject to Ofqual regulation.

⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>

⁵⁷ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual>

Ofqual is one of the four types of external quality assurance providers for the end point assessment taken by apprentices.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)⁵⁹, (Northern Ireland)

CCEA is a non-departmental public body reporting to DE(NI). It is an educational body that brings together curriculum, assessment and examinations.

CCEA has the dual role of both Awarding Organisation (AO) and Regulator. It is the main Northern Ireland AO for School General Qualifications (GCSEs, AS and A Levels). CCEA Regulation is responsible for the accreditation and quality assurance of all qualifications offered in Northern Ireland, including General School Qualifications and Professional and Technical (Vocational) Qualifications.

The Office for Students⁶⁰ (OfS) (England)

The OfS is the independent regulator of registered providers of higher education in England. The OfS has duties to protect the institutional autonomy of English higher education providers and to promote quality and greater choice and opportunities for students in the provision of higher education in England.

Quality Assurance Bodies

UK Higher Education Quality Assurance Body: The Quality Assurance Agency⁶¹ (QAA)

The QAA is an independent body that manages the Quality Code and the FHEQ on behalf of the UK higher education sector. It is delegated this responsibility from the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment⁶² (UKSCQA). QAA works to support the safeguarding of standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world.

The UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment⁶³ (UKSCQA)

The UKSCQA supports the recognition of sector recognised standards to provide sector-led oversight of higher education quality assessment arrangements. The UKSCQA includes representation from all jurisdictions of the UK higher education sector. It includes academic, student and professional/regulatory members, as well as representatives from QAA. It is responsible for strategic oversight of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education: baseline regulatory requirements, including compliance with FHEQ and UK Quality Code for higher education, ensuring the reliability of degree standards, advising on support requirements for academic

⁵⁹ <http://ccea.org.uk/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>

⁶¹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/>

⁶² <https://ukscqa.org.uk/>

⁶³ <https://ukscqa.org.uk/>

governance, and developing and providing strategic understanding of transnational education.

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education⁶⁴ (the Institute) (England)

The Institute is an employer led non-departmental public body. Its functions include ensuring the quality of apprenticeships and providing advice to the Government on future funding provision for apprenticeship training. It works with employer groups, known as trailblazers, to develop apprenticeship standards and assessment plans, as well as making recommendations on funding bands to the Department for Education for each apprenticeship standard. It is accountable for designing and operating approvals and review processes for standards and assessment plans (having regard to the policy criteria set by the Government), and for advising employers on the policy and process for developing standards and end point assessments for apprenticeships.

The Institute is responsible for development, procurement, approval and quality assurance of the qualifications which underpin each of the new T Levels, and for operational delivery oversight of the T Level framework.

Funding provision

Education and Skills Funding Agency⁶⁵ (ESFA) (England)

The ESFA is the executive agency of the Department for Education accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people and adults in England. It is responsible for the £58 billion budget for the education and training sector, and apprenticeships (including higher and degree apprenticeships). More specifically, it ensures that public funds are properly spent, it achieves value for money for the taxpayer and delivers the policies and priorities set by the Secretary of State. The ESFA regulates academies, further education and sixth-form colleges, and training providers, intervening where there is risk of failure or where there is evidence of mismanagement of public funds. For both apprenticeships and technical education, the ESFA is responsible for the end-to-end delivery of these major reform programmes in England.

Education Authority (EA) (Northern Ireland)

The EA is a Government sponsored non-departmental public body of the Department of Education. The EA is the funding authority for all schools and is responsible to DE for ensuring that efficient and effective pre-school, primary and secondary education services are available to meet the needs of children and young people, including those with special education needs, and for ensuring the provision

⁶⁴ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/>

⁶⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/education-and-skills-funding-agency>

of efficient and effective youth services. The EA is accountable for the funding provided directly to it and for the funding delegated to grant-aided schools.

The Department for the Economy (DfENI)

DfENI is responsible in Northern Ireland for funding general and vocational education in further education colleges for 16- to 19-year-olds, for public funding for post-19 adult education and training, and for funding work-based learning (e.g. apprenticeships) and youth training programmes, which are available from age 16.

Government funding is provided in accordance with DfENI priorities. Funding for adult education and training and work-based learning and youth training is increasingly aimed at ensuring a strong and vibrant economy, through the development of professional and technical skills which will help employers to innovate. It is also aimed at supporting social inclusion by providing those with low level or no qualifications, or who have other barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and become economically active.

The learning landscape in England and Northern Ireland

A diverse range of institutions and organisations are involved in delivering education and training in England and Northern Ireland. This information is intended to support the responses to the EQF referencing criteria in Chapter 5 of this report. Table 8 illustrates in broad terms the main stages and providers of education and training.

Table 10: The main stages and providers of education and training in England and Northern Ireland

Phase of education	Type of institution		Typical age
Higher and further education	Further education institutions	Higher education institutions (HEIs) (universities and other HEIs)	18+
	Vocational or academic qualifications, apprenticeships, GCE AS-level and GCE A-level examinations, and T levels (usually taken at age 17 and 18 respectively) provide access to further and higher education and the world of work		
	Further education institutions, sixth form colleges and other training providers	School sixth form	16 -18 years
Secondary education	General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) in academic subjects (usually taken at age 16) and other vocational qualifications provide access to post-compulsory general/academic and vocational studies and the world of work		
	Secondary schools		11-16 years
Primary education	Primary schools		4-11 years
Pre-school and nursery education	Pre-school settings which include maintained nursery schools, nursery schools attached to maintained primary schools, voluntary playgroups, private day nurseries and childminders		

Types of school in England and Northern Ireland

In England and Northern Ireland the school categories are grant-aided (publicly funded) and Independent. Most schools are grant-aided. Most schools follow the National Curriculum for England,⁶⁶ although this is not compulsory for all schools.⁶⁷ All grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland follow the Statutory Curriculum.⁶⁸ Grant-aided schools are regularly inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) in England and the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) in Northern Ireland. Independent schools are fee-paying and follow their own curriculum. Table 11 shows the number of each type of provider type in England and Northern Ireland.

Table 11: Number of Providers

Provider numbers	England	Northern Ireland
Primary schools	16,766	813
Secondary schools	3,436	196
Special schools	1,043	39
Independent schools	2,320	14
Further education colleges	262	6
Universities	108	3

Compulsory school age and stages in England and Northern Ireland

Compulsory attendance at school is from the ages of 5 in England⁶⁹ and 4 in Northern Ireland to age 16. Since 2015, young people in England are required to continue in learning or training until age 18. Raising the participation age (RPA) does not mean young people must stay in school; they can choose one of the following options:

- full-time education, such as school or college;
- apprenticeships, work-based learning; and
- part-time education or training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for at least 20 hours a week.

⁶⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-framework-for-key-stages-1-to-4>

⁶⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school>

⁶⁸ <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/statutory-curriculum>

⁶⁹ In practice most children start school in the September after their 4th birthday

Qualifications in England and Northern Ireland

Qualifications and Pathways - age 14-16 years

Most 14-16 year olds study in a school environment. Schools must offer pupils aged 14–16 years a range of courses leading to recognised qualifications. The outcomes of these external exams and associated qualifications are used to gain access to a range of post-16 options, including access to two further years' study in school known as Sixth Form (16–18 years), a sixth form college (in England only) or a further education college. Further education and sixth-form colleges are also able to enrol pupils aged 14-16 years to complete full-time study programmes that include technical qualifications alongside general qualifications, including English and mathematics.

The most widely studied qualifications from age 14-16 are GCSEs but other qualifications can also be taken including, for example, Technical Awards, and in Northern Ireland only, Occupational Studies. These vocational/applied qualifications cover RQF Entry level to level 2 and can form a valuable part of a general education, preparing pupils for life and work.

GCSEs

GCSEs are available in a wide range of subjects ranging from biology to Biblical Hebrew. GCSEs are designed and awarded by awarding organisations, with grades awarded on a scale that covers both levels 1 and 2 of the RQF. Grades 3 to 1 in England (which equates to grades D – G in Northern Ireland) signify level 1 achievement, while grades 9 to 4 in England (which equates to grades A* - C in Northern Ireland) signify level 2.

In 2017/8, around 4.7m GCSE certifications were issued in England across the 276 subjects in which they are offered, with 180,910 certifications in Northern Ireland. Students usually take about 8-10 GCSE examinations in different subjects, which usually include mathematics and English language. GCSEs are available to all ages and provide a stepping stone to further study in schools and colleges, as well to other work based learning programmes such as apprenticeships or employment.

Technical Awards

Alongside GCSEs, students can study Technical Awards, which are vocational qualifications at RQF level 1 and 2 that provide learners with applied knowledge and practical skills. They cover a range of subjects such as the arts, engineering, technology, social care and sport, helping pupils to develop applied knowledge and practical skills.

Occupational Studies (Northern Ireland only)

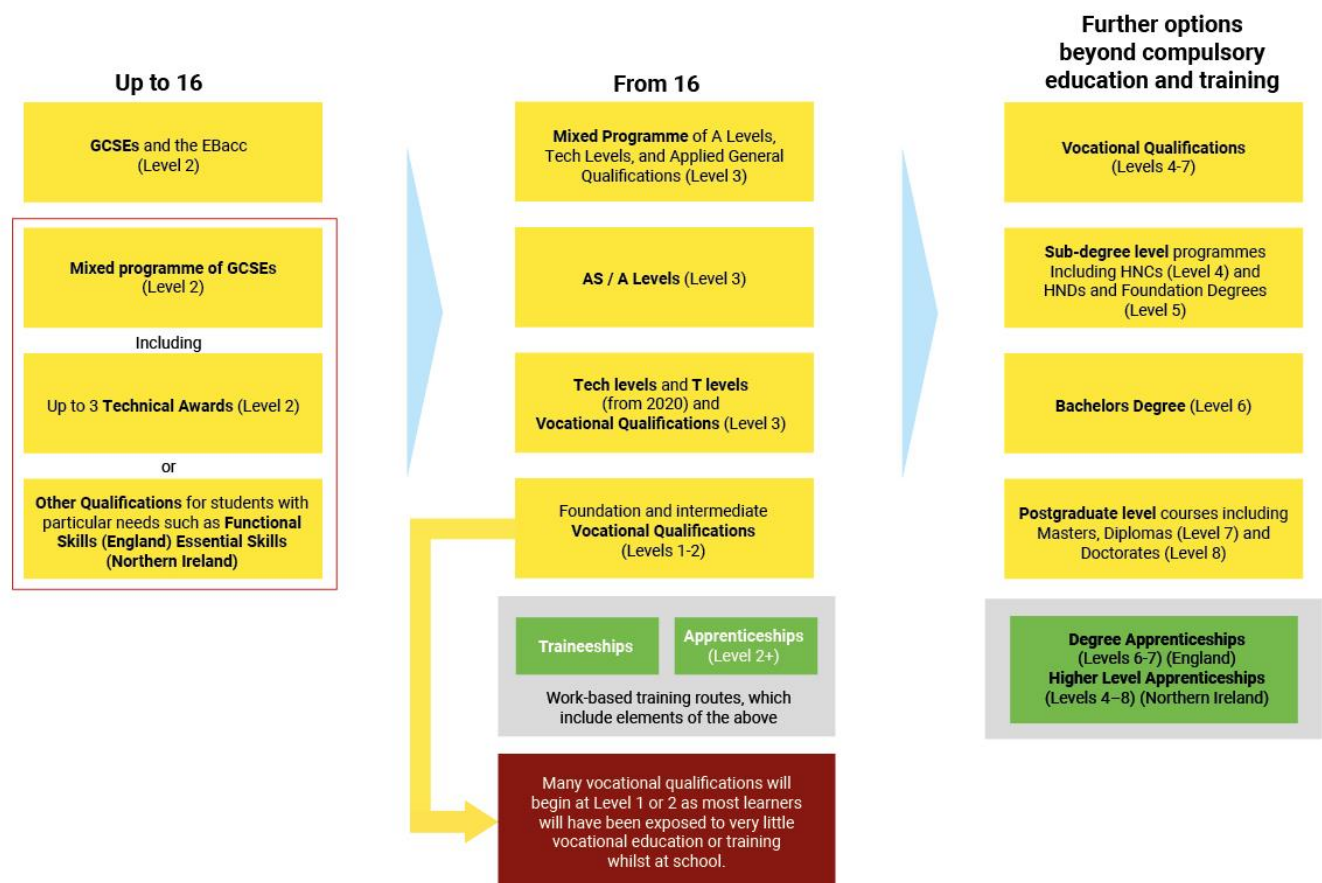
This qualification is targeted at learners working towards and at Level 1 and 2.

Learners with Occupational Studies qualifications generally use them together with GCSEs and other qualifications for entry into further study, training or employment.

Occupational Studies allows learners to learn for work, through work and about work, and it provides the potential for this learning to take place in out-of-school contexts.

There are various academic and technical routes the learner can follow, as shown in Figure 12. These progression routes, and the qualifications within them, are described below.

Figure 12: Academic and technical progression routes⁷⁰



Qualifications and Pathways - age 16-18 years

At age 16, learners have the option to move on to other learning and employment destinations. In England while *education* is compulsory until 18, *schooling* is compulsory to 16, thus post-16 education in England and Northern Ireland can take a number of forms. Students over 16 typically study in a school sixth form, a Further

⁷⁰ Adapted from: <https://www.policyconnect.org.uk/research/guide-skills-system>

Education (FE) College, or in England only, a separate sixth form college. Table 13 shows the number of students enrolled in each phase of education in England and Northern Ireland for 2017/18.

Table 13: Number of students

Student numbers 2017/18	England⁷¹	Northern Ireland⁷²
Pupils in primary education	4.7 million	173,700
Pupils in secondary education (post-primary schools in NI)	3.3 million	140,500
Other schools, including special and independent schools	760, 400	6,300
Further education students	2.2 million ⁷³	77,900 ⁷⁴
University students ⁷⁵	1.9 million	54,460

Students in England and Northern Ireland typically study Level 3 qualifications such as A levels or Applied General qualifications and some will study a mix of these qualifications thus combining academic and technical/vocational qualifications.

Learners aged 16 years or over can also enter work-based apprenticeships or traineeships in order to learn a skilled trade. Traineeships are education and training programmes that are combined with work experience to give trainees the skills needed to get an apprenticeship.

At 16 – 18 years old there are four main qualification pathways - academic, applied general, technical and work based learning. Within these pathways, qualifications are changing and evolving to meet the needs of a wide variety of learners and employers and to support the full implementation of the raising of the participation age to 18 in England.

⁷¹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/719226/Schools_Pupils_and_their_Characteristics_2018_Main_Text.pdf

⁷² [https://www.education-](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revised%2029%20April%202019%20-%20enrolments%20at%20schools%20and%20in%20funded%20pre-school%20e....pdf)

[ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revised%2029%20April%202019%20-%20enrolments%20at%20schools%20and%20in%20funded%20pre-school%20e....pdf](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/education/Revised%2029%20April%202019%20-%20enrolments%20at%20schools%20and%20in%20funded%20pre-school%20e....pdf)

⁷³ <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/College%20Key%20Facts%202018-19.pdf>

⁷⁴ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/FE-Activity-Statistical-Bulletin-13-14-to-17-18.pdf>

⁷⁵ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/17-01-2019/sb252-higher-education-student-statistics/numbers>

1. Academic route: studied at school/college and can lead to university, an apprenticeship or employment

A levels (Advanced level) (RQF level 3) can be used for university entrance in the UK. Students tend to take 3 A levels, or a combination of A levels with other academic, vocational or technical qualifications.

A levels are not the only qualifications available within the academic route which has become more flexible in recent years with the increased take up of qualifications such as the Extended Project Qualification, which is a research skills-based qualification taken alongside A levels, and the International Baccalaureate and Cambridge Pre-U, which are both composite qualifications that include separate skills-based components.

2. Applied General qualifications⁷⁶: studied at college/school and can lead to university, an apprenticeship or a job.

These are advanced (RQF level 3) qualifications that equip students with transferable knowledge and skills. They provide learning in a vocational area rather than for a single occupation, for example applied science, business or sport, and enable learners to develop transferable knowledge and skills. Applied General qualifications include BTECs and OCR Cambridge qualifications as well as a range of other vocational qualifications.

Applied General qualifications are required by the Department for Education to be recognised as a route into higher education through written support of at least three higher education providers.

3. Technical route⁷⁷: studied at college/school or in an apprenticeship and can lead to higher education

Technical Certificates are RQF level 2 qualifications which specialise in a specific industry or prepare students for a particular job in sectors in which where employers recognise entry at this level (for example, construction trades, social care and hairdressing). Technical Certificates also provide access to Tech Levels or an apprenticeship.

Tech Levels are RQF level 3 qualifications, and like Technical Certificates, are vocational and can equip students with the specialist knowledge they need for a specific occupation, such as engineering, computing or hospitality. They also support progression to higher education. Tech Levels are required by the Department for

⁷⁶ The term 'Applied General' level 3 qualifications for post-16 students who want to continue their education through applied learning.

⁷⁷ The DfE in England is currently undertaking a technical education reform programme, which means the technical education landscape in England is changing. See Chapter 6 Future Directions for more.

Education to gain the written support of a trade or professional body, or at least five employers.

4. Work Based Learning

Some apprenticeships include regulated qualifications at RQF levels 2-7, while other apprenticeships may also lead to an additional qualification, such as a diploma.

The Northern Ireland Administration has introduced Higher Level Apprenticeships at RQF levels 4 and 5 from September 2017. Higher Level Apprenticeships at level 6 and 7 have become mainstream from September 2018. Degree Apprenticeships at levels 6 and 7 are covered in the higher education section.

Table 14: Apprenticeship levels

Apprenticeship	RQF Level of qualification ⁷⁸	Equivalent education level
Intermediate	2	GCSE
Advanced	3	A level
Higher	4,5,6 and 7	Foundation degree and above
Degree	6 and 7	Bachelor's or master's degree

Apprenticeships (England)

Apprenticeships are becoming an increasingly significant route for 16-18 year olds, due, partly, to the UK Government's drive to create 3 million apprenticeships in England by 2020. Apprenticeships have been created in new sectors and offered by new employers. Some of these, such as the financial or government sectors, are not traditionally associated with apprenticeships. Many apprenticeships, such as those in engineering, are available at the UK's most prestigious companies.

In England, the term apprenticeship refers not to a single qualification but to the total programme of study and work, which must be designed to meet certain requirements.⁷⁹ Not all apprenticeships include regulated end point assessments, but where end point assessments are regulated by Ofqual, they will be assigned an RQF level. Apprentices work alongside experienced staff, gaining job-specific skills whilst earning a wage and they must take time for study related to their role (usually one day a week, or equivalent). Apprenticeships take one to five years to complete.

