Assessing the Role and Rigour of Post-16 Qualifications

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Areas to cover

- About Ofqual

- The role of vocational qualifications

- Validity in vocational qualifications

- Introducing the RQF

- Accessing information about qualifications

- Promoting confidence in vocational qualifications

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About Ofqual

- We are the regulator of qualifications in England (except for degrees) and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland*
  - c160 recognised awarding organisations to offer regulated qualifications
  - c22,500 regulated vocational qualifications on our register

- We are a non-ministerial Government department, and we regulate assessment and qualifications
 - Not quality of teaching, not curriculum, performance table, or funding decisions

"We regulate so that qualifications are sufficiently valid and trusted"
(Corporate Plan, 2015-18)

Where do qualifications fit into the vocational system?

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

- Many factors other than qualifications drive a healthy vocational education and training system

- 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
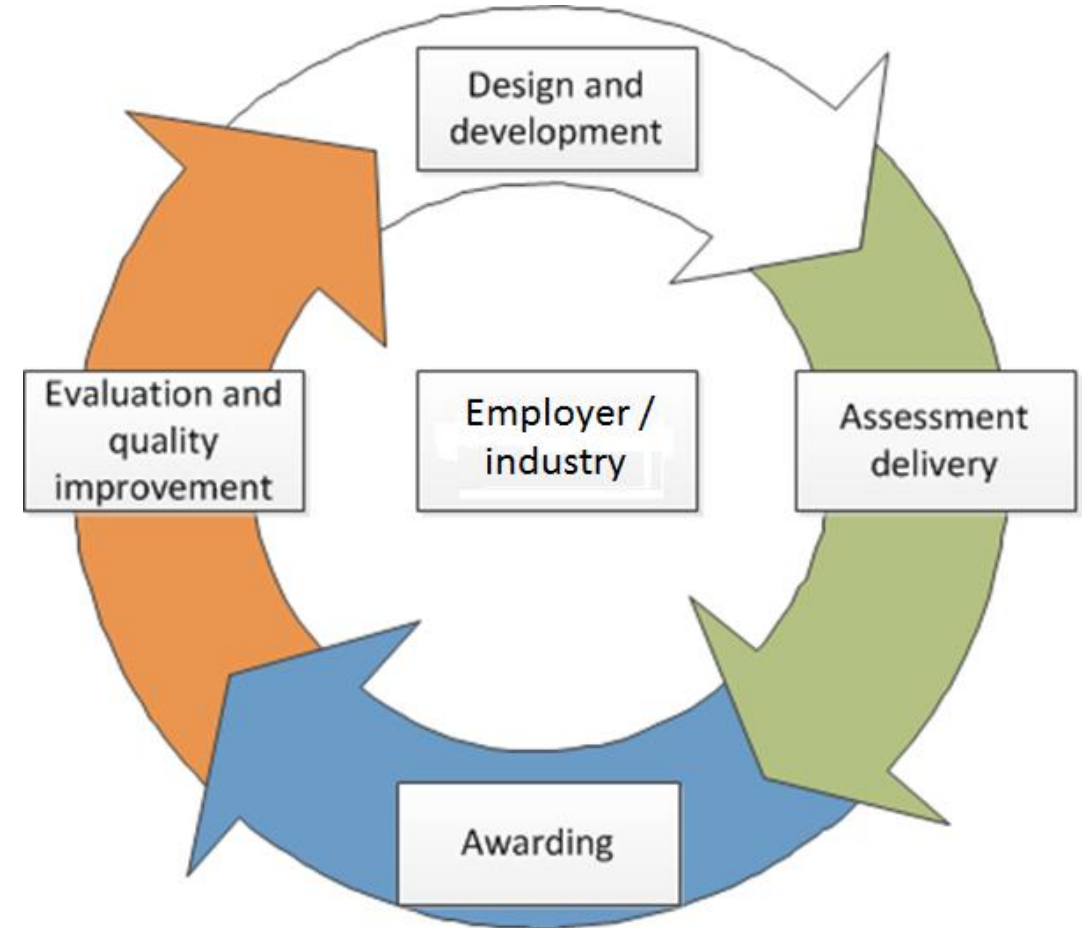
Withdrawal of the QCF

- Intention was to give maximum flexibility by requiring:
  - unit-based qualifications described by level and size and awarded using credits

- The reality was:
  - Not enough focus on quality, too much on meeting inflexible design rules
  - Unitisation did not work for all types of qualifications
  - No real evidence of supporting social or labour mobility

