



# Vocational Qualifications

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## Introduction

This document provides technical and background information on the vocational qualification achievement tables published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

Information on the achievement of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs) and Qualification and Credit Framework Qualifications (QCFs) in England and Wales is taken from the vocational qualifications database held by the Department for Education (DfE) and from information supplied by OfQual.

The tables provide detailed breakdowns for those vocational qualification achievements that are submitted to the vocational qualifications database. A comprehensive time series of vocational qualification achievements based on OfQual data is published as part of the Further Education and Skills Statistical First Release (Table 16):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/learner-participation-outcomes-and-level-of-highest-qualification-held>

Due to changes in data sharing arrangements between BIS and DfE, tables for the 2014/15 academic year are for England and Wales only.

The tables are published at the FE Data Library:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-vocational-qualifications--2>

## **TABLES**

Table 1: Achievement of NVQs/SVQs by Gender, Academic Age, Centre Type, Region and Country, by Level of Achievement, 2014/15, England and Wales

Table 2: Achievement of NVQs/SVQs by Sector Subject Area, by Level of Achievement and Gender, 2014/15, England and Wales

Table 3: Achievement of VRQs by Gender, Academic Age, Centre Type, Region and Country, by Level of Achievement, 2014/15, England and Wales

Table 4: Achievement of VRQs by Sector Subject Area, by Level of Achievement and Gender, 2014/15, England and Wales

Table 5: Achievement of QCFs by Type of Achievement, Gender, Academic Age, Centre Type, Region and Country, by Level of Achievement, 2014/15, England and Wales

Table 6: Achievement of QCFs by Type of Achievement and Sector Subject Area by Gender, Academic Age and Level of Achievement, 2014/15, England and Wales

Table 7: Achievement of NVQs/SVQs by Region and Local Authority by Gender, Academic Age, Level of Achievement and Assessment Centre, 2014/15, England.

Table 8: Achievement of VRQs by Region and Local Authority by Gender, Academic Age, Level of Achievement and Assessment Centre, 2014/15, England.

Table 9: Achievement of All QCFs by Region and Local Authority by Gender, Academic Age, Level of Achievement and Assessment Centre, 2014/15, England.

Table 9a: Achievement of QCF Awards by Region and Local Authority by Gender, Academic Age, Level of Achievement and Assessment Centre, 2014/15, England.

Table 9b: Achievement of QCF Certificates by Region and Local Authority by Gender, Academic Age, Level of Achievement and Assessment Centre, 2014/15, England.

Table 9c: Achievement of QCF Diplomas by Region and Local Authority by Gender, Academic Age, Level of Achievement and Assessment Centre, 2014/15, England.

These tables are supplementary to the Statistical First Release on Post-16 Education and Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held published at 09.30 on 23rd March 2016.

## TECHNICAL NOTES

### SOURCES

1. The two main sources of information on the number of vocational qualification achievements are databases maintained by OfQual and the DfE. OfQual statistics on the numbers of NVQs achieved are collected from all NVQ awarding organisations. The vocational qualifications database (formerly known as the National Information System for Vocational Qualification, NISVQ) collects candidate level information on the achievement of all types of OfQual regulated vocational qualifications in the UK. These data are currently provided by three of the largest awarding organisations (City and Guilds, EDEXCEL Ltd and OCR, and a further 66 awarding organisations which provide candidate level information on the achievement of vocational qualifications, in particular NVQs, SVQs, VRQs and QCFs. Note that the vocational qualifications database counts the number of vocational qualifications achieved between 1 October and 30 September each year, not the number of individuals achieving vocational qualifications.
2. OfQual are responsible for the quality assurance of vocational qualifications i.e. regulation and monitoring of implementation. OfQual regulates proposals by more than 150 awarding organisations (which include single organisations and 'joint' awarding organisation partnerships) to deliver vocational qualifications. The OfQual figures are based on aggregate quarterly returns of the numbers of qualification certificates issued. These are sent to OfQual by all awarding organisations. The awarding organisations' returns cover all certificates issued by quarter.
3. OfQual information is the most comprehensive and up to date source of aggregate numbers of vocational qualifications achieved. The numbers can be broken down by level and OfQual Sector Subject Area, which classifies vocational qualifications into one of 15 subject areas. Awarding organisations do not provide information about the candidate to OfQual but information needs to be available for submission to the vocational qualifications database.

