An update from the regulator - regulating for valid vocational qualifications

Bryan Horne, Associate Director – Standards for Vocational Qualifications and Apprenticeships
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Areas to cover

- The role of vocational qualifications

- Validity in vocational qualifications

- Introducing the RQF

- Accessing information about qualifications

- Promoting confidence in vocational qualifications

Where do qualifications fit into the vocational system?

Qualifications should not be an end in themselves (but often seen that way)

> What matters is skills and knowledge

> Not all learning should lead to a qualification

Many factors other than qualifications drive a healthy vocational education and training system, e.g.:

> good teaching and learning

> good careers advice

> good student choices

> employer input

But qualifications are important in signalling achievement, and so supporting progression

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What makes a qualification sufficiently valid?

- Should assess effectively the skills and knowledge taught in the qualification
- Should enable results to be trusted as a measure of what a person can do
- Purpose and content should meet the needs of end users e.g. employers
- Should be kept under regular review
  - Whole lifecycle is important: from design of qualification to evaluation of assessment
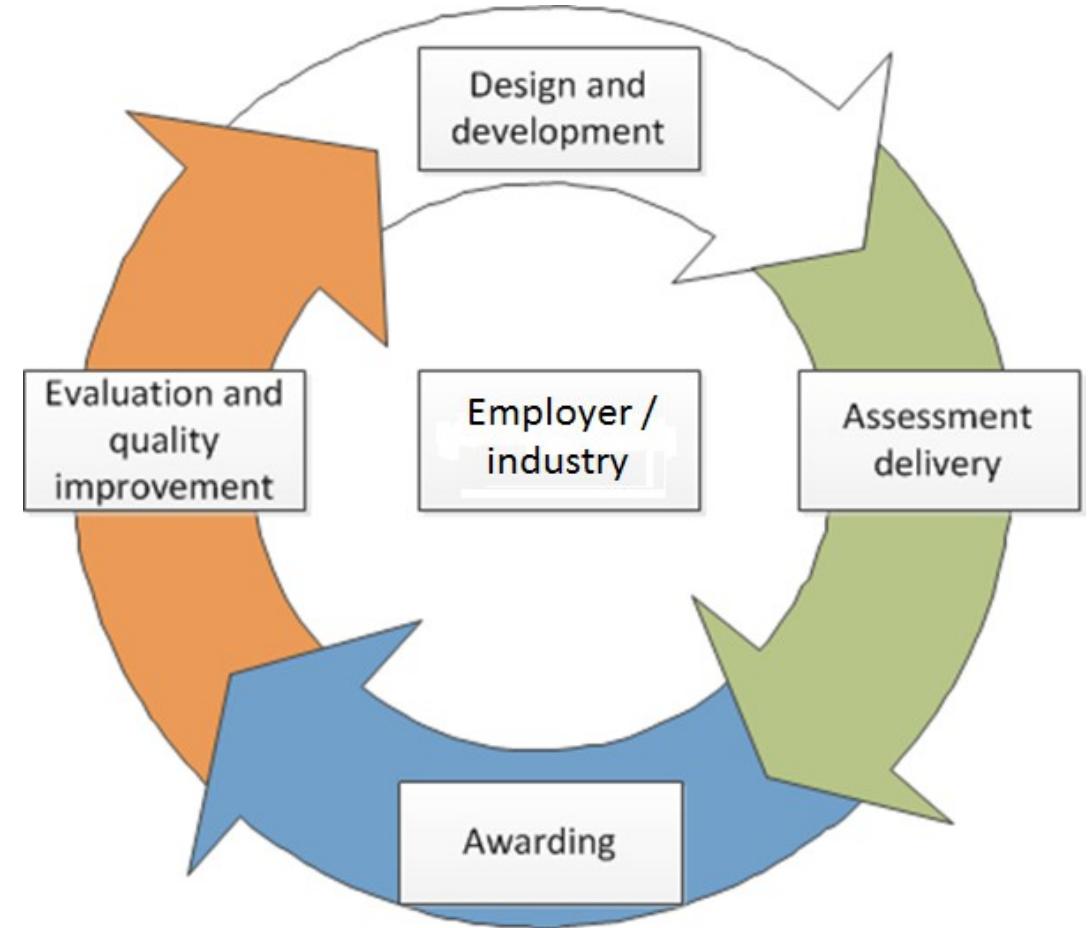
Validity – trade-offs

Ofqual regulates so that qualifications are sufficiently valid and trusted

The idea of sufficient validity acknowledges that qualification design involves trade-off and compromise. All sorts of trade-offs and compromises are made when designing qualifications

Trade-offs might happen through lifecycle – '*bucket brigade metaphor*'

Withdrawal of the QCF

Intention of the QCF was to give learners maximum flexibility by requiring:

  unit-based qualifications described by level and size and awarded using credits

  mechanisms to allow accumulation and transfer of credit to build up qualifications

The reality was:

  Not enough focus on quality, too much on meeting design rules that were inflexible

  Unitisation did not work for all types of qualifications

  No real evidence of supporting social or labour mobility

Withdrawal of the QCF

- September 30 2015 – formally withdrew the rules governing the QCF

- No new design rules and no forced changes to qualifications
  - Not asking awarding organisations to change all of their existing qualifications
  - QCF in qualification titles being phased out between now and end of 2017
  - Awarding organisations still have to comply with all our Conditions