⁷⁸ Not all apprenticeships include regulated qualifications

⁷⁹ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/developing-new-apprenticeships/developing-new-apprenticeship-standards-overview/>

Training for Success (Northern Ireland)

DfENI's Training for Success (TfS) programme guarantees training of up to 104 weeks (156 weeks for those with a disability) to help young people gain the recognised skills and qualifications to help them progress in their chosen career. TfS is designed to develop relevant occupational and employability skills while addressing both essential skills barriers and personal and social development needs:

- Skills for Your Life – to address personal and development needs where young people have disengaged from learning or face other learning obstacles;
- Skills for Work – to help young people gain skills and a vocationally related qualification at Level 1 to help gain employment and/or to progress to higher level training at Level 2. The programme is delivered by providers in the voluntary and private sector as well as FE colleges.

ApprenticeshipsNI⁸⁰ (Northern Ireland)

ApprenticeshipsNI offers over 100 different apprenticeships frameworks at level 2 and level 3, which are devised by industry bodies and therefore meet the needs of industry. Apprenticeship training can take up to four years to complete depending on the occupational field, and aims to help participants to develop skills and knowledge required to work at a high level in their chosen occupation. Participants are expected to follow and achieve externally regulated qualifications at levels 2 or level 3. The programme is delivered by a range of training providers, including FE colleges.

Functional Skills Qualifications (England) and Essential Skills Qualifications (Northern Ireland)

These are examples of key qualifications available at RQF Entry levels 1,2 and 3 as well as RQF levels 1 and 2, which serve similar purposes. Both are designed to provide reliable evidence of a student's achievements against content that is relevant to the workplace as well as a foundation for progression into further study or employment.

The qualifications in English and Maths (and ICT in Northern Ireland) are designed for learners in education, training, work and everyday life situations who would like to gain a nationally accredited qualification. Students can study these qualifications to equip them with the skills they need for everyday life and work. They have been designed with employer needs in mind and take on a real-life and work problem-solving approach to developing literacy and numeracy skills. They are typically taken

⁸⁰ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/types-apprenticeships>

by students (aged 16-18 and adults) who have not achieved a GCSE in the corresponding subject.

Mixed learning programmes

The academic and technical pathways do not operate independently of each other. Many students follow a learning programme that includes a combination of academic, technical and applied qualifications.

Learning programmes comprising a mixture of academic and technical qualifications are well established. They meet the needs of many students and allow access to many higher education courses.

While the number of 16-18 year old students taking a mix of qualifications remains smaller than those on a specific pathway, the numbers have been increasing year on year.

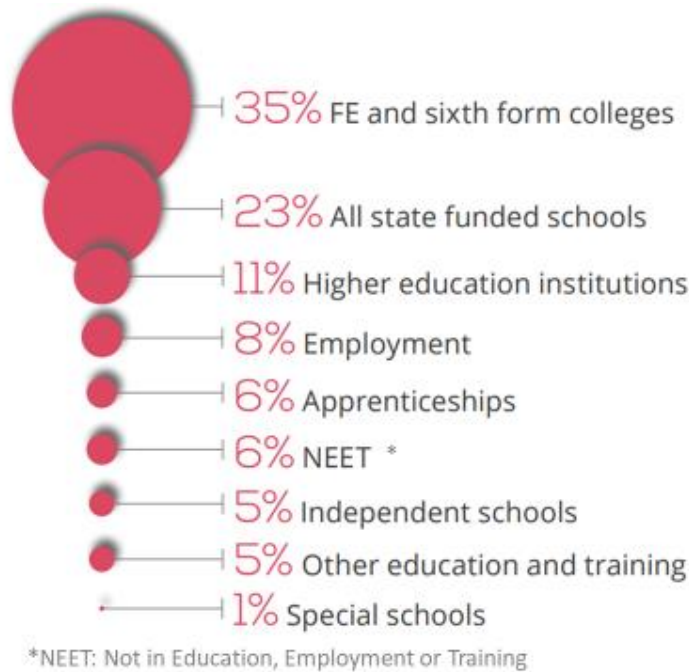
Further Education (FE) in England

The Department for Education is responsible for FE policy and funding, as well as apprenticeships (through the ESFA) and wider skills policies. Strategic responsibility for education quality and financial solvency lies with each college.

FE colleges provide technical and professional education and training for young people, adults and employers. They support students to progress to higher levels of learning and/or develop valuable employability skills, helping to develop their career opportunities. Sixth form colleges provide education to 16 to 18-year-olds enabling them to progress to university or higher level vocational education or employment.

There are 251 colleges in England and 54 of these are sixth form colleges. Colleges educate and train 2.2 million people (as at 2016/2017)⁸¹, which includes 761,000 16-18 year olds and 1.4 million adults. Of these, 314,000 people (of which 76,000 are 16 to 18-year-olds) undertake an Apprenticeship through colleges.

Figure 15: Where 16 to 18 year olds are studying or working in England⁸²



Higher education is also offered in approximately 200 colleges that also offer further education. These colleges cater for one-third of English students aged under 19 entering higher education through UCAS.⁸³ Seven colleges have foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP), while two have taught degree awarding powers (TDAP). In 2016/17 149,000 people were studying higher education in a college, including Higher National Certificates, Higher National Diplomas and Foundation Degrees.⁸⁴

⁸¹ <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/College%20Key%20Facts%202018-19.pdf>

⁸² <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/College%20Key%20Facts%202018-19.pdf>

⁸³ UCAS is the independent charity providing information, advice, and admissions services to inspire and facilitate educational progression <https://www.ucas.com/about-us/who-we-are>

⁸⁴ <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/College%20Key%20Facts%202018-19.pdf>

Further Education (FE) in Northern Ireland

Further education colleges are non-departmental public bodies. Management responsibility lies with each individual college's governing body.

Further education in Northern Ireland has traditionally occupied the sphere between compulsory school education and higher education, delivered by universities. As such, the largest group of people in further education tend to be those aged between 16 and 19, but many other age groups undertake full or part-time FE. FE colleges are the main providers of sub-bachelor level professional and technical education and training in Northern Ireland.

FE colleges also play a central role in raising levels of literacy and numeracy and in up-skilling and re-skilling through a broad range of courses.

Northern Ireland's six FE colleges operate across over 40 campuses and through over 400 outreach community locations. There is also a College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) which delivers a range of agri-food and land based courses and degrees to post-graduate level over three courses.

In Northern Ireland in 2017/18, over 77,900 individuals enrolled on courses in FE colleges, with 155,510 enrolments in total. There were 66,308 HE enrolments in Northern Ireland in 2017/18. Of these, 54,460 (82.1%) were at HEIs and 11,848 (17.9%) were at FE colleges (excluding CAFRE) as illustrated in Table 16 below.

Table 16: HE enrolments in FE colleges in Northern Ireland⁸⁵ (excl. CAFRE)

	2017/18
Level 4 (e.g. HNC, HLA)	3,340
Level 5 (e.g. HND, HLA, Foundation degrees)	7,652
Level 6 (Bachelor's degree, HLA)	785
Level 7 (Master's degree, HLA)	71
Total	11,848

Of these 11,848 HE enrolments in FE colleges in 2017/18, 4,256 were aged 19 and under, 3,179 were aged 20-24 years, and 4,413 were aged 25 and over.

⁸⁵ <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/further-education-activity-northern-ireland-201718>

Higher Education

Approximately 2 million⁸⁶ students were enrolled in the higher education system for the year 2017/18 (1.9 million in England, 55,000 in Northern Ireland). In 2018, 18-year-old entry rates were at their highest recorded levels in England. About one third of young people go on to higher education at age 18 (England 33%, Northern Ireland 35%).

Level 3 qualifications for access to higher education

Students normally enter higher education as undergraduates from age 18 onwards. A broad range of RQF level 3 qualifications is used for entry onto undergraduate degree courses, or first degrees, including teacher training courses. Entrance requirements are set by the institution and are often stated in terms of the points qualifications earn on the tariff specified by UCAS,⁸⁷ with the higher education provider retaining final decisions on admissions.

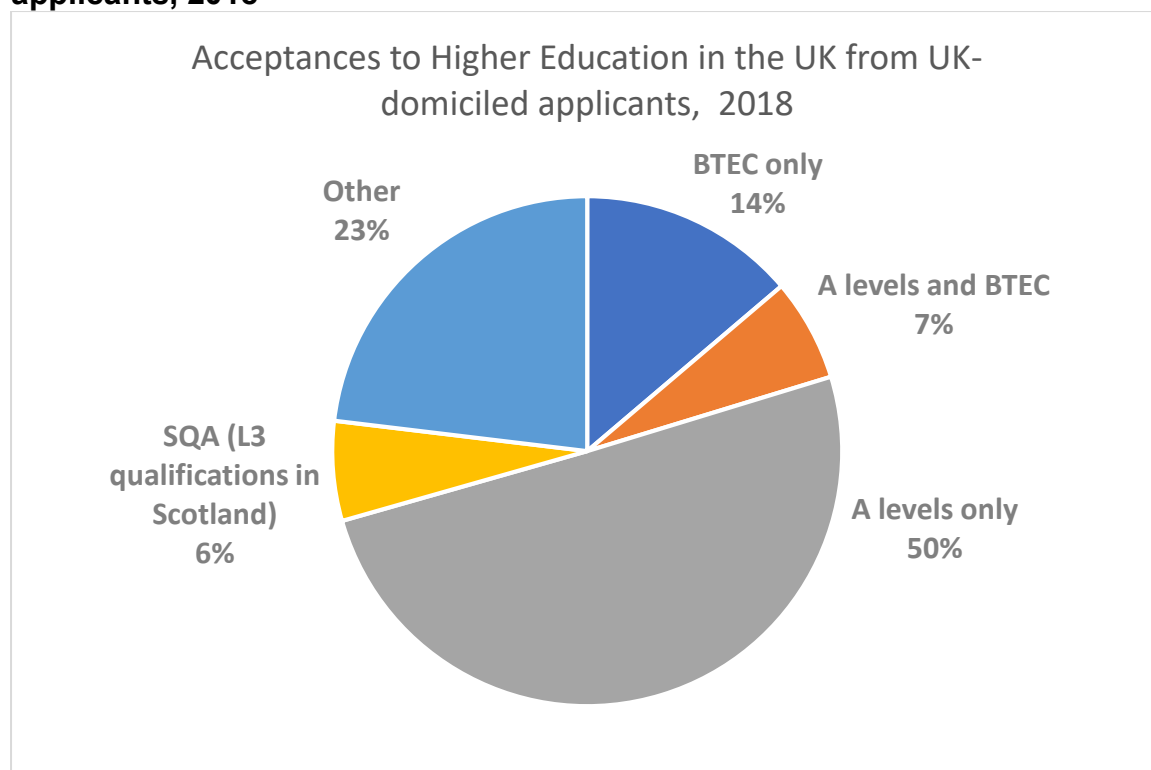
A level qualifications are the most widely used level 3 qualifications for university entry, but there are points available for other qualifications, with the number of UCAS tariff points earned dependent on the level of achievement awarded e.g. grade A*-E at A level, or Pass, Merit, Distinction in National Awards, Certificates or Diplomas. Within England the Access to Higher Education Diploma is a level 3 qualification (regulated by QAA) which prepares people without traditional qualifications for study at university.

⁸⁶Data for UK higher education is collated and analysed by the Higher Education Statistics Agency, HESA <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

⁸⁷ <https://www.ucas.com/about-us>

The qualification landscape for university admissions is changing, with a shift in the types of qualifications with which many young people are applying to university.

Figure 17: Acceptances to Higher Education in the UK from UK-domiciled applicants, 2018⁸⁸



Higher education qualifications

Higher education institutions offer a wide variety of vocational, technical and academic qualifications, including certificates of higher education and higher national certificates (HNCs) at level 4, diplomas of higher education, higher national diplomas (HNDs) and foundation degrees at level 5, bachelor's degrees at level 6, and integrated master's degrees and degrees in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science at level 7. Doctoral qualifications at level 8 can be achieved in wide range of subject areas and might be through a research course (PhD), a work-based learning course, or through professional practice (e.g. DProf, EdD). Degree level apprenticeships in England and Higher Level Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland are also available at levels 4 to 8.

The typical first degree offered at England and Northern Ireland universities is the bachelor's degree with honours, which usually lasts for three years, although more vocational foundation degrees, typically lasting two years (full-time) are also available in some institutions. Many institutions now offer an integrated master's degree, particularly in STEM subjects, as a first degree, which typically lasts for four

⁸⁸ <https://www.ucas.com/file/198496/download?token=aCOhfgUC>

years, the first three years running parallel to the bachelor's course. During a course of study leading to their first degree students are known as undergraduates.

Students who have completed a first degree can apply for postgraduate and graduate courses. These include:

- Graduate certificates, graduate diplomas, professional graduate certificate in education – level 6 courses aimed at those who have already completed a bachelor's degree, often as conversion courses
- Postgraduate certificates, postgraduate diplomas, postgraduate certificate in education – level 7 courses shorter than a full master's degree
- Master's degrees (typically taken in one year, though research-based master's degrees may last for two) – taught or research master's degrees at level 7
- Doctorates (typically taken in three years) – research degrees at level 8, the top level of the qualifications frameworks, often requiring a master's degree for entry. These may be purely research based (PhD/DPhil) or research and practice (professional doctorates)

Higher education institutions

All English and Northern Ireland universities award degrees at RQF/FHEQ levels 6 – 8 i.e. undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral level. Undergraduate / sub-degree awards are made at RQF/FHEQ levels 4 and 5 and include HNC, HND and Foundation Degrees.

Further study can lead to postgraduate qualifications at masters and doctorate levels, and for a qualification to a professional body.

Higher Education Providers (England)

There are 148 higher education providers in England with powers to award taught degrees (101 providers may award taught and research degrees; 33 providers may award any taught degrees and 7 may award foundation degrees only). There are also over 600 colleges and training providers in England that deliver degrees in association with a degree-awarding body.

Higher Education Providers (Northern Ireland)

The principal providers of higher education in Northern Ireland are three universities and two university teaching colleges. Alongside these, six further education colleges and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) provide higher education qualifications. The six FE colleges and CAFRE provide approximately

20% of Level 4 and 5 (Year 1 & 2 of higher education) provision in Northern Ireland.⁸⁹

Apprenticeships at Higher Education levels

Historically apprenticeships have been available at education levels below those of higher education. Recent changes have provided for apprenticeships to be introduced in England and Northern Ireland at levels 4 -8 (none are available yet at level 8).

Higher and Degree Apprenticeships (England)

In England, higher apprenticeships including regulated qualifications at levels 4-6 were introduced in 2015. Degree apprenticeships,⁹⁰ as the name implies, include a degree qualification. In Northern Ireland, apprenticeships between levels 4 – 8 on the FHEQ are called Higher Level Apprenticeships and will include a degree if awarded at levels 6-8.

In England, apprenticeships at all levels may contain a qualification. In England, the apprenticeship itself is not a qualification and, therefore, does not appear on the FHEQ. When designing a qualification that is to be included as part of an apprenticeship programme, higher education providers will use the FHEQ to inform the specification of the learning outcomes to align with the relevant level on the FHEQ e.g. Foundation Degree at level 5 FHEQ (Short Cycle QF-EHEA); Bachelor's degree with Honours at level 6 FHEQ (First Cycle QF-EHEA). Apprentices who meet the requirements for award of a higher education qualification and the requirements for the apprenticeship will receive both the HE award and the (separate) apprenticeship certificate. Quality assurance requirements for HE awards within an apprenticeship are the same as HE awards that do not form part of an apprenticeship.

Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLA) (Northern Ireland)

The Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) programme for Northern Ireland, launched in September 2017, providing opportunities at levels 4 and 5, and at levels 6 and 7 from September 2018. The apprenticeships blend on and off the job training while ensuring quality and achievement of the full apprenticeship award. HLAs are primarily based on a single higher-level qualification at a particular level, for example, a HLA at level 5 is generally a Foundation degree.

⁸⁹ <https://www.economy.ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/economy/Essential%20Skills%20Interactive%20PDF%20%28revised%29.pdf>

⁹⁰ The term 'degree' is protected; degrees can only be awarded by organisations with Degree Awarding Powers <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/reviewing-higher-education/degree-awarding-powers-and-university-title>. It can only be applied to in a limited number of awards, as identified within the FHEQ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

The apprentice is in paid employment while working towards an industry approved qualification, and the apprenticeship lasts a minimum of 2 years. Off-the-job training at levels 4 and 5 is provided through the six local FE Colleges and the College of Agriculture (CAFRE), with the three local Universities providing training at level 6 and above.

5. Responses to the EQF Referencing Criteria

The referencing process conducted in England and Northern Ireland presents evidence to address all of the EQF criteria.⁹¹ The bodies responsible for qualifications policy and for the RQF and FHEQ have addressed each criterion in turn and a summary of the responses follows.

Criterion 1:

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process are clearly determined and published by the competent authorities.

There were three principal bodies that managed the referencing process for the two qualifications frameworks in England and Northern Ireland (the RQF and the FHEQ). These were Ofqual, the regulator of qualifications in England, CCEA Regulation, the regulator of qualifications in Northern Ireland, and QAA, the quality assurance agency for higher education in the UK. These three organisations collaborated in managing the process to reference the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF. Ofqual⁹² and CCEA Regulation were designated the joint England/NI EQF National Coordination Point (NCP) in 2009.

Whilst these three bodies managed the report production, relevant government departments in England and Northern Ireland were closely involved throughout the process, as active members of the Steering Group, contributing text and reviewing drafts (see Steering Group members and Terms of Reference, Annex 1).

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)

While the Department for Education is responsible for policy in respect of the qualifications taken by students age 16-19 years, and for decisions on the curriculum, including how this is reflected in any subject content expectations for particular qualifications, Ofqual sets the regulatory framework within which certain qualifications are designed, delivered and assessed.⁹³

Ofqual was established in 2010 as the statutory regulator of qualifications (other than higher education qualifications) and exams in England. Ofqual is directly accountable

⁹¹ See Annex III for referencing criteria: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/ceed970-518f-11e7-a5ca-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

⁹² Ofqual took over NCP responsibility from the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, QCDA, which closed in 2012.

⁹³

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/749790/Memorandum_of_understanding_between_the_DfE_and_Ofqual.pdf

to Parliament and is independent of government, as a non-ministerial⁹⁴ government department⁹⁵ established under section 127 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009⁹⁶ (the ASCL Act). Ofqual is a regulator with statutory supervisory and statutory enforcement powers.