### NVQs/SVQs

4. As part of the vocational qualifications database project the DfE obtains a file (available on the OfQual website) which gives quarterly and annual totals (October-September) of NVQ achievements by sector subject area and level. These are provided to OfQual by awarding organisations. The DfE use these totals to 'gross up' the more detailed NVQ achievement information, collected from the awarding organisations that participate in the vocational qualifications database, in order to produce UK NVQ estimates. UK NVQ/SVQ estimates are based on grossed-up numbers of NVQs, plus all SVQs as submitted to the vocational qualifications database by awarding organisations.
5. Robust UK NVQ/SVQ estimates have been possible over recent years because of general increases in the coverage of NVQs on the vocational qualifications database, which is measured against the total number of NVQs regulated by OfQual in a year. This has been well over 90% for a number of years.
6. Until 2007/08, NVQ achievements (received by the vocational qualifications database) were grossed to OfQual NVQ aggregate figures using NVQ Framework Area classifications, but because NVQ Framework Area classifications are no longer maintained by OfQual, it was necessary to change the grossing methodology. So since 2008/09 NVQ achievements have been 'grossed' to OfQual NVQ aggregate figures using Sector Subject Areas, which are maintained by OfQual and provide the best means of grossing NVQs in a nature comparable to earlier years.
7. From 2013/14 onwards, NVQ achievements will not be grossed to OfQual NVQ aggregate figures as the numbers are now very small.

## **VRQs**

8. Until 2010/11, the number of reported VRQs had grown year on year since their inception enabling more detailed analyses to be presented. In the last three years as the move to QCF qualifications has gathered pace, there has been the expected reduction in the number of VRQ achievements. In 2001/02 the vocational qualifications database received information on the achievement of VRQs from only three awarding organisations. The vocational qualifications database collects information for each achievement – classified according to the features of the qualifications, e.g. level, subject, characteristics of candidates, and the location of the assessment centre. However, whilst the coverage of VRQs on the vocational qualifications database is very good it is not fully comprehensive.

## **QCFs**

9. The vocational qualifications database only collects the achievement of qualifications (not units). There are three types of QCF qualifications: Awards (1 to 12 Credits); Certificates (13 to 36 credits) and Diplomas (37 credits or more). All three types of QCF can be achieved at any level. This is because the 'type' indicates the size of the qualification, rather than its difficulty. The title of a qualification should indicate its difficulty, how long it will take the average learner to complete, and its general content.
10. Only those achievements notified to the vocational qualifications database by participating awarding organisations are reported on. The vocational qualifications database seeks to collect information for each QCF achievement on the same basis as for VRQs. As yet, whilst the coverage of QCF qualifications on the vocational qualifications database is good it is not fully comprehensive.

## **Other Regulated Vocational Qualifications**

11. For regulated vocational qualifications other than NVQs, SVQs, VRQs and QCFs it is very difficult to establish a complete and accurate picture of the numbers of qualifications achieved. Consequently, whilst some information on other types of qualifications is collected, it is not analysed or included in the table pack.

## **Classification Systems Used in the Tables**

12. This commentary presents information on qualification achievements broken down by Sector Subject Area (SSA). SSA's are classifications of Business Areas as determined by OfQual. They enable the classification of particular subjects in two Tiers. Tier 1 is a broad grouping of values and is used in this commentary. Tier 2 is a more precise 'lower level' classification level with over 50 values, but is not used in this commentary. SSA's are applicable to all types of vocational qualifications and are available for all NVQ, SVQ, VRQ and QCF qualification achievements recorded on the vocational qualifications database.

## **DEFINITIONS**

13. **Academic Age** – academic age is the age of the person at the start of the academic year, for example, academic age in 2011/12 would be age at 31 August 2011. Academic age has been used throughout this commentary.
14. **Administering Body** – the organisation that administers a qualification and therefore holds records of the achievement. The vocational qualifications database collects information on qualifications administered by a number of awarding organisations and therefore includes joint achievements made in collaboration with smaller awarding organisations. This is the definition of administering body used for vocational qualifications database purposes.