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Introducing the RQF

- October 1 2015 – launched the Regulated Qualifications Framework

- Framework to help understand qualifications in a consistent way

Downloadable 'postcard' available at:
www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulated-qualifications-framework-a-postcard
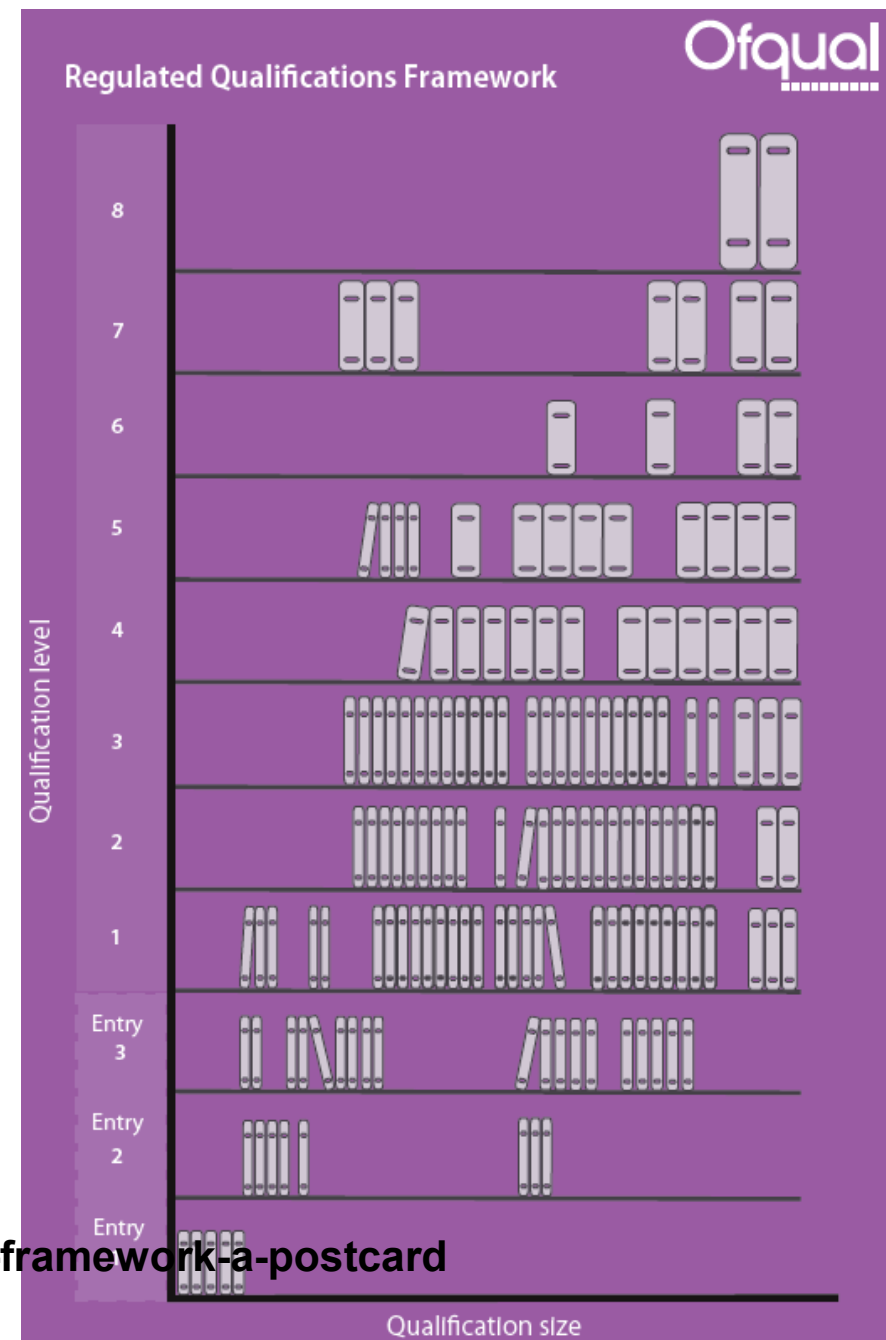
Introducing the RQF

- Levels - Entry level 1 to Level 8
    - Same levels of demand, same numbers, but using updated level descriptors
    - Still align with European Qualifications Framework and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

- Size – Total Qualification Time
    - More accurate approach to describing size, still includes Guided Learning Hours
    - An indication of how long a typical learner might take to study a qualification, including the time spent on individual study

- Qualifications can still be broken down into units and assigned credits
    - If the awarding organisation judges that it is the most valid way of meeting a qualification's purpose

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The Register

alpharegister.ofqual.gov.uk

Confidence in vocational qualifications

What might promote confidence in VQs?

Qualifications are grounded in and built round the needs of end users (e.g. employers)

Employers and others understand qualifications and can see they do what they are meant to

Students and their teachers have ready access to information about qualifications and the progression opportunities they offer

Where there are problems with qualifications, action is taken

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Confidence in vocational qualifications

Ofqual is doing its bit:

- Engaging in public debate about VQs to build understanding

- Discussing with employers and Government the need for credible skills standards

- Developing the Register to improve access to information about qualifications

- Requiring awarding organisations to keep their qualifications under review

- Following up intelligence about problems and preparing to take regulatory action where it is justified

Are there other things we should be doing?

Next steps

- Awarding organisations should focus on the validity of their qualifications – design and ongoing delivery

- We will aim to provide stable, transparent, evidence-based regulation

- We will develop the information we provide to users about the qualifications we regulate

- We will continue to advise Government on where qualifications fit into VQ and apprenticeship reform, and take forward functional skills reform

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Questions

Bryan Horne
Associate Director - Standards for Vocational
Qualifications and Apprenticeships, Ofqual

T: 02476 716729
M: 0791 2775036

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