The ASCL Act sets out the following five statutory objectives for Ofqual:

1. The qualifications standards objective is to secure that—
 - regulated qualifications give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding, and
 - regulated qualifications indicate —
 - a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable regulated qualifications, and
 - a consistent level of attainment (but not over time) between regulated qualifications and comparable qualifications (including those awarded outside the United Kingdom) which are not qualifications to which this Part applies.
2. The assessments standards objective is to promote the development and implementation of regulated assessment arrangements which—
 - give a reliable indication of achievement, and
 - indicate a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable assessments.
3. The public confidence objective is to promote public confidence in regulated qualifications and regulated assessment arrangements.
4. The awareness objective is to promote awareness and understanding of—
 - the range of regulated qualifications available,
 - the benefits of regulated qualifications to learners, employers and institutions within the higher education sector, and
 - the benefits of recognition under Section 132 of the Act to bodies awarding or authenticating qualifications.
5. The efficiency objective is to secure that regulated qualifications are provided efficiently and in particular that any relevant sums payable to a body awarding or authenticating a qualification in respect of which the body is recognised under Section 132 of the Act represent value for money.

⁹⁴ A non-ministerial department is a government department in its own right, but does not have its own minister. However, it is accountable to Parliament through its sponsoring ministers. A non-ministerial department is staffed by civil servants and usually has its own estimate and accounts

⁹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/public-bodies-reform>

⁹⁶ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/section/127>

The ASCL Act includes the following in relation to Ofqual:

1. Objectives – the things that Ofqual aims to achieve, which relate to qualifications standards, assessments standards, public confidence, awareness and understanding of regulated qualifications, and efficiency/ value for money.
2. Duties - the things that Ofqual must take into account in the way it operates, such as the overriding duty to act fairly in the exercise of its functions (to learners, stakeholders, employers and so on, by being transparent and giving reasons for its actions, and having due regard to the Public Sector Equalities Duty)⁹⁷.
3. Functions - the things that Ofqual must do; or has the power to do if it chooses, which relate to qualifications, awarding organisations and other key areas under its remit such as National Assessments (regulated, statutory early years and national curriculum assessments, taken during state primary education for progression monitoring and school accountability purposes).

This translates into a regulatory system whereby:

- Participation in the regulatory system is voluntary – awarding organisations do not have to be regulated, although they can only offer regulated qualifications if they are.
- Ofqual's regulatory powers apply to awarding organisations but its objectives relate to qualifications. Ofqual regulates qualifications through the awarding organisations that award them.
- The ASCL Act requires Ofqual to consult and provide reasons for many of its actions.
- The Act allows Ofqual to create legally binding rules – the General Conditions of Recognition⁹⁸ (the Conditions). Enforcement powers can only be used in relation to breaches of Ofqual rules.
- When Ofqual takes action it must consider its Objectives and Duties as well as what its statutory powers allow it to do.

The Act sets out the duties that must be met and the powers that may be exercised by Ofqual in seeking to meet these objectives. Schedule 9 of the Act sets out arrangements for Ofqual's governance.

Schedule 9 to the Act gives Ofqual's statutory powers and responsibilities to the Ofqual Board.⁹⁹ The Board delegates some of its powers to the Chief Regulator who in turn delegates some of her powers to Executive Directors and other members of staff. The current Ofqual Board consists of the Ofqual Chief Regulator as well as

⁹⁷under the Equality Act 2010, section 149: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/149>

⁹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

⁹⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual/about/our-governance>

board members with executive experience in school and FE management, other public services, youth organisations and awarding organisations.

The Board as a whole has a responsibility to ensure that Ofqual complies with its statutory responsibilities as set out in the Act, all other relevant legislation and government accounting rules in relation to its use of public funds. The Board is entrusted with public funds and therefore has a particular duty to observe the highest standards of corporate governance. This includes ensuring and demonstrating integrity and objectivity in the transaction of its business and, wherever possible, following a policy of openness and transparency in the dissemination of its decisions.¹⁰⁰

Another key advisory group is the Standards Advisory Group, which is a committee of the Ofqual Board. It reviews research and makes recommendations about how Ofqual can maintain standards of qualifications, and comprises members of the Board and independent assessment specialists from higher education, awarding organisation research arms, and independent consultants. During 2017-8 Ofqual employed 183 full-time equivalent staff.

CCEA Regulation (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment)

CCEA is a public body reporting to the Department of Education (DE), it has responsibility for the three areas of curriculum, assessment and examinations. CCEA has the dual role of both awarding organisation and regulator. It is the main Northern Ireland awarding organisation for School General Qualifications (GCSEs, AS and A Levels).

CCEA Regulation functions independently from CCEA Awarding Organisation. To assist in the separation of duties the establishment of a Regulatory Advisory Committee provides support to CCEA Council in exercising its responsibilities for regulation and accreditation.

CCEA receives core funding from DE, which is supplemented with fees from the provision of qualifications. CCEA Regulation receives funding from the Department for the Economy (DfE) for the regulation of Professional and Technical qualifications in Northern Ireland and provision of advice and guidance on qualifications.

The Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1998¹⁰¹ established the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). CCEA's duties

¹⁰⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/752926/Ofqual_Governance_Framework.pdf

¹⁰¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1998/1759/contents>

and functions are detailed in the Order (Articles 73 to 80). In summary, these include to:

- continually review all aspects of the curriculum, examinations and assessment for grant-aided schools and colleges of further education;
- undertake statutory consultation on proposals relating to legislation involving curriculum, examinations or assessment;
- advise DE on matters concerning curriculum, assessment, examinations and external qualifications;
- develop qualifications, conduct qualifications and assessments and moderate relevant qualifications and assessments, ensuring that educational standards are recognised as equivalent to those upheld by other similar UK bodies;
- accredit and provide advice on approval of qualifications;
- publish and disseminate information relating to curriculum, assessment and examinations;
- develop and produce teaching support materials for schools; and
- carry out research and development.

In its regulatory role, Articles 75 and 76 of the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 states:

‘CCEA shall develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications, and accredit, where such criteria are met, any qualifications submitted for accreditation.’

‘CCEA shall keep under review all aspects of relevant external qualifications, and publish and disseminate information relating to relevant external qualifications.’

CCEA Regulatory work includes:

- the recognition and monitoring of Awarding Organisations and evaluating their qualifications against published criteria and Conditions;
- the approval and monitoring of Awarding Organisations offering qualifications in Northern Ireland, ensuring that they have the capability to offer these qualifications and that they meet the General Conditions of Recognition.¹⁰² Awarding Organisations that are approved must continue to comply with the Conditions of Recognition and are subject to monitoring by CCEA Regulation;
- regulation and development activities for skills qualifications, particularly Essential Skills;
- working closely with the Qualifications Regulators in England (Ofqual) and Wales (Qualifications Wales) to ensure that the standards of general and

¹⁰² http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/compliance/general_conditions_recognition

skills examinations available in Northern Ireland are equivalent and comparable to examinations conducted by bodies or authorities exercising similar functions elsewhere in the UK.

CCEA is accountable to its Council of non-executive members and consists of a Chairperson and 10 other members appointed by the Department of Education (DE). The Council includes representatives from education, industry and commerce as well as having government assessors. The chairperson and members serve on the Council for four years. During 2017–18 CCEA employed 346 staff, of which 13 are CCEA Regulation staff.

The Regulatory Advisory Committee includes no more than 2 Council members, the Chief Executive, nominated officers of the Council and at least 10 individual representatives, with a particular knowledge, expertise or interest in qualifications development and regulation. The group provides advice to the Council relating to regulatory activities such as the recognition and monitoring of awarding organisations and accreditation of their qualifications. The committee also considers the impacts of broader issues, advising on procedures for maintaining standards in qualifications with the rest of the UK, matters such as the nature and scope of frameworks, particularly in the wider European context, developments in qualifications in Ireland, and criteria and design principles for accredited qualifications to ensure that accredited qualifications add value to the Northern Ireland society and economy.

The UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

The UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is an independent body, a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It works to “safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is delivered around the world” and checks “that students working towards a UK qualification get the higher education they are entitled to expect.”¹⁰³

QAA is funded by subscriptions from HE providers, contracts and agreements with the UK funding councils and organisations and by other contracts for work relating to HE oversight, consultancy and business development work in the UK and internationally.

QAA works across all four nations of the UK, with a leading role in higher education quality assurance in each nation, ensuring comparability and the shared benefits of UK-wide approaches.

¹⁰³ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/>

QAA fulfils two key roles in relation to the EQF referencing work. Firstly, QAA manages the FHEQ on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA), which was established in 2016 to provide “sector-led oversight of higher education quality assessment arrangements”. The QAA verified the compatibility of the FHEQ with the FQ-EHEA¹⁰⁴ in 2008.

The second role involves monitoring and advising on standards and quality in UK higher education, in order to operate an effective quality assessment system for England and Northern Ireland.

In England, QAA works as the Designated Quality Body for the Office for Students¹⁰⁵ (OfS) in order to fulfil two main purposes:¹⁰⁶

- to enable the OfS to assess the quality of, and standards applied to, higher education provided by English higher education providers and in particular to enable the OfS to determine whether:
 - providers, that have applied to be registered in the Register to be maintained by the OfS, satisfy any initial registration condition applicable to them relating to the quality of, or the standards applied to, higher education provided by them; and
 - registered higher education providers satisfy any ongoing registration condition of theirs relating to the quality of, or the standards applied to, higher education provided by them.
- to help inform the OfS’s decisions as to the authorisation, variation or revocation of Degree Awarding Powers (DAPs) by providing advice to the OfS regarding the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education provided by a provider.

As the DQB, QAA is answerable to the Quality Assessment Committee, which was established by the OfS as required by the HERA, in order to provide advice on the DQB’s exercise of the assessment functions.

Collaborative work on the EQF referencing report

During the process of referencing the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF, the three relevant bodies for England and Northern Ireland (Ofqual, CCEA Regulation and QAA) worked closely together, seeking advice and endorsement of the report at both the drafting and finalisation stages from key stakeholders via the jointly managed steering group.

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/verification-of-the-compatibility-of-fheq-with-fq-ehea.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/>

¹⁰⁶ Section 23(2) of HERA: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/29/section/23>

The steering group consisted of members with a wide range of experience and knowledge, with representation from across England and Northern Ireland, and included international experts. Steering group members represented all mainstream education sectors (HE, VET, school), as well as key organisations in education and training, government, trade unions and the qualifications funding agency. The steering group terms of reference and a full list of members are provided in Annex 1.

The referencing work also involved a significant level of collaboration between all four of the UK administrations, facilitated by a joint working group of all UK NCPs and other key UK stakeholders, the UK Coordination Group for European Vocational Education and Training Initiatives (UKCGVETI). The UKCGVETI shares advice and guidance on framework referencing, as well as ensuring a coordinated UK response to the EU as required. Scotland presented its re-referencing report to the EQF Advisory Group in December 2018, and England, Northern Ireland and Wales were consulted in the development of that report. Similarly, Scotland supported the work of England and Northern Ireland and of Wales as they prepared their reports for submission to the EQF Advisory Group in May 2019.

Ofqual and CCEA Regulation represent the joint EQF national coordination point (NCP) for England and Northern Ireland, and this role has been carried out on this basis since 2009 and throughout the work to produce the referencing report in 2010.

Criterion 1 Summary

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process has been stated. These bodies have worked together to agree the referencing position and prepare this report.

Criterion 2:

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications frameworks or systems and the level descriptors of the EQF.

The national qualifications frameworks in England and Northern Ireland are the RQF and the FHEQ. The evidence presented in this section supports a clear and demonstrable link between the levels of these frameworks and the levels of the EQF.

2010 Referencing Outcome

England and Northern Ireland first undertook a mapping of its national qualifications framework to the EQF in 2010. This process produced a clear referencing between the levels of the QCF, which was the principal qualifications framework at the time, and those of the EQF, as presented below.

Table 18: 2010 QCF – EQF referencing outcome

	QCF level										
QCF	E1	E2	E3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	-		1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8
	EQF level										

2019 Referencing Approach

Since 2010 the QCF has been replaced by the RQF, which mirrored the levels in the QCF. This means that the mapping of the QCF to the EQF in 2010 should translate directly to the RQF. Whilst amendments were made to the level descriptors to form the RQF, there was no intention to revise the meaning of any level or change the number of levels or their relationship to each other, and their public status remains exactly the same. To test that this is the case, however, a further review of the mapping was carried out to ensure that the RQF still supports the 2010 conclusions for level to level relationships with the EQF.

Further, in 2010 the FHEQ was not referenced directly to the QCF or the EQF. The FHEQ had been mapped to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA) in November 2008 as part of the Bologna Process to verify the compatibility between the two frameworks.¹⁰⁷

The mapping process therefore included a re-examination of the descriptors of the RQF, as well as an examination of the FHEQ, in relation to those of the EQF. The

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/verification-of-the-compatibility-of-fheq-with-fq-ehea.pdf>

process confirmed the relationship established in 2010, and produced a clear referencing between the FHEQ, the RQF and the EQF.

Table 19: 2019 RQF – EQF referencing outcome and examination of FHEQ – EQF, including QF-EHEA

RQF	E1	E2	E3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
FHEQ							4	5	6	7	8
FQ-EHEA								Short Cycle	First Cycle	Second cycle	Third cycle
EQF		-	1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8

Approach to mapping the three frameworks

A summary of the approach to the mapping is presented below, along with an example of the outcome for the RQF/FHEQ level 5 review. The detailed outcomes for every level are provided in Annex 2.

Each component of the RQF and the FHEQ could be separately matched to each of the three EQF descriptors (Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility and Autonomy). However, in the RQF, the FHEQ and the EQF, each framework level is to be judged by taking an overview of the two (RQF) or three (FHEQ/EQF) descriptors. It is therefore more appropriate to compare each RQF and FHEQ level to each EQF level by reading across the descriptors for the levels.

As a starting point, the 2010 position was taken since, as stated earlier, both the EQF levels and the RQF levels have not changed by design since 2010.

To check that the referencing position in the table has not changed for each level of the RQF the following procedure was followed. For each of the levels of the RQF:

1. The descriptors were compared to the EQF level matched in 2010
2. The descriptors were compared to the EQF level immediately below the level matched in 2010
3. The descriptors were compared to the EQF level immediately above the level matched in 2010
4. A best fit position was determined

The FHEQ was not directly aligned to the EQF in 2010. However it is possible to link the FHEQ levels to EQF levels by means of the Framework of Qualifications for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). In November 2008, QAA verified that the FHEQ in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is compatible with the QF-EHEA Area.

The 2017 EQF Recommendation¹⁰⁸ (para 21) establishes that the EQF is compatible with the QF-EAHE and its cycle descriptors and therefore the conclusion can be drawn that the self-certification process for the FHEQ shows compatibility of levels 5 to 8 with levels 5 to 8 of the EQF (further detail presented in Annex 2).

The FHEQ level descriptors are included in the tables for levels 4 – 8 inclusive to show how these map to both the RQF and EQF.

Table 20 below illustrates the outcomes of this procedure at level 5. For ease of reference, the RQF and the FHEQ level descriptors are also presented to show how these map to both the RQF and EQF.

Table 20: Outcome of referencing RQF and FHEQ level 5 to the EQF

RQF Level 5		
Knowledge descriptor	Skills descriptor	
Has practical, theoretical or technological knowledge and understanding of a subject or field of work to find ways forward in broadly defined, complex contexts. Can analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information, concepts and ideas. Is aware of the nature and scope of the area of study or work. Understands different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Determine, adapt and use appropriate methods, cognitive and practical skills to address broadly defined, complex problems. Use relevant research or development to inform actions. Evaluate actions, methods and results.	
FHEQ Level 5		
Knowledge descriptor (Will have demonstrated...)	Skills descriptor (will be able to...)	Responsibilities (will have...)
Knowledge and critical understanding of the well-established principles of their area(s) of study, and of the way in which those principles have developed. The ability to apply underlying concepts and principles outside the context in which they were first studied, including, where appropriate, the application of	Use a range of established techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, and to propose solutions to problems arising from that analysis Effectively communicate information, arguments	The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making.

¹⁰⁸

<file:///ofqual.internal/DFS/Userdata/rhian.dent/Downloads/Council%20recommendation%20of%2022%20May%202017%20on%20the%20European%20Qualifications%20Framework%20for%20lifelong%20learning.pdf>

those principles in an employment context. Knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in the subject(s) relevant to the named award, and ability to evaluate critically the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems in the field of study An understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge.	and analysis in a variety of forms to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively Undertake further training, develop existing skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations.	
EQF level 4		
Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities
EQF level 5		
Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others
EQF level 6		
Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups
RQF Analysis The level 5 Knowledge descriptor for both the RQF and the EQF require theoretical knowledge. RQF level 5 requires an awareness of the nature and scope of the area of study or work and an understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them. This compares well with the EQF level 5 requirement for an awareness of the boundaries of knowledge of a field of work or study.		

Level 4 of the EQF requires less precise knowledge of the boundaries of knowledge of a field of study or work. The EQF at level 6 requires a critical understanding of a field of knowledge, which is not required by the RQF at level 5.

In terms of Skills, the RQF at level 5 requires skills to be applied in broadly defined complex problems. This compared to the EQF requirement at level 5 for skills to be applied to abstract problems. The EQF at level 6 specifies unpredictability in these contexts, which is a step beyond the RQF level 5 requirement.

The RQF at level 5 is specific about the need to be able to evaluate actions, methods and results and this goes beyond the EQF requirement at level 4 and falls short of the managerial evaluation required at EQF level 6. The RQF level 5 requirement better matches the review of performance required at EQF level 5.

FHEQ Analysis

The underlying factual and theoretical knowledge of the area of study link FHEQ level 5 and EQF level 5 and this link is strongly reinforced by the awareness of the limits of the area of knowledge.

In terms of the FHEQ level 5 skills descriptor, the map to the EQF is evident at level 4 and level 5 but is not clear at EQF level 6. The EQF level 5 requirement for creative solutions to abstract problems is not explicit in the FHEQ level 5 descriptor.

The FHEQ level 5 responsibility component and the element of the skills descriptor which demands that they have skills and acquire new competences that will enable them to assume significant responsibility within organisations support a link to EQF level 5.

Best fit outcome: there is a good match between RQF level 5, FHEQ level 5 and EQF level 5.

The mapping of the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF was made available to the Steering Group, to UKGCGVETI and to all the constituencies they represent. The outcome will also be posted on Ofqual, CCEA and QAA websites and others. The confirmatory mapping is seen as reflecting the status quo in terms of level to level relationships. However, whilst the mapping outcomes were confirmed, the mapping exercise did reveal a number of differences between the descriptors at level 4 of the RQF and level 4 of the FHEQ. These do not affect the EQF or QF-EHEA relationships, which are robust: instead, they relate to the strength of the links between the two England and Northern Ireland frameworks. These will be further explored in the future by reviewing the learning outcomes of these levels.