- 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

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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**
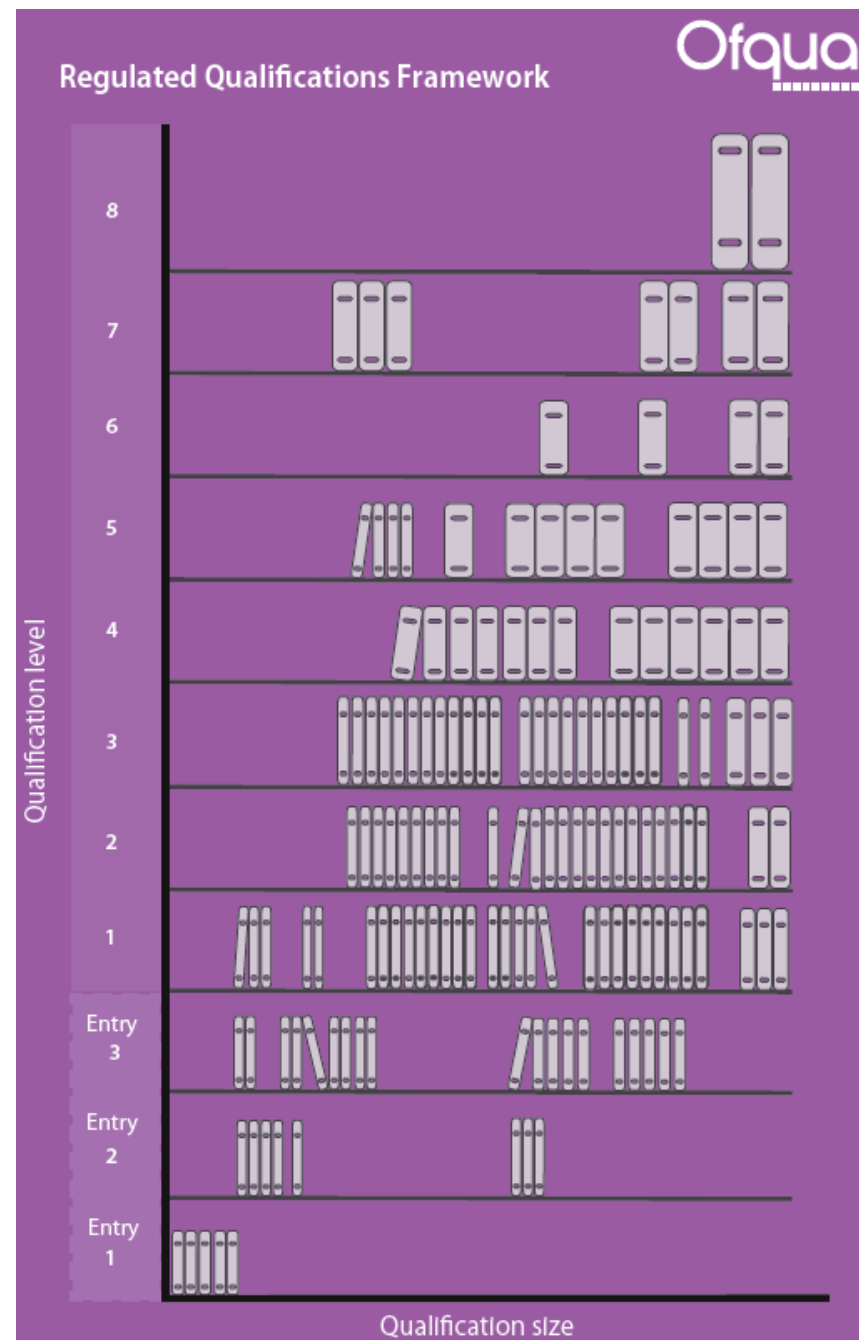
Confidence in vocational qualifications

■ 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?

Functional Skills Reform

- There are some skills that are fundamental: to be successful in life and at work, people must be able to read and write and to use numbers with confidence.

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- Ofqual looked at these qualifications in 2014 and found that, whilst they were not broken, there was room to improve the offer. ETF published '*Making maths and English work for all*' which came to a similar conclusion

- Government wants everyone has an appropriate opportunity to improve their maths and English skills and achieve a credible employer recognised qualification

- The purpose of the programme is to make sure that the regulation of maths and English Functions Skills qualifications allows the development and award of valid qualifications, and reflects any policy changes to the qualifications

- We are looking at reform of Functional Skills Qualifications as a whole; including qualifications and the regulation framework. In particular, we are looking at standard setting and assessment issues.

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New GCSE grading structure from 2017

NEW GCSE GRADING STRUCTURE	CURRENT GCSE GRADING STRUCTURE
9	
8	A*
7	A
6	B
5	
4	C
3	D
2	E
	F
1	G
U	U

GOOD PASS (DfE)
5 and above = top of C and above

AWARDING
4 and above = bottom of C and above

GCSE, AS and A level reforms in England
New GCSE grading structure

Reformed GCSEs will be introduced gradually over three years from September 2015. They will be graded from 9 to 1, instead of A* to G. Students taking GCSEs over this period will therefore receive a mixture of 9 to 1 and A* to G grades.

9 to 1
GCSE

Students will not lose out as a result of the changes. We will use a statistical method (known as comparable outcomes) in 2017 so that:

- broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 4 and above as currently achieve a grade C and above
- broadly the same proportion of students will achieve a grade 7 and above as currently achieve a grade A and above
- the bottom of grade 1 will be aligned with the bottom of grade G
- grade 5 will be awarded to around the top third of students gaining the equivalent of a grade C and bottom third of a grade B. This has been defined as a good pass by the Department for Education.

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