

Credits/ Awards/ Certificates/Diplomas?? What does it all mean?

If you are confused by acronyms such as NQF, QCF, QCA, OFQUAL, QCF, QCDA, RRQ, NDAQ, AO and APL, and are unsure what the difference is between an Award, Certificate and Diploma, then rest assured that you are not alone !

An overview of the current situation.

First of all, here are the meanings of those acronyms:

NQF - National Qualifications Framework

QCF - Qualifications and Credit Framework

QCA - Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

OFQUAL - Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation

QCDA - Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency

RRQ - Register of Regulated Qualifications

NDAQ - National Database of Accredited Qualifications

AO - Awarding Organisation

APL - Accredited Prior Learning

How it was....

In the past the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) accredited qualifications, and approved and regulated awarding organisations (such as the ABC/ITEC/VTCT). Qualifications run by these approved awarding bodies were on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) is the Government framework for recognising achievement. It is taking over from the NQF. The Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA) is the Government agency that is responsible for developing the curriculum, improving and delivering assessments, and reviewing and reforming qualifications. The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (OFQUAL) is now responsible for the regulation of qualifications, examinations and assessments. Basically the QCDA develops and OFQUAL regulates. Details of qualifications that are accredited by the regulators of external qualifications are listed on the Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ), formerly known as the National Database of Accredited Qualifications (NDAQ).

The Move to a Credit-Based System

Qualifications on the QCF are made up of one or a number of units. Each unit is awarded a number of credits. The number of credits given to a unit is determined by the number of notional hours of study - 1 credit equals 10 hours of notional learning. The total number of credits from all the units included in a qualification determine whether the qualification is categorised as an Award, Certificate or Diploma.

1-12 credits = Award

13-36 credits = Certificate

37+ credits = Diploma

Within each of these 3 categories the difficulty of the qualification is indicated by the level. There are 8 levels, Level 1 - Level 8, where Level 1 is the easiest and Level 8 is the most difficult. You could therefore feasibly have a Level 3 Award, Certificate and Diploma in the same subject. It means that the content was of the same difficulty to learn but less hours were required to learn it - indicating less content.

Many units held on the QCF are used by different awarding organisations (AOs). The "sharing" of these units means that the credit awarded is accepted as accredited prior learning (APL) by other awarding organisations. Some units appear in more than one qualification and the credit can be transferred. This makes for more flexible career pathways with reduced repetition. The "sharing" also allows learners to gain credit towards qualifications from more than one AO.

What does this mean for you?

When you are selecting your course it is important that it is the right one for you. You want to make sure that you take advantage of being able to transfer the credit awarded.

For example: Anatomy & Physiology has always been a major component (and often pre-requisite) for complementary therapy qualifications. If you want to take an accredited course and study your chosen therapy to the standard of a Level 3 Diploma (the industry standard), as of 1/9/2012 one of the four QCF units that is included is the R/503/7640 - Knowledge of Anatomy, Physiology and Pathology for Complementary Therapies. This is a shared unit and so will be recognised as accredited prior learning by other awarding organisations so it could be ABC/ITEC/VTCT or any other awarding body that offers QCF qualifications.