Summary: Criterion 2

The 2010 referencing of QCF levels to EQF levels has stood the test of time. The use of these relationships in the RQF and FHEQ has not led to any challenges to the decisions made in 2010.

The EQF levels have been published on the database of qualifications and many publications (local and national) have disseminated the outcome of the referencing process. Peer learning events with experts from other countries have provided the opportunity to examine in depth the relationship of England and Northern Ireland

levels with the EQF (for example in the context of qualifications at EQF level 5 and for school leaving qualifications).

As in some other EU countries, the issues of consistency faced at European level for qualifications at level 5 and school leaving qualifications have also been felt within the national context. Whilst no challenges to the RQF - EQF or the FHEQ – EQF (and QF-EHEA) relationships have been raised, the mapping exercise has provided an additional level of insight into the relationships between the domestic frameworks in England and Northern Ireland, which will be further explored in future work.

Criterion 3:

The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

In England and Northern Ireland (as elsewhere in the UK), qualifications are designed according to regulatory criteria and become a specification that is used by providers: learning institutions and teachers, students and wider stakeholders. One aspect of the regulatory process is that a qualification has to be based on a set of learning outcomes. These learning outcomes determine what level the qualification can take in the RQF or the FHEQ as the outcomes are compared to the RQF/FHEQ descriptors.

The UK has a history of using learning outcomes that goes back to the 1980s, with the development of purely outcome-based national vocational qualifications (NVQs). Today it is common practice for qualifications to be specified in terms of what learners need to be able to demonstrate in order to be awarded a qualification. An important aspect of the UK approach to qualifications is that outcomes should be specified, but the curriculum and learning approach is for providers to determine.

RQF and Learning Outcomes

The RQF level descriptors are expressed in terms of learning outcomes and provide a general, shared understanding of learning and achievement at each of the eight levels and three entry levels. They are designed to be used across a wide range of learning contexts, and many have an “and/or” construction indicating knowledge and skills associated with the study of a subject or in preparation for a job. The RQF level descriptors build on, but simplify, the descriptors used in the former QCF and the EQF.

All regulated qualifications must be based on learning outcomes to meet the following General Conditions of Recognition, with these being specified in a number of qualification details.

For example, qualifications must have an objective, which must be clearly stated and which the qualification must fulfil, and that objective must lead to a benefit to the learner:

E1.1 An awarding organisation must ensure that each qualification which it makes available or proposes to make available –

(a) has a clear objective in accordance with this condition, and

(b) meets that objective.

E1.2 The objective of a qualification must be such as to lead to a benefit for Learners who have reached a specified level of attainment, and may include –

- (a) preparing Learners to progress to a qualification in the same subject area but at a higher level or requiring more specific knowledge, skills and understanding,*
- (b) preparing Learners to progress to a qualification in another subject area,*
- (c) meeting relevant programmes of learning,*
- (d) preparing Learners for employment,*
- (e) supporting a role in the workplace, or*
- (f) giving Learners personal growth and engagement in learning.*

Further, awarding organisations must ensure that the specification, or syllabus which must be published, sets out the following:

E3.2 An awarding organisation must ensure that the specification for a qualification sets out –

- (a) the qualification's objective,*
- (b) any other qualification which a Learner must have completed before taking the qualification,*
- (c) any prior knowledge, skills or understanding which the Learner is required to have before taking the qualification,*
- (d) units which a Learner must have completed before the qualification will be awarded and any optional routes,*
- (e) any other requirements which a Learner must have satisfied before the Learner will be assessed or before the qualification will be awarded,*
- (f) the knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of the qualification (giving a clear indication of their coverage and depth),***
- (g) the method of any assessment and any associated requirements relating to it,*
- (h) the criteria against which Learners' levels of attainment will be measured (such as assessment criteria or exemplars),***
- (i) any specimen assessment materials,*
- (j) any specified levels of attainment,*
- (k) where the awarding organisation is required to make such an assignment under General Condition E7 (Total Qualification Time), the number of hours which it has assigned to that qualification for each of Total Qualification Time and Guided Learning,*
- (l) any value for credit which it has assigned to that qualification and any Component of that qualification, and*

(m) the level or levels which it has assigned to that qualification and any Component of that qualification.

E3.3 An awarding organisation must ensure that the specification for a qualification is clear, accurate and communicates, to the reasonable and informed person –

(a) what the qualification requires of the Learner in respect of each of the details that is applicable to the qualification, and

(b) how the qualification is fit for purpose.

E3.4 An awarding organisation must promptly amend the specification for a qualification following any revision by it of –

(a) the number of hours which it has assigned for Total Qualification Time or Guided Learning,

(b) the level or levels which it has assigned to that qualification or any Component of that Qualification, or

(c) any value for credit which it has assigned to that qualification or any Component of that qualification.

The awarding organisation must also ensure that the assessment is fit for purpose and can be delivered, with the following aspects relating to learning outcomes being central to this Condition:

E4.2 In designing such an assessment, an awarding organisation must in addition ensure that the assessment –

(e) allows each Learner to generate evidence which can be Authenticated,

(f) allows each specified level of attainment detailed in the specification to be reached by a Learner who has attained the required level of knowledge, skills and understanding, and

(g) allows Assessors to be able to differentiate accurately and consistently between a range of attainments by Learners.

Regulated qualifications must have a level assigned against the RQF level descriptors which use knowledge, understanding and skill descriptors. Qualifications can only be awarded as a result of an assessment, and achievement against specified levels of attainment of knowledge, skills and understanding.

AOs have to develop qualifications using learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

An example is the City and Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Professional Cookery,¹⁰⁹ which consists of a range of units each of which cover the required guided learning hours,

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.cityandguilds.com/qualifications-and-apprenticeships/hospitality-and-catering/hospitality-and-catering/7133-hospitality-and-catering-level-3#tab=information>

the credit value, unit aim and learning outcomes, for example two learning outcomes in Unit 203:

Figure 21: Example learning outcomes in City and Guilds L3 Diploma

Outcome 7 Be able to prepare, cook and hold food safely

The learner can:

- 27. Check food before and during **operations** for any **hazards**
- 28. Follow correct procedures for dealing with food hazards
- 29. Follow organisational procedures for items that may cause allergic reactions
- 30. Prevent cross-contamination between different types of food
- 31. Use methods, times, temperatures and checks to make sure food is safe following operations
- 32. Keep necessary records up-to-date

What you must cover:

1. Operations

- a) Defrosting food
- b) Preparing food, including washing and peeling
- c) Cooking food
- d) Reheating food
- e) Holding food before serving
- f) Cooling cooked food not for immediate consumption
- g) Freezing cooked food not for immediate consumption

2. Hazards

- a. Bacteria and other organisms
- b. Chemical
- c. Physical
- d. Allergenic

Outcome 8 Know how to prepare, cook and hold food safely

The learner can:

- K39. State why it is necessary to defrost foods before cooking
- K40. State when it is necessary to defrost foods before cooking
- K41. Describe how to safely and thoroughly defrost food before cooking
- K42. Describe how to recognise conditions leading to safety hazards
- K43. State what to do if any food safety hazards are discovered
- K44. State the importance of knowing that certain foods cause allergic reactions
- K45. Describe organisational procedures to deal with foods possible of causing allergic reactions
- K46. State what to do if a customer asks if a particular dish is free from a

certain food allergen

K47. Describe how cross-contamination can happen between different food types

K48. Describe how to avoid cross-contamination between different food types

K49. Explain why thorough cooking and reheating methods should be used

K50. State cooking and reheating temperatures and times to use for food being worked with

K51. Describe how to check that food is thoroughly cooked or safely reheated

K52. State the importance of making sure that food is at the correct temperature before and during holding, prior to serving it to the customer

K53. State the types of foods that may need to be chilled or frozen because they are not for immediate consumption

K54. Describe how to safely store food not for immediate consumption

The example below illustrates an extract from the specification for OCR Level 1 and 2 Cambridge National qualifications in Health and Social Care.¹¹⁰ This specification covers three qualifications: award, certificate and diploma, dependent on the number of units taken (2, 4 and 8 respectively). Each unit is described in learning outcomes, with the mark scheme for Unit R023 (Understanding body systems and disorders) provided against each learning outcome, with progression between each mark band clearly and consistently presented.

Figure 22: Example OCR Cambridge National Level 1 and 2 mark scheme

LO1: Know how body systems work ₁		
MB1: 1–3 marks	MB2: 4–6 marks	MB3: 7–8 marks
Demonstrates basic knowledge of how the cardiovascular system works. Provides basic information to illustrate the structure of the cardiovascular system making few links between structure and function. Provides a basic description of the system functionality making limited use of terminology but demonstrating a basic understanding.	Demonstrates sound knowledge of how the cardiovascular system works. Provides clear information to illustrate the structure of the cardiovascular system making some links between structure and function. Provides a clear description of the system functionality, making some effective use of terminology and demonstrating a sound understanding.	Demonstrates detailed knowledge of how the cardiovascular system works. Provides detailed and coherent information to illustrate the structure of the cardiovascular system making many links between structure and function. Provides a comprehensive description of the system functionality, effectively using terminology which demonstrates a clear and thorough understanding.

LO3: Be able to interpret data obtained from measuring body rates with reference to the functioning of healthy body systems		
MB1: 1–6 marks	MB2: 7–11 marks	MB3: 12–15 marks
Demonstrates limited confidence in measuring body rates. A limited interpretation of data obtained from measuring body rates and comparing against the norms making limited reference to the functioning of healthy body systems. There will be some errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Draws upon limited skills/knowledge/understanding from other units in the specification.	Demonstrates some confidence measuring body rates. A reasonable interpretation of data obtained from measuring body rates and comparing against the norms making some reference to the functioning of healthy body systems. There will be minor errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Draws upon some relevant skills/knowledge/understanding from other units in the specification.	Demonstrates confidence and competency measuring body rates. A thorough interpretation of data obtained from measuring body rates and comparing against the norms making detailed reference to the functioning of healthy body systems. There will be few , if any, errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Clearly draws upon relevant skills/knowledge/understanding from other units in the specification.

¹¹⁰ <https://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/82369-specification.pdf>

Further, the performance descriptors for each of the qualification grades are provided.

Figure 23: Example qualification outcomes presented as performance descriptors

3.4 Performance descriptions

The performance descriptors indicate the level of attainment associated with Distinction at Level 2, Pass at Level 2 and Pass at Level 1. They are for use at awarding meetings. They give a general indication of the levels of attainment likely to be shown by a representative learner performing at these boundaries.

Performance descriptor – Distinction at Level 2

Learners will be able to work with confident independence to create material which reflects thoughtful planning, skilled development and perceptive evaluation.

They will be able to apply knowledge, understanding and skills in a variety of health and social care contexts - exploring, identifying, selecting and using a range of health, social and early year care values to provide quality care. They will be able to use a range of skills and abilities confidently that add value in the workplace and in higher education.

They will be able to produce work that is complete and coherent, demonstrating originality and depth of understanding.

They will be able to:

- Recall a wide range of information regarding social issues within health, social care and early years settings
- Perceptively analyse health, social care and early years care situations
- Create solutions which demonstrate detailed consideration of the requirements of people who use services
- Understand and use a wide range of health, social care and early years terminology correctly
- Use techniques efficiently to search for, select and store appropriate information effectively, in a

Some groups of qualifications with additional regulatory conditions, such as A levels, are required to meet the subject content requirements as defined by the Department for Education. As illustrated below, the subject content, contained within the subject level conditions for A levels in modern foreign languages¹¹¹ includes learning outcomes, which awarding organisations must follow in order to be able to offer the qualifications.

Figure 24: Subject content objectives for A level Modern Foreign Languages

Aims and objectives

3. AS and A level specifications in a modern language must enable students to:
 - enhance their linguistic skills and promote and develop their capacity for critical thinking on the basis of their knowledge and understanding of the language, culture and society of the country or countries where the language is spoken
 - develop control of the language system to convey meaning, using spoken and written skills, including an extended range of vocabulary, for both practical and intellectual purposes as increasingly confident, accurate and independent users of the language
 - develop their ability to interact effectively with users of the language in speech and in writing, including through online media
 - develop language learning skills and strategies, including communication strategies to sustain communication and build fluency and confidence
 - engage critically with intellectually stimulating texts, films and other materials in the original language, developing an appreciation of sophisticated and creative uses of the language and understanding them within their cultural and social context
 - develop knowledge about matters central to the society and culture, past and present, of the country or countries where the language is spoken

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/610131/GCE_Subject_Level_Conditions_for_MFL_April_2017_.pdf

Also contained within the subject level conditions are the assessment objective requirements, which are the required proportions of marks to be rewarded in the qualification for the demonstration of specified knowledge, skills or understanding. For example, A levels in modern foreign languages must meet the following assessment objective weightings:

Figure 25: Assessment objectives for A level Modern Foreign Languages

	Objective
AO1	Understand and respond: ■ in speech to spoken language including face-to-face interaction; ■ in writing to spoken language drawn from a variety of sources.
AO2	Understand and respond: ■ in speech to written language drawn from a variety of sources; ■ in writing to written language drawn from a variety of sources.
AO3	Manipulate the language accurately, in spoken and written forms, using a range of lexis and structure.
AO4 (AS)	Show knowledge and understanding of, and respond critically to, different aspects of the culture and society of countries/communities where the language is spoken.
AO4 (A level)	Show knowledge and understanding of, and respond critically and analytically to, different aspects of the culture and society of countries/communities where the language is spoken.

In order to develop an A level in a modern foreign language, awarding organisations must meet the requirements of the subject content, the assessment objectives, and all the regulatory conditions, such as those relating to learning outcomes presented above.

RQF and Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The General Conditions for Recognition of both Ofqual and CCEA Regulation refer to recognition of prior learning (RPL) in relation to formal, regulated qualifications included in the RQF. RPL is mainly used for initial assessment of a learner to tailor the learning offer; this is a generally accepted practice leading to an amendment to the requirements that a learner must satisfy before assessment or before award, and (where appropriate) to a reduction of funding so that only the activities that are delivered are paid for.

Any RQF qualification can be achieved through the recognition of prior non-formal¹¹² and informal¹¹³ learning, providing the AO and its centres have policies and procedures in place which enable the qualification to be awarded in accordance with its Condition of Recognition (Condition E10, below). In practice, it is not common for qualifications to be awarded based wholly on recognition of prior learning, and rules in place around funding mean that this approach is less widely promoted by learning providers, who are funded for qualification teaching rather than for achievement of qualifications.

Condition E10 Recognition of Prior Learning

E10.1 Where an awarding organisation has in place a policy for the recognition of prior learning it must –

(a) ensure that the policy which it has in place enables the awarding organisation to award qualifications in accordance with its Conditions of

Recognition,

(b) publish that policy, and

(c) comply with that policy.

E10.2 For the purposes of this Condition, ‘recognition of prior learning’ is the –

(a) identification by an awarding organisation of any learning undertaken, and/or attainment, by a Learner –

(i) prior to that Learner taking a qualification which the awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available, and

¹¹² Non-formal learning is a purposive, but voluntary, learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity.

¹¹³ Informal learning, from the learner's standpoint at least, is non-purposive learning, which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community.

Both: <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary/-/glossary/All>

(ii) which is relevant to the knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of that qualification, and

(b) recognition by an awarding organisation of that learning and/or attainment through amendment to the requirements which a Learner must have satisfied before the Learner will be assessed or that qualification will be awarded.

In England, progress and achievement in non-regulated learning (mainly adult and community learning) can be recognised through a five-stage process, complementary to RPL, known as RARPA (recognising and recording progress and achievement in non-accredited learning). Using RARPA standards is mandatory for non-regulated training provision funded by Education & Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA), but the system is now also used by some providers offering accredited/regulated learning. Though this does not lead to any form of certification, it is a method of quality assurance of non-regulated learning provision and supports the transition from non-formal to formal learning. RPL and RARPA are referred to in the ESFA funding rules that apply in England to all education and training providers.

One strength of the current RPL arrangements in England and Northern Ireland is the link to the RQF, allowing for non-formal and informal learning to be converted into a recognised qualification with currency. In addition, the regulators Ofqual and CCEA Regulation have oversight of (and provide quality assurance of) regulated qualifications acquired via RPL. Regulated qualifications awarded through RPL (and the standards used) are the same as those earned through formal learning opportunities, although it may not be possible to achieve the same graded outcomes; instead, the outcomes of RPL are either 'pass' or 'fail'. Consequently, "there is no question of whether the outcomes of validation are 'trusted' by stakeholders and in society, since they are the same outcomes¹¹⁴" (European Commission et al).

In England and Northern Ireland there is no single centralised policy on RPL or validation of non-formal and informal learning provision; responsibility for deciding on and implementing validation arrangements has been devolved to the awarding organisations¹¹⁵ and learning providers. The process is designed to be self-governing and allow for RPL validation where it is relevant, but not to impose an overly rigid model on those who deliver qualifications. The advantage is that each validation process, and even each individual procedure of validation, can be tailored to the learner(s) in question. Some argue that this way of validation can better respond to changes in the labour market. The potential disadvantage is that, without a greater drive at national level, and without a centralised system for identifying where RPL is available or if a particular qualification can be obtained via RPL, it is

¹¹⁴ <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/country-reports/united-kingdom-european-inventory-nqf-2018>

¹¹⁵ Ofqual and CCEA Regulation recognise 155 and, respectively, 99 awarding organisations which can award credits and qualifications in England and Northern Ireland.

likely that the number of people actually benefiting from RPL opportunities will remain low. There is no data to show the extent to which RPL takes place in England and Northern Ireland, but it is thought that, in practice, it is relatively small-scale.

For the use of RPL to increase, further support and awareness-raising amongst providers and other practitioners involved in working with learners would be needed. This includes resources in terms of staff numbers and staff development, as well as a funding methodology which supports the process and makes it a viable option for providers to offer.

RQF and Credit

The predecessor to the RQF (QCF) had very specific qualification design rules whereby qualifications had to be designed from units with learning outcomes, assessment criteria, a QCF level and credit value. The RQF does not include these prescriptive design rules for qualifications, however to help people understand better how qualifications relate to each other, RQF qualifications must have a consistent measures of size (how long, typically, a qualification takes to study and be assessed for) and level of difficulty.

In relation to size of qualifications, General Condition E7¹¹⁶ requires awarding organisations to:

In respect of each qualification it makes available (or proposes to make available), assign a number of hours to that qualification for:

- a) Total Qualification Time, and*
- b) Guided Learning*

Values for total qualification time, including guided learning, are calculated by considering the different activities that Learners would typically complete to achieve and demonstrate the learning outcomes of a qualification. They do not include activities which are required by a Learner's Teacher based on the requirements of an individual Learner and/or cohort. Individual Learners' requirements and individual teaching styles mean there will be variation in the actual time taken to complete a qualification. Values for Total Qualification Time, including Guided Learning, are estimates.

Some examples of activities which can contribute to Total Qualification Time include:

- Independent and unsupervised research/learning
- Unsupervised compilation of a portfolio of work experience

¹¹⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook/section-e-design-and-development-of-qualifications>

- Unsupervised e-learning
- Unsupervised e-assessment
- Unsupervised coursework
- Watching a pre-recorded podcast or webinar
- Unsupervised work-based learning
- All Guided Learning (including classroom-based learning supervised by a Teacher, work-based learning supervised by a teacher, live real-time webinars or telephone tutorials with a teacher, e-learning supervised by a Teacher in real time, and all forms of assessment which take place under the supervision of teacher).

Ofqual guidance¹¹⁷ was developed for AOs to ensure the consistent use of TQT. Although it is not mandatory for RQF qualifications to have credit, TQT can easily be used by AOs to assign credit to qualifications and qualification components. Credit is calculated as one tenth of the TQT. The other UK frameworks – the SCQF, CQFW and FHEQ use the same basis for calculating credit which means credit is consistently applied to qualifications and qualification components (units) across the UK easing recognition and mobility of qualifications across the UK countries.

Condition E8 sets out the following requirements in relation to credit:

E8.1 An awarding organisation may assign a value for credit to a qualification, or a component of a qualification, which it makes available or proposes to make available.

E8.2 Where an awarding organisation assigns a value for credit to a qualification, that value must be equal to one tenth of the Total Qualification Time assigned to that qualification, rounded to the nearest whole number.

E8.3 Where an awarding organisation makes any revision to the number of hours which it has assigned to a qualification in respect of any element of Total Qualification Time, it must –

1. (a) review each value for credit which it has assigned to that qualification and any Component of that qualification, and
2. (b) revise that value if appropriate.

¹¹⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/total-qualification-time-criteria

Regulated qualifications and the seven EQF credit principles

In the General Conditions of Recognition, a component is subject to much of the same rules as a qualification, and is defined as:

A discrete part of a qualification which –

(a) focuses on specific areas of the knowledge, skills and understanding assessed for the qualification, and

(b) has a specific set of criteria against which Learners' performance will be differentiated.

The following table reviews the England and Northern Ireland approach to credit with the EQF credit principles.

Table 26: Review of credit systems for qualifications in England and Northern Ireland with the EQF credit principles

Principles for credit systems related to national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)	General Conditions of Recognition (GCR)	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
1. Credit systems should support flexible learning pathways, for the benefit of individual learners.	The General Conditions of Recognition facilitate flexible learning pathways by ensuring a consistent system is used for credit, where an awarding organisation chooses to do so. <i>E8.1 An awarding organisation may assign a value for credit to a qualification, or a Component of a qualification, which it makes available or proposes to make available.</i> Where an AO offers unit based qualifications, learners can achieve units and be awarded unit certificates. The different sizes of qualifications support flexible learning pathways and allow learners to build on their	The FHEQ sets out the qualifications descriptors for higher education; it does not include reference to credit and credit frameworks. This is provided in supplementary information: Higher education credit framework for England: guidance on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England¹¹⁸ and Academic credit in higher education in England – an introduction¹¹⁹ Credit is used by the majority of higher education institutions in England and NI; it is not compulsory, the university uses

¹¹⁸ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

¹¹⁹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/academic-credit-higher-education-in-england-an-introduction.pdf>

	learning and tailor learning to suit their needs. <i>D6.1 An awarding organisation may only make available a qualification which uses a unit or Rule of Combination developed by another person where it reasonably believes that –</i> <i>(a) the unit or Rule of Combination complies with the requirements relating to it that are set out in any Regulatory Document, and</i> <i>(b) in the development of the unit or Rule of Combination, due regard has been had to the guidelines and principles of good practice set out in any Regulatory Document.</i> Qualification titling requirements support clarity within and across awarding organisations. <i>E2.2 An awarding organisation must, in addition –</i> <i>(b) take all reasonable steps to ensure that the title allows Users of qualifications to identify similar units or qualifications which it makes available or are made available by other awarding organisations.</i>	its autonomous powers to use, or not use, credits. Where credits are used they are assigned to an amount of learning at a level within the FHEQ. Credits are awarded for achievement of learning outcomes and are accumulated to achieve a higher education award. For instance a Bachelor's Degree (with honours) is, typically, 360 credits (120 at each of levels 4, 5 and 6). Where credits are awarded for modules or units of study they can be used towards further study at the same level, progression to another level, transfer to another institution and/or onto another course. Consistency in qualifications titling (FHEQ) and credit level and sizes enable flexibility for learners to undertake flexible learning within the relevant framework. The institution receiving a request from a learner for credit transfer determines how the credits can be used.
2. When designing and developing qualifications, the learning outcomes approach should be systematically used to facilitate the transfer of (components of) qualifications and progression in learning.	Learning outcomes are required in regulated qualifications: <i>E3.2 An awarding organisation must ensure that the specification for a qualification sets out –</i> <i>(f) the knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of the qualification (giving a clear indication of their coverage and depth)</i>	The FHEQ requires that: <i>5.6 For each individual programme of study and qualification, specific statements about the intended learning outcomes are drawn up and approved by the degree-awarding body which is awarding the qualification. The outcomes are expected to align with the qualification descriptor for the relevant level and also</i>

	<i>(h) the criteria against which Learners' levels of attainment will be measured (such as assessment criteria or exemplars).</i>	<i>with any relevant subject benchmark statements.</i> Units of learning that contribute to a course of study make use of learning outcomes that contribute to the overall award. Units of learning e.g. individual modules, multiple modules and whole courses are defined in terms of learning outcomes that can be used to facilitate the transfer of learning.
3. Credit systems should facilitate transfer of learning outcomes and progression of learners across institutional and national borders.	All the Qualifications Frameworks in the UK calculate credit in the same way, which means that credit values ascribed to qualifications and qualification components are consistent across both institutional and national borders. This eases recognition and supports mobility of qualifications. <i>E8.2 Where an awarding organisation assigns a value for credit to a qualification, that value must be equal to one tenth of the Total Qualification Time assigned to that qualification, rounded to the nearest whole number.</i> Each component assigned a credit value must have a level assigned: <i>E9.2 Where an awarding organisation assigns a value for credit to a component of a qualification which it makes available or proposes to make available, it must assign a level to that component.</i>	The use of credit systems, the FHEQ and learning outcomes enable transparency across subjects, providers and countries, within UK, across EU and internationally. Consistency in establishing credit values and levels of learning facilitates cross-border transfer of credits and progression of learners The guidance on academic credit arrangements¹²⁰ states: <i>7. credit can serve a number of different functions..... it also provides a basis for recognising learning achieved in other institutions or elsewhere.</i>
4. Credit systems should be underpinned by explicit and	Individual components or units to which credit is assigned are subject to the same quality and	Individual components or units to which Credit is assigned are subject to the same quality and monitoring rules as all higher

¹²⁰ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks>

transparent quality assurance.	monitoring rules as all regulated qualifications: <i>J1.2 Unless the context suggests otherwise, in these conditions – (i) a ‘qualification’ means a regulated qualification (and includes any units of that qualification)</i>	education qualifications and awards: The Quality Code and FHEQ apply to all awards made by degree awarding bodies including award of credits e.g. individual or groups of modules and full awards e.g. Certificates of HE, BSc (Hons), PGCE.
5. The credit acquired by an individual should be documented, expressing the acquired learning outcomes, the name of the competent credit awarding institution and, where relevant, the related credit value.	The qualification information should be clear and accessible, presenting the credit value: <i>E3.2 An awarding organisation must ensure that the specification for a qualification sets out – (I) any value for credit which it has assigned to that qualification and any component of that qualification</i> Results must be issued, and must be clear and comprehensible to users: <i>H6.1 An awarding organisation must, in relation to any qualification which it makes available –</i> <i>(a) issue results for all units and qualifications</i> <i>(c) issue results which are clear and readily capable of being understood by users of qualifications</i> The certificate should clearly reference the learner and the qualification title: <i>I3.2 An awarding organisation must ensure that –</i> <i>(a) all certificates which it issues clearly and uniquely identify both the Learner and the certificate itself,</i> <i>(b) all certificates which it issues clearly display the title of the qualification as it appears on the Register (and any</i>	FHEQ requires that: <i>5.9 Students are provided with a detailed record of their studies when they leave their programme of study (on completion, or earlier), which gives evidence of their achievement. This may be in the form of a transcript, Diploma Supplement and / or Higher Education Achievement Report</i>

	<i>Endorsement known after the qualification is submitted to the Register) and do not include any other title for the qualification.</i>	
6. Systems for credit transfer and accumulation should seek synergies with arrangements for validation of prior learning, working together to facilitate and promote transfer and progression.	Condition E10 facilitates the identification of prior learning where the policy to do so enables the award of qualifications in accordance with the Conditions. Prior learning must be relevant to the knowledge, skills and understanding to be assessed in that qualification, and that learning must be recognised by amending the assessment requirements for that Learner to be awarded that qualification. <i>E10.2 For the purposes of this Condition, 'recognition of prior learning' is the –</i> <i>(a) identification by an awarding organisation of any learning undertaken, and/or attainment, by a Learner –</i> <i>(i) prior to that Learner taking a qualification which the awarding organisation makes available or proposes to make available, and</i> <i>(ii) which is relevant to the knowledge, skills and understanding which will be assessed as part of that qualification, and</i> <i>(b) recognition by an awarding organisation of that learning and/or attainment through amendment to the requirements which a Learner must have satisfied before the Learner will be assessed or that qualification will be awarded.</i>	An individual university's RPL regulations will state the policy for recognition of prior learning, the arrangements for transfer of credits from prior certificated learning, or the award of credits for prior experiential learning Condition F2 in the OfS Regulatory Framework (England) requires that: <i>The provider must provide to the OfS, and publish, information about its arrangements for a student to transfer.</i>
7. Credit systems should be developed and improved through cooperation between	Credit systems are well embedded and understood in the UK and based on the same principles thus ensuring a	The FHEQ and the higher education credit framework are developed through cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders representing the

stakeholders at the appropriate national and Union levels.	consistent UK approach to credit. The UK has been actively engaged with the implementation of ECVET and is using ECVET to promote transnational mobility, to ensure a quality experience for the learner/worker and recognition/validation of their learning. UK ECVET Experts are promoting and encouraging organisations involved in mobility to use ECVET in geographical mobility.	four UK nations and including students, funding bodies, professional bodies and other sector representative bodies. The QAA documentation includes names, roles and organisations for those involved in their development.
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FHEQ and Learning Outcomes

The FHEQ levels are based on qualification descriptors. These are written in terms of learning outcomes through a series of statements at each level showing what a graduate at that level will be able to demonstrate and do and the qualities that they will have. The Subject Benchmark Statements¹²¹, which detail subject specific outcomes at each HE level, state the expected outcomes in relation to the subject of study e.g. English, Physics, Architecture, Medicine etc.

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education requires that:

- The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.
- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.
- Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
- From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.

The advice and guidance for course design and development includes a principle whereby: “definitive course documentation is produced accurately and fairly describing the learning opportunities, intended student outcomes and support offered”¹²² and that for assessment: “Assessment methods and criteria are aligned to learning outcomes and teaching activities”

¹²¹ See link for example Subject Benchmark Statement: https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/subject-benchmark-statements/sbs-creative-writing-16.pdf?sfvrsn=d4e2f781_8

¹²² <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/course-design-and-development>

Good practice within higher education will include the presentation of the course through a course specification where the intended learning outcomes for a course are set out, individual units of study and assessment will state the intended learning outcomes and what is expected of a student to achieve the stated outcomes through grading criteria (see Annex 3).

Qualifications in the FHEQ are awarded on the basis of demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes, expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding and abilities, and attainment. Qualification descriptors are key to this approach. A qualification descriptor sets out the generic outcomes and attributes expected for the award of a particular type of qualification (for example a bachelor's degree with honours). The qualification descriptors describe the threshold academic standard for those qualification types in terms of the levels of knowledge and understanding and the types of abilities that holders of the relevant qualification are expected to have.

The outcomes and attributes described in qualification descriptors result from learning acquired on completion of coherent courses of study. These courses, which develop high-level analytical skills and a broad range of competences, are therefore distinct from training or solely the acquisition of higher-level skills. Individual courses of study have learning outcomes which specify the intended outcomes from that course which must be achieved for the award of a specific qualification from an individual degree-awarding body. The course learning outcomes are required to align with the relevant qualification descriptor.

The FHEQ is also based on the principle that consistent qualification nomenclature for the main qualification types (for example degree, postgraduate diploma) conveys trustworthy information about the level, nature and subject of study.

FHEQ, Credit and Credit Transfer

Credit systems are in place in most universities and higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland, with most higher education courses composed of modules with sizes expressed in credit values. Current practice within the UK equates two FHEQ credits to one ECTS (European credit transfer and accumulation system).

Credit transfer within and between institutions is possible; it is used when a learner moves from one course of study to another and where a learner transfers credits from a completed course to gain advanced entry to another course. For example, a graduate with a Foundation Degree or a Higher National Diploma (HND) can usually gain entry into the final level of study for a Bachelor's Degree with Honours in a related subject area. Where courses are accredited by a professional, statutory or regulatory body there may be restrictions on credit transfers.

Credit transfers are generally considered for either general or specific credits. General credits are where a learner has achieved, for example, 40 credits of learning at level 4 and transfers to a new course of study requiring 120 credits per year. In this scenario, the 40 credits are transferred into the new course and the learner completes the level with a further 80 credits of study chosen from any of the level 4 modules available in the new course. Specific credits are where the credits transferred into a new course are aligned to a specific module within the new course; the learner must complete the remaining 80 credits from the remaining available modules.

Some higher education providers offer awards completed through credit accumulation, rather than as part of a pre-designed course, most notably the Open University, where learners study self-selected modules of varying sizes to complete each level of study to achieve a higher education award. There are no restrictions on which module a learner chooses within each level of study. Learners can transfer credits awarded by other organisations¹²³.

The QAA provides guidance on academic credit arrangements¹²⁴ which notes that each higher education institution will determine what credit it will accept for purposes of accumulation or transfer and that the application of the guidelines on credit are a matter for individual institutions to decide at their discretion; in line with the autonomous nature of universities in the UK.

Summary: Criterion 3

The RQF and the FHEQ descriptors are based on learning outcomes, and the regulatory and quality assurance processes associated with them underline the ways learning outcomes should be used in assessment and awarding of qualifications. This kind of understanding and practice is deeply embedded in the ways qualifications frameworks, qualifications and assessment and awarding processes work in the UK.

The RQF and the FHEQ enable the validation of non-formal and informal learning in England and Northern Ireland; the process of validation is left to the learning provider to structure in ways that satisfies the quality assurance regulations of awarding organisations. The RQF sets the ground rules for use of credit although it does not require it. Similarly, the FHEQ enables a consistent approach for credit for those HE institutions that choose to use it, although it does not make this a specific requirement.

¹²³ <http://www.open.ac.uk/study/credit-transfer/faqs/what-are-cats-points-or-credits> and <http://www.open.ac.uk/study/credit-transfer/>

¹²⁴ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code/qualifications-and-credit-frameworks> and <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/academic-credit-higher-education-in-england-an-introduction.pdf>

Criterion 4:

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

The procedures by which qualifications are recognised in the RQF and the FHEQ are transparent, being publicly available via clearly worded documents on relevant websites.

Before relevant or degree awarding bodies are able to award regulated qualifications in either framework, they must be recognised by the regulators as competent bodies, with a clear understanding of what is required of qualifications in each framework.

Further, there are additional criteria and accreditation processes in place for certain groups of qualifications, so that only qualifications that meet these criteria, and that are offered by bodies that are recognised by the regulators, are submitted to the frameworks.

Once the qualifications are submitted to the frameworks, ongoing monitoring and quality assurance activities ensure that the procedures are working effectively and consistently.

Process for inclusion in the RQF

Awarding Organisations (AOs) that want to offer regulated qualifications in England and Northern Ireland must be recognised by the qualifications regulators in England and Northern Ireland, (Ofqual and CCEA Regulation respectively) and meet the regulators' Criteria for Recognition.¹²⁵ Once recognised, AOs can submit qualifications (which must comply with the General Conditions of Recognition¹²⁶ and any relevant qualification and/or subject level Condition)) to the Ofqual Register of Regulated Qualifications.¹²⁷

In England, certain groups of qualifications, (such as GCSEs, AS and A levels) must go through the Ofqual accreditation process¹²⁸ before they are entered onto the Register of Regulated Qualifications as part of the RQF, while other qualifications may be placed directly onto the Register by recognised awarding organisations. In Northern Ireland, all qualifications must go through the CCEA Regulation accreditation process before they are entered onto the Register.

All AOs offering qualifications on the RQF are subject to ongoing audit and compliance activity, as they are recognised by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation and hence must comply with the General Conditions of Recognition. Audit and

¹²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criteria-for-recognition>

¹²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

¹²⁷ www.register.ofqual.gov.uk

¹²⁸ <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2015/09/24/gsce-as-and-a-level-reform-the-accreditation-process/>

compliance reviews are based on risk profiles developed using information from key touchpoints with each AO (for example during accreditation or upfront evaluation reviews), and other information such as qualification type or learner cohort size.

Audit and compliance work provides assurance that individual or groups of AOs are managing risks appropriately, for example ensuring the right systems and people are in place in terms of capacity and expertise. This work may take the form of proactive thematic reviews, for example considering malpractice, monitoring of internal assessors or centre controls, or may be more targeted, responsive investigations, for example into suspected non-compliance within an AO.

The role of awarding organisations (AOs)

An AO develops qualifications, delivers the assessments and awards the resulting certificates. Qualifications test knowledge, skills and understanding of a subject and are awarded to learners who demonstrate the required level of attainment.

AOs offer qualifications to meet the need of their customers - schools, colleges and training providers that offer the courses that lead to their qualifications - and to meet government policy requirements as relevant. AOs develop the exams, tests and other assessments that learners take to achieve their qualifications.

Accreditation of non-HE qualifications in England and Northern Ireland

In England Section 138(1) of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the ASCL Act) allows Ofqual to specify qualifications, or descriptions of qualifications that are subject to an accreditation requirement. If a qualification is subject to an accreditation requirement, then, under section 132(5) of the ASCL Act, an awarding organisation may not award or authenticate that qualification until it has been accredited by Ofqual.

Ofqual accredit qualifications against accreditation criteria which it sets and publishes under section 140(1) of the ASCL Act. Ofqual will accredit a qualification submitted by an awarding organisation if:

- that awarding organisation has been recognised in respect of that qualification or type of qualification, and
- the qualification submitted to Ofqual meets the relevant accreditation criteria.

In England, from November 2014, qualifications subject to an accreditation requirement under section 138(1) of the 2009 Act include:

- GCSE Qualifications;
- GCE Qualifications; and
- Technical Qualifications

The Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 states that The Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) shall have the following regulatory powers:

- with the approval of the Department of Education develop and publish criteria for the accreditation of relevant external qualifications; and accredit, where they meet such criteria, any such qualifications submitted for accreditation.

In Northern Ireland and England, where a qualification is subject to accreditation by the Regulators, AOs must submit a qualification specification and specimen assessment materials (SAMs).

In England and Northern Ireland, during the accreditation process, regulatory officers convene a panel of regulators and subject assessment experts to review the specification and other materials against the regulator's Conditions of Recognition and, where they exist, qualification level conditions and subject level conditions. For example, for the purposes of accrediting a GCE qualification in a particular subject (e.g. Music), the relevant Conditions include:

- GCE Qualification Level Conditions¹²⁹ (and Design Principles in Northern Ireland)
- GCE Subject (Music) Level Conditions¹³⁰ (criteria in Northern Ireland)

During the accreditation review, key considerations relate to Ofqual's statutory objectives around ensuring qualifications are valid, reliable and comparable to other qualifications at the same level of demand, or the same RQF level. Evaluating each of these is dependent on clear and appropriate descriptions of learning outcomes in qualification specifications. When submitting a qualification for accreditation reviews (or for the closely related upfront evaluation review of qualifications including Functional Skills qualifications), awarding organisations are required to provide a specification, sample assessment materials including mark schemes, and an assessment strategy.¹³¹ The accreditation reviews consider the materials provided and scrutinise, in close detail, every question in every assessment, to ensure the level of demand is appropriate for the qualification level.

Allocating level and size to RQF qualifications

The General Conditions of Recognition (the Conditions) require awarding organisations to take a consistent approach to determining the level, and describing the size, of regulated qualifications before they can be accepted into the RQF. In

¹²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements>

¹³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-music>

¹³¹ The assessment strategy covers all of the awarding organisations internal quality assurance processes that relate to the qualification assessment design, delivery, marking, moderation, appeals, certifications and so on.

2015, Ofqual published further guidance which awarding organisations must apply when describing the size and assigning levels to regulated qualifications. These guidelines can be accessed in the Ofqual handbook.¹³²

Awarding Organisations must adhere to the following Conditions in terms of qualification titles and qualification and component levels:

E2.1 An awarding organisation must ensure that the title on the Register of any qualification which it makes available includes the following information –

- 1. (a) the name of the awarding organisation,*
- 2. (b) the level of the qualification,*

Condition E9 Qualification and Component levels

E9.1 An awarding organisation must assign one or more levels to each qualification which it makes available or proposes to make available.

E9.2 Where an awarding organisation assigns a value for credit to a Component of a qualification which it makes available or proposes to make available, it must assign a level to that Component.

E9.3 An awarding organisation must adhere to any requirements, and have regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual/CCEA Regulation and revised from time to time in assigning –

- (a) a level to a qualification,*
- (b) more than one level to a qualification, and*
- (c) a level to a Component of a qualification.*

E9.4 An awarding organisation must –

- (a) keep under review each level which it has assigned to a qualification or a Component of a qualification,*
- (b) in particular, review that level following any revision by Ofqual/CCEA Regulation of any requirements published under this Condition, and*
- (c) revise that level if appropriate.*

E9.5 Following any review by Ofqual/CCEA Regulation of a level assigned to a qualification or a Component of a qualification an awarding organisation must revise that level in any manner specified by Ofqual/CCEA Regulation.

¹³² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

Once an AO's qualification has been successfully accredited by CCEA Regulation for use in Northern Ireland or by Ofqual for use in England, the AO will be made aware of the Regulator's decision and informed that they may upload their qualification to the Register of Regulated Qualifications. For every accredited qualification uploaded to the Register, a qualification accreditation start and end date is displayed. Once the accreditation end date approaches (usually within 5 years of the accreditation start date) the AO must either withdraw the qualification or resubmit the qualification to the regulators for reaccreditation.

Process for inclusion in the FHEQ

The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is a "key reference point for UK higher education, protecting the public and student interest, and championing UK higher education's world-leading reputation for quality. It enables providers to understand what is expected of them and what to expect from each other."¹³³

The Quality Code sets out a sector-agreed series of expectations for standards and quality.

The expectations for standards are:

- The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the FHEQ.
- The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.¹³⁴

Sector recognised standards include characteristics statements, subject benchmark statements, PSRB requirements.

In Northern Ireland, the Operating Model for Quality Assessment was introduced in 2016, which was a new, risk-based approach to external oversight in place of the previous cyclical inspections. Universities' Annual Progress Reviews confirm that benchmark regulatory requirements continue to be met. Further Education Colleges in Northern Ireland that deliver higher education are subject to Quality Review Visits.¹³⁵

In England, providers registered with the OfS must satisfy the conditions of registration that relate to quality and standards (see table 25). New applicants must have a Quality and Standards Review¹³⁶ by the QAA which assesses whether a provider is meeting all of the core practices of the Quality Code. The QAA's advice following this review is then used by the OfS as it determines whether the provider meets the relevant conditions of registration.

¹³³ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

¹³⁴ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

¹³⁵ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-review-visit>

¹³⁶ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/quality-and-standards-review>

Where the OfS wishes to gather evidence about whether a registered provider continues to satisfy its condition of registration, it may ask the QAA to assess whether the provider is continuing to meet the core practices of the Quality Code. When the QAA is asked to assess core practices relating to standards it will assess whether the provider is delivering qualifications that meet the relevant requirements of FHEQ. For this reason, the Expectations of the Quality Code 2018 are deliberately aligned with the OfS's conditions of registration, notably including condition B5, that providers "must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications at Level 4 or higher."

Table 27: The Office for Students' quality and standards conditions and the Expectations of the Quality Code

Condition of registration	Quality Code Expectation
B1. The provider must deliver well designed courses that provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.	Expectation for Quality: Courses are well-designed, provide a high-quality academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed.
B2. The provider must support all students, from admission through to completion, with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.	Expectation for Quality: From admission through to completion, all students are provided with the support that they need to succeed in and benefit from higher education.
B3. The provider must deliver successful outcomes for all of its students, which are recognised and valued by employers, and/or enable further study.	This does not form part of the Quality Code.
B4. The provider must ensure that qualifications awarded to students hold their value at the point of qualification and over time, in line with sector recognised standards.	Expectation for standards: The value of qualifications awarded to students at the point of qualification and over time is in line with sector-recognised standards.
B5. The provider must deliver courses that meet the academic standards as they are described in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications at Level 4 or higher.	Expectation for standards: The academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the relevant national qualifications framework.

The Access to Higher Education Diploma is a nationally recognised level three qualification specifically developed as an access route to higher education for adult learners. QAA has regulated the qualification through the QAA Recognition Scheme for Access to Higher Education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland since

1997.¹³⁷ The courses are designed and awarded to align with the qualifications frameworks throughout the UK as noted in the 'Qualifications can cross boundaries' leaflet and the UK Government website.¹³⁸

Summary: Criterion 4

The procedures by which qualifications are recognised in the RQF and the FHEQ are transparent. The procedures are clearly worded, publicly available and well understood by the relevant organisations.

The procedures for including qualifications in the RQF and the FHEQ are similar in that specific requirements are set before an organisation can submit a qualification to the frameworks, with both frameworks setting specific requirements in certain areas.

Once the qualifications are entered onto the frameworks, a range of monitoring and quality assurance activities ensure ongoing compliance is maintained.

¹³⁷ <https://www.accesstohe.ac.uk>

¹³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

Criterion 5:

The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this recommendation.

Key bodies involved in the national quality assurance system, and the roles they play in relation to specific groups of qualifications, are presented in the table below.

Table 28: Accountability for key qualification types¹³⁹

Qualification types			
	Non-degree qualifications	Apprenticeships	Degrees / HE qualifications
Qualifications framework	RQF	RQF/FHEQ/none ¹⁴⁰	FHEQ
Qualification level/s	Entry level 1 - 8	Technician (2-3) Higher Technician (4-5) Professional (6+)	Levels 4-8
Overall accountability for quality	DfE (England) DfENI and DE(NI)	DfE (England) DfENI	DfE (England) DfENI
Standards / content development review and approval	DfE (England) DfENI	The Institute (England) DfENI	Universities and higher education institutes with Degree Awarding Powers
Quality of teaching/ training provision	Ofsted/ ETI (NI)	Ofsted/ ETI (NI) L2-3 In England: OfS L4+ where inc HE qualification or where provider is registered	OfS with QAA as DQB (England) DfENI and QAA (NI)
Quality of qualifications in RQF	Ofqual/ CCEA Regulation	Ofqual/ CCEA Regulation	Not applicable
Quality of HE qualifications	Not applicable	Not applicable: L2-3 In England: OfS L4+ where inc HE qualification or where provider is registered	OfS with QAA as DQB (England) DfENI and QAA (NI)

¹³⁹ Based on: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-accountability-statement>

¹⁴⁰ As not all apprenticeships include qualifications

RQF qualifications

In England and Northern Ireland, national quality assurance functions for regulated non-degree qualifications in the RQF focus on awarding organisations that offer regulated qualifications and the institutions that teach those qualifications.

The RQF forms an integrated part of the regulated qualification system in England and Northern Ireland. Awarding Organisations (AOs) that seek to offer regulated qualifications in England and Northern Ireland must be recognised by the qualifications regulators in England and Northern Ireland (Ofqual and CCEA Regulation respectively) and meet the regulators' Criteria for Recognition.¹⁴¹ Once recognised, AOs can submit qualifications (which must comply with the Ofqual and CCEA Regulation General Conditions of Recognition) to the Register of Regulated Qualifications.¹⁴²

Quality assurance for these qualifications is based on ensuring compliance with the Conditions, which cover the full range of quality assurance considerations from assessment design to delivery, marking, reviews and certifications.

Apprenticeships

In England, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) is responsible for the quality of apprenticeships, in all areas excluding the component qualifications, that is: developing and maintaining quality criteria for the approval of apprenticeship standards and assessment plans, and supporting the development of standards and assessment plans by employer groups.

Ofqual is responsible for the regulated RQF qualifications that may form part of an apprenticeship and for end point assessment where Ofqual is the designated external quality assurance body for that apprenticeship standard.

The OfS employs a risk-based approach to quality assurance, defined by a high quality threshold for initial entry to the Register and ongoing monitoring of all providers on the OfS Register. OfS and Ofsted quality assessment processes for level 4 and 5 apprenticeships are complementary, as established by the apprenticeship pilot. The two organisations exchange valuable information to evaluate the quality of apprenticeship provision. As part of the ongoing pilot, the OfS will provide information and data to Ofsted to inform its risk assessment process and areas of focus for inspections.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criteria-for-recognition>

¹⁴² <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

¹⁴³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/skills-and-employment/degree-apprenticeships/degree-apprenticeships-for-higher-education-providers/checking-the-quality-of-apprenticeships/>

Further Education and contracted training provision up to Level 3 (Northern Ireland)

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) has responsibility for providing inspection services for Departmental provision up to and including Level 3. This encompasses provision in Further Education colleges as well as the contracted training programmes Training for Success (TfS) and ApprenticeshipsNI.

All ETI inspections are based on the ETI's published Inspection and self-evaluation Framework¹⁴⁴ and all organisations undergoing inspection are expected to demonstrate the required standards of quality in the following areas: outcomes for learners; quality of provision and leadership and management including safeguarding, care and welfare.

Quality Improvement Planning is an important aspect of the quality assurance model. All colleges of Further Education in NI, and all contracted training providers, are required to self-evaluate their provision on an ongoing basis, and to plan effectively to drive and sustain quality improvement. Annually, organisations are required to submit Quality Improvement Planning returns, utilising the published information published by the ETI.¹⁴⁵ These returns must include a review of actions taken to improve quality over the past year; a plan for the year ahead; and an assurance statement signed by a chief executive or equivalent. These submissions are reviewed by the ETI and the Department's Quality Improvement Advisor, and each organisation receives a written response. In cases where the required standards are not met, the organisation will be subject to Inspection, using one of the inspection models outlined above. On occasion, the Quality Improvement Advisor will carry out support visits to assist delivery organisations, where appropriate.

Higher Education Qualifications

In Higher Education the FHEQ forms part of the baseline regulatory requirements for both England and Northern Ireland; the FHEQ is owned by the HE sector and managed by the QAA. DfENI and the OfS are the regulatory bodies responsible for quality assurance in Northern Ireland and England, respectively.

The baseline regulatory requirements consist of "a series of external reference points that exist in the higher education landscape".¹⁴⁶ They are the core component of the quality assessment subsystem operational in England, Northern Ireland and

¹⁴⁴ See the Framework at <https://www.etini.gov.uk/publications/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef-effective-practice-and-self-evaluation-4>

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/quality-improvement-scrutiny-inspection-guidance-sept-18.pdf>

¹⁴⁶

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180322112445tf/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Regulation/UKSC%20text%20for%20web%2024%204%2017.pdf>

Wales; different requirements apply in Scotland. All four nations “agree on the core principles the requirements represent and, that students are entitled to a high-quality academic experience; that their interests are protected; and that degree standards are comparable across the UK”.¹⁴⁷ The requirements have applied in England, Northern Ireland and Wales from 2016.

Baseline regulatory requirements are for compliance with:

- Frameworks for higher education qualifications
- Expectations of the UK Quality Code for higher education
- The relevant code of HE governance
- The providers’ relevant obligations under consumer law
- The relevant good practice framework for handling complaints and appeals
- Financial sustainability, management and governance requirements of relevant funding body, and mission and strategy for higher education provision.

ENQA reviews of QAA

The Board of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)¹⁴⁸ has conducted two cyclical reviews since 2008. In 2013¹⁴⁹ the review was against the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) 2005¹⁵⁰ and reported “full compliance in all criteria”. The most recent review, in 2018,¹⁵¹ was against the ESG 2015¹⁵² which includes a requirement that “the qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.”

The QAA was assessed as “in compliance with the ESG” and the report noted 11 commendations and that the QAA was fully compliant in 13 of the 14 standards. The report stated that the QAA makes “valuable contributions to protecting student interests and towards higher education quality advancements internationally” and in his letter to the QAA,¹⁵³ the ENQA president stated that “the [ENQA] Board

¹⁴⁷

https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20180322112445tf_/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Regulation/UKSC%20text%20for%20web%2024%204%2017.pdf

¹⁴⁸ <https://enqa.eu/index.php/about-enqa/>

¹⁴⁹ https://enqa.eu/index.php/reviews/review-reports-and-decisions/?keyword=qaa&submit=SEARCH&check_date=on&from_day=01&from_month=01&from_year=2013&to_day=01&to_month=01&to_year=2014

¹⁵⁰ https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ESG_3edition.pdf

¹⁵¹ <https://enqa.eu/index.php/reviews/review-reports-and-decisions/>

¹⁵² https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf

¹⁵³ https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Letter-ENQA-to-QAA_160718.pdf

appreciates QAA's firm commitment to quality enhancement and commends specifically its enhancement-led approach in thematic analysis".¹⁵⁴

EQF Principles of Quality Assurance and RQF and FHEQ Quality Assurance Systems

The following two tables compare the quality assurance systems of England and Northern Ireland with the EQF principles of quality assurance.

Table 29: Roles of education and training bodies in England and Northern Ireland in relation to the EQF principles of quality assurance (see footnotes 155, 156, 157, 158 in table)

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/european-plaudits-for-qaa-and-uk-higher-education-quality-assurance>

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook> in England or http://ccea.org.uk/regulation/compliance/general_conditions_recognition in NI

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/common-inspection-framework-education-skills-and-early-years-from-september-2015>

¹⁵⁷ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/articles/inspection-and-self-evaluation-framework-isef>

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

Ofqual/ CCEA Regulation		Recognised awarding organisations	Ofsted	Education and Training Inspectorate NI	QAA	Office for Students	Higher Education Institutions
Area of coverage	All recognised awarding organisations All regulated qualifications	QA of all regulated qualifications and centres that offer them	Maintained schools, FE and skills provision and registered early years settings	Education and training at all stages: early years to FE and work-based learning	Higher Education Institutions; Higher education providers, UK Higher Education	Higher Education Providers; Registered Providers	Degree awarding bodies; higher education providers
Processes	General Conditions of Recognition (GCR) ¹	Proprietary qual development/QA processes, which comply with GCR	The Common Inspection Framework ²	The Inspection and Self-Evaluation Framework ³	UK Quality Code ⁴ FHEQ	Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England	Internal QA; compliance with UK Quality Code and FHEQ
EQF Principles: QA requirements should cover:							
1. Design of qualifications	GCR E1, E4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2. Valid & reliable assessment	GCR D1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3. Feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement	GCR A5, D3, E7, E8, E9, H3, I2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4. Inclusion of stakeholders at all stages in the process	GCR D3, D4, E1, E2, E9, H4, H6, I4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5. Self-assessment & external review	GCR B2, D3, D4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6. Integration into management structures	GCR A5, B1, B2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7. Clear, measurable objectives, standards and guidelines	All GCR and accompanying Guidance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
8. Appropriate resources	GCR A5	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
9. Regular review of bodies/agencies responsible for QA	GCR A8, B2, B3, B4, B6, B7, B8, C1, C2, C3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10. Electronic accessibility of evaluation results	GCR B2, B3, B4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

The following table shows how the RQF and FHEQ quality assurance processes are consistent with the quality assurance principles¹⁵⁹ for qualifications that are part of national qualifications frameworks or systems referenced to the EQF.

Table 30: Review of quality assurance systems for qualifications in England and Northern Ireland with the EQF quality assurance principles

EQF QA principles	RQF	FHEQ
In accordance with national circumstances and taking into account sectoral differences quality assurance of qualifications with an EQF level should:		
Address the design of qualifications as well as application of the learning outcomes approach	RQF Qualifications must be designed to comply with the General Conditions of Recognition. These Conditions require awarding organisations to design and develop qualifications to ensure that: - qualifications have an objective, including defined outcomes for learners (including progression in education or employment) - awarding organisations gain support for a proposed qualification from potential users; - qualifications can accurately differentiate between learners' levels of attainment	Qualifications in the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) must be designed with reference to that framework and meet all expectations set out within the Quality Code The descriptors within the FHEQ set a series of learning outcomes on which learners are assessed. Degree Awarding Bodies design their qualifications to align with the descriptors set out in the FHEQ and using the named titles given. The framework and descriptors enable comparisons to be made across subjects, institutions, levels and modes of study. The qualifications awarded accurately differentiate learners' levels of attainment.
Ensure valid and reliable assessment according to agreed and transparent learning outcomes-based standards and address the process of certification	General Conditions of Recognition require regulated qualifications to be 'fit for purpose', including that they are: - valid; - reliable; - comparable; - manageable; and - minimise bias	The UK Quality Code requires that: - academic standards of courses meet the requirements of the FHEQ - value of qualifications awarded to students over time is in line with sector-recognised standards - courses are well-designed, provide a high quality

¹⁵⁹ <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9620-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

EQF QA principles	RQF	FHEQ
	The GCR also requires that qualification certificates are issued to learners following appropriate marking, moderation and following any appeals, and clearly state relevant information including the qualification level.	academic experience for all students and enable a student's achievement to be reliably assessed The Quality Code includes a core practice that the "provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent".¹⁶⁰
Consist of feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement	Ofqual and CCEA Regulation undertake a programme of audits to ensure that awarding organisations are compliant with regulatory requirements. Feedback from users of qualifications and centres of learning is explicitly sought. Awarding organisations are also required to periodically review their own approaches to the award of qualifications, and to review qualifications on a regular basis to ensure they remain fit for purpose and (for vocational/professional/occupational qualifications), are based on the most recent NOS as relevant Where awarding organisations are dissatisfied with the outcome of this quality assurance, they may appeal regulatory decisions.	The Quality Code includes two common practices that: - The provider reviews its core practices for standards regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement - The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement. In Northern Ireland, Higher Education Providers currently work under the Revised Operating Model for Quality Assessment and are subject to an Annual Provider Review. In England, Higher Education Providers confirm annually to the OfS that they meet the requirements for on-going registration. Where a review is triggered the QAA (as DQB) will undertake a review that will, among other things, look at the feedback mechanisms and procedures for continuous improvement. Final year students undertake the National Student Survey (NSS), which provides feedback

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code>

EQF QA principles	RQF	FHEQ
		on a range of criteria that can be compared within and across institutions and subjects. Outcomes of the NSS are widely used as an indicator of student satisfaction and to inform the sector of an institution's performance, as rated by their graduates.
Involve all relevant stakeholders at all stages of the process	Quality assurance for regulated qualifications ensures that learners, centres and awarding organisation employees (as 'whistleblowers') can raise concerns with Ofqual and CCEA Regulation. The views of stakeholders are sought in Ofqual and CCEA Regulation research and evaluation programmes. New regulatory requirements which potentially impact on awarding organisations, learners or centres are subject to public consultation before being implemented.	All practices within higher education across the UK are co-regulated. Where practice is under review, or reassessment, the QAA consults widely across all potential stakeholders to ensure the widest relevant input is accessed. Core principles within the Quality Code require that: - The provider uses external expertise, assessment and classification processes that are reliable, fair and transparent. - The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience. A common practice requires that: - The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise. Higher education courses that are new, or being reviewed, will involve a wide range of stakeholders in review, design and validation. Whilst courses are in train a provider will regularly seek input and feedback from all those involved in the course, its assessment

EQF QA principles	RQF	FHEQ
		and the graduates from the course. Where stakeholders have concerns about higher education there are measures in place to provide clearly articulated routes for raising such concerns, or complaints.
Be composed of consistent evaluation methods, associating self-assessment and external review	Awarding organisations are required to submit annual self-assessed Statements of Compliance to Ofqual and CCEA Regulation to demonstrate compliance with the General Conditions of Recognition. Monitoring and scrutiny activities are conducted by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation to ensure awarding organisation compliance with the General Conditions of Recognition. AOs conduct reviews of their centres to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.	Providers in England and those in Northern Ireland are evaluated under consistent evaluation methods although the precise nature of the methods varies in each nation. The evaluation methods used all include self-assessment and external review. HE providers who are subject to review are able to access detailed guidance and support from the QAA who also manage the processes of external peer review.
Be an integral part of the internal management, including sub-contracted activities, of bodies issuing qualifications with an EQF level	Awarding organisations are required to have a designated Governing Body and Responsible Officer for the purpose of regulated activities. Awarding organisations are required to ensure that any third parties undertaking any part of the development, delivery or award of regulated qualifications act in a way that ensures compliance with regulatory requirements.	The Quality Code includes a core principle for standards that states: - Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the standards of its awards are credible and secure irrespective of where or how courses are delivered or who delivers them. And one for quality that states: - Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality

EQF QA principles	RQF	FHEQ
		irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them. Nevertheless, the Degree Awarding Body is responsible for the standards and quality of all awards that it makes.
Be based on clear and measurable objectives, standards and guidelines	Ofqual and CCEA Regulation regulatory requirements are set out in the form of: - Conditions, to which awarding recognition is subject - Criteria, which must be met in order to attain recognition - Policies, which describe approach and enforcement powers. Ofqual and CCEA Regulation are required to produce these under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009¹⁶¹ and the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 respectively.	The OfS, in England, set conditions that higher education providers must meet for initial and on-going registration. The OfS monitors the providers through a series of metrics and publishes the criteria on which these are based. In Northern Ireland, the Annual provider Review draws on existing data and information to reach a judgment on quality and standards. Where the QAA undertakes a review of a higher education provider, it monitors the provider's compliance with the Quality Code and the FHEQ.
Be supported by appropriate resources	Ofqual and CCEA Regulation are sponsored and funded by the UK Government and NI Government respectively to undertake the functions outlined in the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009. and the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 respectively. These include the quality assurance processes outlined above. The criteria for recognition (Section C) state that awarding organisations must have	QAA is a registered charity and company limited by guarantee. It receives funding from the UK Government / OfS / DfE NI to provide quality assurance activities in higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

¹⁶¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2009/22/section/134>

EQF QA principles	RQF	FHEQ
	appropriate resources and financing for the development, delivery and award of any qualification which it may make available as a recognised awarding organisation.	
Include a regular review of existing external monitoring bodies or agencies, carrying out quality assurance	The General Conditions of Recognition require recognised awarding organisations to ensure that their documented quality assurance systems and arrangements are compliant with the General Conditions of Recognition. Evidence of this assurance is collected through the annual statement of compliance audits and other regulatory interventions. In addition, monitoring and scrutiny activities are conducted by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation to ensure awarding organisation compliance with the General Conditions of Recognition. Ofqual is held to public account by UK Parliament at the Education Select Committee, which monitors the policy, administration and spending of the DfE and its associated arm's length bodies such as Ofqual. Further, Ofqual is subject to periodic organisational reviews by government. Similarly, CCEA Regulation is accountable to DE(NI) and DfENI for its performance.	The QAA is regularly reviewed by ENQA; most recently in 2018. The ENQA report¹⁶² stated: that QAA was assessed as “in compliance with the ESG”; it noted 11 commendations and that the QAA was fully compliant in 13 of the 14 standards.
Include the electronic accessibility of evaluation results	Awarding organisations are responsible for uploading their qualifications onto the Register of Regulated Qualifications.	The QAA publishes the evaluation results on its website which provides electronic accessibility ¹⁶⁴ .

¹⁶² <https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/External-review-report-QAA-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁶⁴ In England the results are published, following confirmation from the OfS.

EQF QA principles	RQF	FHEQ
	Results of evaluation work carried out to review the standard of qualifications in relation to RQF levels are published on the Ofqual and CCEA Regulation websites. A recent example is the evaluation of the reformed assessment of A level science practical skills ¹⁶³ .	The ENQA 2018 is accessed through a hyperlink on the QAA website ¹⁶⁵ .

¹⁶³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/practical-skills-of-a-level-science-students-study-4>

¹⁶⁵ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/news/european-plaudits-for-qaa-and-uk-higher-education-quality-assurance>

Criterion 6:

The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

The quality assurance bodies described in Criterion 5, and presented below in figure 29, have all been involved in the production and review of the report and the evidence presented. These bodies support this final report and confirm their agreement that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

Table 31: QA bodies for each framework and their role in the EQF referencing work

QA bodies	Qualifications Framework	Role in Referencing
Ofqual	Qualifications Regulator (England)	Managed referencing process and report production, joint NCP
CCEA Regulation	Qualifications Regulator (Northern Ireland)	Supported referencing process and report production, joint NCP
QAA	Quality Assurance of HE Qualifications (UK)	Supported referencing process and report production
OfS	Office for Students	Provided feedback and comments on report drafts

Further, as described in Criterion 5, all awarding organisations and degree awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring the quality of the RQF or FHEQ qualifications that they offer. Criterion 5 also describes the quality assurance arrangements for learning providers, as required by the RQF and FHEQ.

The awarding organisations that develop regulated qualifications that sit in the RQF play a critical role in quality assurance, and their representative bodies, the Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB), and the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) were represented on the steering group and have endorsed the outcomes of this report. Similarly, degree awarding bodies that develop qualifications in the FHEQ are represented by Universities UK which was represented on the steering group and has endorsed this report.

Criterion 7:

The referencing process shall involve international experts and the referencing reports shall contain the written statement of at least two international experts from two different countries on the referencing process.

International experts played a key role in the production of the final report, providing advice and expertise during the drafting stage and in preparation for each of the EQF Advisory Group meetings.

The experts, Horacy Dębowski from the Central Examinations Commission, Poland and John O'Connor, from Quality and Qualifications Ireland, were chosen following discussion with the other UK EQF National Coordination Points, the SCQFP (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership) and Colleges Wales/Colegau Cymru. These colleagues were also referencing their qualifications frameworks to the EQF, and recommended inviting the same experts to provide advice and guidance to the ENI referencing work. We agreed the experts working with UK colleagues would be best placed not only given their knowledge and experience working with national qualifications frameworks and the EQF, but also as this would help ensure consistency in the approaches taken to produce the individual UK reports.

The international experts attended our scheduled Steering Group meetings to provide input. They also provided written comments on drafts of our report and on the final report, prior to presentation to the EQF Advisory Group. Written statements from the international experts are included in Annex 4.

+Summary of advice and guidance from international experts (to follow before submission of final report)

Criterion 8:

The competent authority or authorities shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications frameworks or systems with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing, and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent authorities, including the EQF National Coordination Points, and shall address separately each of the criteria. The same report can be used for self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter.

The three competent national bodies for England and Northern Ireland in relation to the national qualifications frameworks (Ofqual, CCEA Regulation and QAA) will each publish this single referencing report in full, on behalf of the UK and Northern Ireland government departments. The report includes the evidence addressing each of the criteria as well as statements of endorsement to certify the referencing of the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF and the self-certification of the FHEQ to the FQ-EHEA.

Statements of endorsement will be provided by the government departments as well as members of the England and Northern Ireland EQF referencing steering group. The steering group included members with a wide range of experience and knowledge, with representation from across England and Northern Ireland: from a wide range of education sectors (higher education, VET, school and voluntary); key education bodies; education and training government bodies and funding agencies; UCAS; learners; social partners; and international experts.

The production of the referencing report was very much a collaborative project, involving colleagues throughout the government departments and all steering group members, who, with the benefit of international expert guidance, met to discuss the work and the contents of the report at meetings, contributed specific areas of the report, and reviewed the drafts and final report. The resulting report is therefore a joint production, coordinated by Ofqual, CCEA Regulation and QAA.

Criterion 9:

Within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall publish the referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal.

The three national bodies for England and Northern Ireland in relation to the national qualifications frameworks (Ofqual, CCEA Regulation and QAA) all consent to the publication of, and use of information contained within, the referencing report, on the official EQF platform for reasons of qualification comparison purposes.

Ofqual, CCEA Regulation and QAA will publish the England and Northern Ireland referencing report on their organisation websites once the EQF advisory group has accepted the final report.

Criterion 10:

Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications frameworks or systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

The Ofqual Register¹⁶⁶ of Regulated Qualifications is a publicly accessible database of all of the regulated qualifications in the RQF. The database includes the level of every qualification on the Register, allowing comparison against the EQF levels.

Ofqual and CCEA Regulation require awarding organisations to ensure that all qualification certificates clearly and distinctly state the RQF level of the qualification. Awarding organisations may also state the EQF level on certificates, but this is not a regulatory requirement. This non-mandatory approach resulted from a consultation carried out with awarding organisations. To date, whilst some awarding organisations do present the EQF level on qualification certificates, this is not widespread.

There is no requirement for degree-awarding bodies to include the EQF level within a qualification certificate, as the FHEQ was not directly referenced to the EQF prior to this referencing work. Documentation published by the QAA will, where relevant, include reference to the EQF and its alignment with the FHEQ.

In England and Northern Ireland, the certificate supplement is not compulsory and is not an individualised statement, in the same way that the diploma supplement is for higher education qualifications. Demand for the certificate supplement has been low, but these are issued with EQF levels included by a small number of awarding organisations

¹⁶⁶ <https://register.ofqual.gov.uk/>

6. Future directions

Looking to the future, a range of developments will likely affect the qualifications available in England and Northern Ireland. These will be accommodated within the existing qualifications frameworks. Many of these developments are underway, while others have yet to take shape. Some focus on specific qualifications, while others have a broader scope.

The Department for Education in England is currently undertaking a review of post-16 qualifications at level 3 and below, excluding GCSEs and A levels. The government's aim is to simplify the landscape and streamline the current offer to ensure all qualifications approved for funding have a distinct purpose, are necessary, support progression to further study or employment, and be high quality.

A key part of the aim to improve the vocational and technical education available to 16-19 year olds, is the development of T Levels, a new suite of two-year technical study teaching to be phased in for teaching from 2020. The content for T Levels is being designed by employers and will cover 25 employment areas. T Levels will offer students a mixture of classroom learning and 'on-the-job' experience during an industry placement of at least 45 days. Students will take a Technical Qualification during the course, which will be a regulated qualification within the RQF at level 3.

In Northern Ireland, the Administration is currently implementing major reforms of Northern Ireland's professional and technical education and training. The reformed system of Apprenticeships, from Level 3 through to Level 8, and youth training, in the form of Traineeships at Level 2, will encourage progression and build on the existing model of the Apprenticeships Northern Ireland Programme to that of a more employer-led system. The Northern Ireland Administration has introduced Higher Level Apprenticeships at Levels 4 and 5 from September 2017. Higher Level Apprenticeships at Level 6 and 7 are now mainstream. The phased implementation plan is on schedule to deliver the reformed vision for Apprenticeships and Youth Training by 2021.

With regard to the frameworks of England and Northern Ireland, a potential area for exploration was revealed during the mapping exercise, which highlighted some minor differences between the descriptors at level 4 of the RQF and level 4 of the FHEQ. Whilst these do not affect the EQF or QF-EHEA relationships, they do relate to the strength of the links between the two England and Northern Ireland frameworks. We will consider these further in the future by reviewing the level 4 descriptors of the RQF and FHEQ, and from that point we can consider any implications for the FHEQ level 4 with the QF-EHEA short cycle.

Another area worthy of investigation relates to the basis of the EQF itself: the use of learning outcomes and how this may be evolving. Steering Group members suggested that transferable knowledge and skills as well as employment-specific knowledge and skills are becoming increasingly desirable for both the labour market and society. Some qualification designers are taking a broader, more creative and flexible approach to qualification design, where learning outcomes are not rigidly and explicitly mapped to occupational standards for limited purposes. Instead, programme and teaching specifications may be supplemented with curriculum content that can be tailored to specific geographical regions or niche/specialist contexts, to complement the core standards of a qualification.

In higher education, the new regulatory framework in England has enabled a more diverse higher education sector with changes to procedures to achieve degree awarding body status and University title. One of the underlying aims for this change is to encourage more providers to offer higher education to broaden the range of providers, of subjects and to widen participation. It is too early to say whether this aim will be achieved. As regards credit and qualifications frameworks, any new providers who are accepted onto the Office for Students' Register will need to meet that regulator's requirements. There is also government support for and increasing interest in the development, design and delivery of accelerated degrees, which encompass the same amount of credit and learning hours as their traditional counterparts but delivered over a shorter time frame.

It is clear that the context and purpose of the national qualifications frameworks of England and Northern Ireland will continue to evolve. What has also become clear throughout the production of this referencing report, is that the engagement and collaboration characterised by this work are certain to support future developments.

Colleagues in Ofqual, CCEA Regulation and QAA would like to express their sincere thanks to all of those involved in the production and review of this report, and we look forward to future engagement in the international qualifications and frameworks arena.

Annex 1. ENI EQF Referencing Steering Group

Context

The Steering Group's remit is to advise Ofqual and CCEA Regulation (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment) in relation to their work to reference the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), in line with the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union's recommendation.¹⁶⁷

The recommendation to reference national qualifications frameworks to the EQF applies to Member States. However, there is scope for countries outside the EU (or "third countries") to compare their qualifications levels to the EQF too, in order to facilitate mutual understanding of qualifications between countries. Our aim is to complete the referencing report before the end of March – i.e. before the UK exits the EU – although the process by which the EQF Advisory Group will consider the report, in the context of the UK exit from the EU, is uncertain. In mapping the RQF to the EQF we will follow the recommendation that Member States:

- reference levels of qualifications within the national qualifications system to the EQF levels;
- promote and apply the European principles for quality assurance in education and training when relating the national qualifications system to the EQF;
- ensure all methodology used to refer national qualifications levels to the EQF is transparent and that the resulting decisions are published;
- provide guidance to stakeholders on how national qualifications relate to the EQF through the national qualifications system;
- ensure the participation of all relevant national stakeholders including, according to national legislation and practice, higher education and vocational education and training institutions, social partners, sectors and experts on the comparison and use of qualifications at the European level.

We will be mindful to avoid duplication of other relevant initiatives, such as the Bologna Process in higher education where countries compare their higher education frameworks to the European Higher Education Area equivalent (FQ-EHEA).

¹⁶⁷ The Qualifications and Credit Framework was referenced to the EQF in 2010. The EU recommend that referencing reports should be updated regularly.

Terms of Reference

The remit of the England and Northern Ireland (ENI) EQF Referencing Steering Group is to support the production of the report to reference the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF.

The aim is to ensure that the report provides a comprehensive, accurate, and accessible overview of the England and Northern Ireland education, training and qualifications systems to readers from around the world, noting on-going developments.

Specifically the remit of the Steering Group is to:

- help ensure the report provides an accurate description of the education, training and qualifications systems and the associated quality assurance arrangements in England and Northern Ireland
- as required, provide information or sources to refer to during the drafting of the report
- review the draft report and comment on the accuracy and clarity of the information presented, taking into account the comments of international experts and others
- endorse and provide comments on the final report before it is submitted to the Ofqual, CCEA Regulation and QAA chief executives and/or directors and then to the EQF Advisory Group in June 2019
- promote the final report to relevant stakeholders.

Timeline

Activity	Ofqual/ CCEA
Evidence gathering for each referencing criterion	October – November 2018
Technical mapping of RQF/EQF levels	October – November 2018
Technical mapping of FHEQ/EQF levels	December - January 2019
Drafting first-draft report	November - January 2019
Steering Group meeting 1	21 January 2019
ENI/Wales meeting to discuss reports	January 2019
Feedback from steering group/experts/stakeholders	February 2019
Verbal debrief at EQF Advisory Group	March 2019
Steering Group meeting 2	4 April 2019
Submit final report to EQF advisory group	May 2019
Formal presentation at EQF Advisory Group	June 2019

Membership

The Steering Group included members with a wide range of experience and knowledge, with representation from across England and Northern Ireland: from all the education sectors (HE, VET, school and voluntary); key education bodies; education and training government bodies and funding agencies; trade union; and international experts.

Organisation	Representative
Ofqual (Joint ENI NCP)	Julie Swan (Chair) Rhian Dent
Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment Regulation (CCEA) (Joint ENI NCP)	Caroline Egerton
Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)	Alison Felce
International experts	Horacy Dębowski, Central Examinations Board (Centralna Komisja Egzaminacyjna), Poland John O'Connor, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), Republic of Ireland
Independent framework expert	Mike Coles
Department for Education (DfE, England)	Ann Miller
Department for the Economy (DfE, Northern Ireland)	John McGuigan
Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education	Simon Perks
Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)	Janet Ryland
Universities UK	Will Hammonds
Ofsted	Neil Redmond King
Vocational Training Charitable Trust (VTCT)	Carina Fagan
Federation of Awarding Bodies (FAB)	Ailin O'Cathain
Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ)	Andy Walls
Colegau Cymru/ Colleges Wales	Adrian Sheehan
Qualifications Wales	Jack Watkins
Trades Union Congress (TUC)	Kirsi Kekki

Annex 2. Mapping the RQF and the FHEQ to the EQF

Please find attached separate document.

Annex 3. Example higher education grading criteria

Example module guide below provided by University of Wolverhampton which specify what a student will be doing in terms of learning outcomes.

Module Guide: (7SR008) Extended Dissertation

Important: The University is adopting **Canvas** as its new Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), replacing **WOLF**. With the exception of modules that started in the previous academic year, all modules will be taught using Canvas. It is possible that the module guides may still refer to the older **WOLF** VLE; assume that these should refer to Canvas. If in doubt, ask your Module Leader.

About

Module Leader Tina Smith Tina.Smith@wlv.ac.uk

Contact Information

2017/8 CRYRA Walsall Campus (UW1)

Description

In this module students will negotiate an extended piece of research in consultation with a designated supervisor. Students will draw on knowledge of academic literature and research design, philosophies and techniques to identify an appropriate research methodology, and carry out an extended research project relevant to their area of study. Students will produce either a piece of empirical research, or professionally related, applied practice depending on their area of study.

Pre-requisite Modules

Prohibited Module Combinations

Cannot be taken in conjunction with 7SR006 Independent Study or 7SR007 Dissertation

Learning Outcomes

LO1: Demonstrate a critical awareness and comprehensive understanding of current research, much of which is at the forefront of your discipline, to select an appropriate methodology and associated technologies to utilise in a piece of extended research

LO2: Produce research or practice which demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of skills and knowledge appropriate to your area of study

LO3: Apply knowledge extensively, in original ways and demonstrate a practical understanding of how established techniques are used to create and interpret knowledge in your area of study

LO4: Communicate complex issues systematically and creatively to relevant audiences

Content

Students will engage in independent study supported by specialist supervision which may include the following: literature reviews, annotated bibliographies, theory and research, research methodologies, research questions, practice-as-research & practice-based-research (where appropriate), qualitative/quantitative data analysis (where appropriate). The specific module content will be dictated by the nature of the research each student undertakes and the needs identified by the supervisor. Students will be required to produce a final dissemination of their project in an appropriate manner such as: an empirically based research project, a professional practice based research project, a practice as research project.

Teaching and Learning

Learning Activities

As a Masters student you will be required to undertake independent study as well as attend tutorials to support your development. Learning activities will include lectures, independent study, research and / or practice, formative assessment opportunities, and feedback tutorials.

Blended Learning

1. Where possible, all lecture-produced course documents will be provided in an electronic form via CANVAS.
2. Formative assessment opportunities will occur during face-to-face sessions and online.
5. Assessments will be submitted online, feedback will be provided electronically.

The example grading criteria below show how the learning outcomes are used and how these are transferred and used in assessments for grading criteria.



How your work will be assigned a grade

Learning Outcome	100 – 70% (Distinction)	69 – 60% (Merit)	59 – 50% (Pass)	49 – 40% (Fail)	39 – 0% (Fail)
LO1: Demonstrate a critical awareness and comprehensive understanding of current research, much of which is at the forefront of your discipline, to select an appropriate methodology and associated technologies to utilise in a piece of extended research.	The work demonstrates evidence of a focused analysis and critique of academic theory and literature highly relevant to the proposed research project. Differing theoretical and academic perspectives and interpretations relevant to the proposed research project have been recognised and ideas synthesised to determine the approach adopted. Ideas are presented succinctly and the project aims and methodology are fully considered and justified with reference to academic theory and literature. There are few errors in referencing, grammar or syntax.	The work demonstrates a capacity to express views based on sound argument and solid evidence from academic theory and literature, which is relevant to the proposed research project, in an articulate and concise way. The work demonstrates a willingness to question and explore theoretical and academic perspectives and interpretations relevant to the proposed research project. A willingness to synthesise ideas from academic theory and literature to determine the approach adopted is evident. Academic theory and literature is put forward to justify the project aims and methodology. There are some small repeated errors in referencing, grammar or syntax.	The work demonstrates clear presentation of major debates and suitable basic academic theory and literature relevant to the proposed research project. The work explores and analyses issues relevant to the proposed research project but is mainly descriptive. There is evidence of engagement with pertinent issues from academic theory and literature to justify the project aims and methodology. There are some repeated errors in referencing, grammar or syntax.	The work demonstrates limited presentation of academic theory and literature relevant to the proposed research project. The work is overly descriptive and provides minimal interpretation and limited analysis of academic theory and literature relevant to the proposed research project. There is little evidence of engagement with academic theory and literature to justify the project aims and methodology.	The work demonstrates little or no understanding of academic theory and literature relevant to the proposed research project. The work is mainly descriptive and provides little or no interpretation and analysis of academic theory and literature relevant to the proposed research project. There is little or no evidence of engagement with academic theory and literature to justify the project aims and methodology.

Annex 4. Statements from International Experts

The England and Northern Ireland EQF Referencing work drew on the advice of two international experts: John O'Connor, and Horacy Debowski.

The statement from John O'Connor is provided below.

The statement from Horacy Debowski will follow due to extenuating circumstances. Horacy has been involved in significant disruption to the Polish exam series, followed by a serious illness in his family. He has been involved throughout the referencing work however and the resulting report takes on board his interim comments, with only his final statement outstanding. We hope the EQF Advisory Group understand this unique and difficult situation.

Statement on report on Referencing the qualifications frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the levels of the EQF

International Commentator: Dr. John O'Connor, Head of Qualifications and Skills Policy, Quality and Qualifications Ireland.

May 2019

General Observations

The updated referencing report provides a sound basis to confirm and strengthen the relationship between the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The report also references the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) to the EQF for the first time. The report presents evidence against each of the criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications frameworks or qualifications systems to the EQF as set out in Annex III of the EQF Recommendation reauthorised by the Council of the European Union in May 2017.

In my opinion, the approach and method employed to update the 2010 referencing exercise and the additional evidence presented in this report, serve both to establish a relationship between the FHEQ and the EQF and to confirm and strengthen the historical association between the RQF and the EQF. The updated referencing report was produced consistent with the guidance provided in Note AG 43-4-REV on the Updating of EQF referencing reports as part of the EQF AG work programme 2018-19.

The current report should be read in conjunction with the Welsh and Scottish reports which detail the relationship between the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) with the EQF. Collectively, the three UK updated referencing reports respect the diversity of the national systems of qualifications while maintaining intra-UK coherence and qualifications alignments.

The current report, in establishing a relationship between the FHEQ and the EQF, fulfils the ambition to achieve EQF referencing of all of the UK qualifications frameworks for the first time.

The current report referencing the RQF and the FHEQ in England and Northern Ireland to the EQF, is not without challenges. Simultaneous referencing of two NQFs to the EQF requires a high degree of coordination among key actors. Achieving this for two countries exhibiting a tendency towards increasingly divergent education policy landscapes, adds to the complexity of the exercise. Much care has been taken to respect the integrity of both qualifications frameworks and the integrity of the national qualifications systems in which they operate. Overall the report acknowledges differences between the two qualifications frameworks and their

application within the two distinct qualifications policy environments, while at the same time demonstrating how the qualifications system of England and Northern Ireland still have much in common.

In my opinion the report provides an accessible and comprehensive description of the education, training and qualifications policy context in England and Northern Ireland. The history and evolution of the RQF in particular is helpful as is the portrayal of the fairly extensive wave of institutional, statutory and regulatory reform that has been underway since 2010. This context is particularly important given the challenges noted above.

The report aims to enhance intra-UK and international mobility and recognition for holders of qualifications. This is consistent with the primary ambition of the EQF. While the nature of the future UK-EU relationship remains unclear, the report recognises the value of maintaining a European currency for its qualifications system.

The approach to preparing this report has been inclusive and deliberative. Utilising existing policy networks and establishing a dedicated steering group to promote and coordinate the work and to establish consensus and agreement. The work has progressed speedily with demanding timelines to complete the task. The report identified issues that will need ongoing and future attention, reflecting the dynamic nature of qualifications systems. The executives at OFQUAL and CCEA along with members of the steering group deserve credit for producing a high-quality report under challenging conditions.

As a member of the steering group I was afforded access to relevant documentation and had good opportunity to comment on earlier drafts of this report. I also acted as an international commentator for both the Scottish and Wales referencing reports. This was helpful, affording me the opportunity to gain a good appreciation of qualifications developments across the UK.

By international standards, the UK has had much experience of working with NQFs. Well known UK experts on NQFs and the EQF contributed to this report, maintaining continuity with the original UK referencing report and offering well informed advice on the current report. The RQF, in its current form, has been the subject of frequent and significant change. The ongoing efforts to balance a responsive, innovative and flexible (general and VET in particular) qualifications system with necessary governance and regulatory arrangements, will likely be of interest to policymakers elsewhere.

Comment on the extent to which the draft report addresses the criteria and procedures for referencing national qualifications frameworks or systems to the European Qualifications Framework, as set out in Annex III of the 2017 Recommendation.

Criterion 1: The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Co-ordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.

This criterion is addressed. The institutional, legislative and governance arrangements supporting the both the RQF and the FHEQ are extensively detailed in the report. The report describes the nature and extent of engaging with all relevant national bodies in the updated referencing process.

Criterion 2: There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the national qualifications frameworks or systems and the level descriptors of the EQF.

This criterion is addressed.

The 2010 QCF-EQF alignment is maintained notwithstanding the fact that the RQF has since replaced the QCF. The absence of the responsibility and autonomy sub-strand in the RQF is explained in the report, the relevant national authorities are of the view that this change has not substantively altered the basis for maintaining the 2010 alignments.

The proposed FHEQ-EQF alignment is supported by detailed technical analysis of the respective level descriptors. This strand of the work, referencing the FHEQ to the EQF, was conducted cognisant of the outcomes of the self-certification of the FHEQ and the QF-EHEA conducted in 2008 and also taking account of the relationship between the EQF and the QF-EHEA articulated in the 2017 EQF Recommendation.

The proposed alignment of FHEQ level 4 with EQF level 5 has prompted some domestic reflection of the relationship between VET and Higher Education qualifications at this level, reflected in the commitment to revisit the respective FHEQ/RQF/EQF alignments as part of the further development and implementation of the EQF in England and Northern Ireland. The co-location of short cycle higher education (SCHE) qualifications and other qualifications that are considered part of higher education but not classified as SCHE qualifications, both at EQF level 5, is not necessarily problematic and not unique to England and Northern Ireland. Importantly, the report presents a transparent mapping of the respective level descriptors and the FHEQ-EQF alignments are endorsed by the steering group and relevant qualifications authorities. This issue does challenge the EQF-AG to consider its guidance to participating countries on the implications of updated EQF referencing reports on pre-existing or first time QF-EHEA self-certification exercises.

Criterion 3: The national qualifications frameworks or systems and their qualifications are based on the principle and objective of learning outcomes

and related to arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

This criterion is addressed.

The UK education and training system has a long tradition of learning outcomes-based qualifications. The way that learning outcomes are implemented under the RQF and the FHEQ is detailed in the report. Useful examples of learning outcomes referenced qualifications are presented in the report. The respective arrangements for validation of non-formal and informal learning within the sub-systems operation the RQF and the FHEQ are detailed. The potential for both frameworks to promote learning outcomes and enable validation practice is evident. The report includes a helpful mapping of credit arrangements in England and Northern Ireland and their compatibility with the principles for credit as set out in Annex V of the 2017 EQF Recommendation.

Criterion 4: The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the national qualifications framework or for describing the place of qualifications in the national qualification system are transparent.

This criterion is addressed.

The procedures for inclusion are made transparent in the report. Such procedures are integrated within national regulatory and quality assurance arrangements for the RQF and the FHEQ. There is evidence too that such procedures are not just in place, but that they are generally effective given the widespread acceptance of the level of qualifications for employment or for further study.

Criterion 5: The national quality assurance system(s) for education and training refer(s) to the national qualifications frameworks or systems and are consistent with the principles on quality assurance as specified in Annex IV to this Recommendation.

This criterion is addressed.

As with other recent referencing reports, my sense is that the principles in Annex IV, will need further refinement so that participating countries can best present aspects of their quality assurance systems that promote confidence in their NQFs. If comparable analysis of quality assurance arrangements supporting qualifications, is of interest to the EQF community, again, some further consideration and guidance on how consistency with the principles in Annex V is to be demonstrated, will be required by the EQF-AG. Currently, in my opinion, the principles are open to a fairly liberal interpretation which the EQF-AG will need to decide is a good thing or not.

The current report does provide an extensive description of quality assurance arrangements that underpin the RQF and FHEQ and the delivery of education and training programmes that lead to qualifications included within the two frameworks.

The report takes each of the principles set out in Annex V and maps them against relevant quality assurance procedures governing each framework. A variety of qualification types are selected, and the traceability of their QA infrastructure is presented. Tables presented are clear and informative.

The positive outcomes of the latest (2018) ENQA review of the QAA is used as part of the evidence presented in this section. The report notes the significance of ensuring the appropriate levelling of qualifications within relevant qualifications frameworks, becoming a mandated requirement under the revised European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area (2015).

With less reliance now being placed on the use of institutional reviews in the QA system for higher education in England and Northern Ireland, it will be interesting to observe how FHEQ 'levelling' of qualifications within HE institutions are ensured.

Criterion 6: The referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies that the referencing report is consistent with the relevant national quality assurance arrangements, provisions and practice.

This criterion is addressed.

Criterion 7: The referencing process shall involve international experts and the referencing reports shall contain the written statement of at least two international experts from two different countries on the referencing process.

This criterion is addressed.

Criterion 8: The competent authority or authorities shall certify the referencing of the national qualifications frameworks or systems with the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing, and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent authorities, including the EQF National Coordination Points, and shall address separately each of the criteria. The same report can be used for self-certification to the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area, in accordance with the self-certification criteria of the latter.

This criterion is addressed.

At the time of writing, I have not yet seen the written endorsements of this report by the relevant national authorities. This is because the final report as yet to complete the final stages of governance and official sign off. The report commits that such certification is imminent, and I fully expect to observe full compliance with this criterion in the report presented to the EQF-AG.

Criterion 9: Within 6 months from having referenced or updated the referencing report, Member States and other participating countries shall

publish the referencing report and provide relevant information for comparison purposes on the relevant European portal.

This criterion is addressed.

Provision for addressing this criterion is clearly evident.

Criterion 10: Further to the referencing process, all newly issued documents related to qualifications that are part of the national qualifications frameworks or systems (e.g. certificates, diplomas, certificate supplements, diploma supplements) and/or qualification registers issued by the competent authorities should contain a clear reference, by way of national qualifications frameworks or systems, to the appropriate EQF level.

This criterion is addressed.

END

Annex 5. Letters of endorsement

A joint letter of endorsement from the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfENI) and the Department for Education, Northern Ireland (DENI) and a letter of endorsement from QAA are provided below.

Letters will follow from the Department for Education (DfE, England), and the Office for Students (OfS) in the coming weeks, and prior to the EQF Advisory Group presentation on 11th June 2019.



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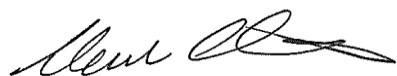
Wednesday 15th May 2019

To whom it may concern,

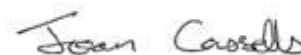
**Re: Referencing the Qualifications Frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the
European Qualifications Framework**

On behalf of the Department for the Economy (DfE) and the Department for Education (DE), I can confirm that the report fully reflects the education and training landscape in Northern Ireland and that Departmental officials Clement Athanasiou (DfE) and Joan Cassells (DE) are happy to endorse the final report.

Yours faithfully,



Clement Athanasiou
Vocational Education Policy Branch



Joan Cassells
14-19 Curriculum Entitlement Team

*Referencing the Qualifications Frameworks of England and Northern Ireland to the
European Qualifications Framework*



10 May 2019

Chief Executive
Douglas Blackstock

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To whom it may concern

QAA can confirm that it has been involved in the updating of the Referencing of the RQF and FHEQ to the EQF process in 2019. Dr Alison Felce has represented the QAA on the Steering Group established to oversee this process, that she has worked with Ofqual and CCEA Regulation on the production of the report and that the QAA has had opportunity to input to and comment on the various drafts and the final version of the updated referencing report.

I can confirm on behalf of QAA that the report reflects the current quality assurance arrangements in England and Northern Ireland in respect of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), of the key quality assurance role of QAA in those arrangements and that QAA is happy to endorse this updated referencing report.

Yours faithfully

Douglas Blackstock
Chief Executive



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