- 15. Assessment Centre** – an organisation (such as a school, college or workplace) accountable to an awarding organisation for the assessment arrangements leading to an achievement, i.e. the centre that assessed, examined or administered the achievement. This is not necessarily where the training or study took place, or where the candidate is living.
- 16. Awarding Organisation** – an organisation or consortium recognised by a regulatory authority for the purpose of administering specified qualifications, eg an organisation such as City and Guilds which is responsible for administering vocational qualifications. Where an awarding organisation offers a qualification jointly with another organisation, it is known as a 'Joint Awarding Organisation'.
- 17. Achievement of NVQs** – only certifications of NVQs are included in OfQual and vocational qualifications database information, certifications of NVQ units are not collected through the vocational qualifications database and consequently are not included in this commentary. Achievements of single subjects, mixed level, and client-specific qualifications are identified and excluded from the reported vocational qualifications database results. As part of the vocational qualifications database project, a considered judgement of the size of any other qualification that appears in the awarding organisations' data is made by OfQual to identify whether the qualification is a single subject or not. This may include reviewing the content of the qualification, determining the amount of work required, and liaising with the awarding organisation concerned.
- 18. Achievement of 'Full' VRQs** – Tables 5 and 6 include achievements of full VRQs. Full VRQs at levels 1 and 2 have been identified as those which have guided learning for 325 hours or more which gives a qualification width of 80% or more. Full VRQs at level 3 have been identified as those which have guided learning for 595 hours or more which would also give a qualification width of 80% or more.
- 19. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ)** – national vocational qualifications regulated by OfQual are competence-based qualifications built on national occupational standards and criteria established by OfQual.
- 20. NVQ level** – each competence-based full qualification is assigned to one of five levels:
- NVQ level 1:** competence, which involves the application of knowledge and skills in the performance of a range of varied work activities most of which may be routine and predictable.
- NVQ level 2:** competence, which involves the application of knowledge and skills in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts. Some of the activities are complex or non-routine, and there is some individual responsibility or autonomy. Collaboration with others, perhaps through membership of a work group or team, may often be a requirement.
- NVQ level 3:** competence, which involves the application of knowledge and skills in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy, and control or guidance of others is often required.
- NVQ level 4:** competence, which involves the application of knowledge and skills in a broad range of complex, technical, or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources is often present.
- NVQ level 5:** competence, which involves the application of skills and a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often

unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often a significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources feature strongly, as do personal accountabilities for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.

- 21. Qualification** – in this commentary, a qualification is a certification that a person has met the required national standards of competence, or practical or theoretical knowledge.
- 22. Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF)** – the Qualification and Credit Framework is regulated by OfQual, DfES (Wales) and CCEA (N Ireland). The QCF is a system for recognising skills and qualifications. It does this by awarding credits for qualifications and units (small steps of learning). Each unit has a credit value. This value specifies the number of credits gained by learners who complete that unit. The flexibility of the system allows learners to gain qualifications at their own pace along routes that suit them best. The QCF allows achievements to be recognised and recorded through the award of credits and qualifications. It supports the accumulation and transfer of credits and the easy identification of each achievement's level and size. In this way, learners have maximum flexibility and range of opportunities and can be reliably recognised for their achievements.
- 23. Regulatory Body** – an organisation designated by Parliament to establish national standards for qualifications and to secure compliance with them. OfQual regulates all external qualifications in England, and NVQs in Wales and Northern Ireland and works with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to ensure that NVQs and SVQs remain aligned.
- 24. Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ)** – the Scottish equivalent of an NVQ, regulated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority.
- 25. Unit** – an NVQ/SVQ is constructed of units with content expressed as assessable outcomes of learning. A unit is the smallest part of a qualification that can be separately certified.
- 26. Vocational Qualification** – a qualification designed to fit a person for employment.
- 27. Vocationally Related Qualifications (VRQs)** – vocational qualifications which have been regulated by the Regulatory Authorities for inclusion in the National Qualifications Framework and which therefore meet the relevant criteria for regulated qualifications. Accreditation of VRQs commenced in April 2000.

## Related Publications

**BIS SFR** – Post-16 Education and Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learner-participation-outcomes-and-level-of-highest-qualification-held>

**Vocational Qualification tables** - SFR Supplementary Tables

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fe-data-library-vocational-qualifications--2>

**DfE SFR 37/2015** – GCSE and Equivalent Results in England, 2014/15 (Provisional)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-gcse-and-equivalent-results-in-england-2014-to-2015> This SFR provides information on the overall achievements of young people in GCSE and equivalent examinations in 2015.

**DfE SFR 03/2016** – GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results in England, 2014/15 (Revised)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/a-level-and-other-level-3-results-2014-to-2015-revised>

This SFR provides information on the overall achievements of young people in GCE/Applied GCE AAS level and equivalent examinations in 2014.

**DfE SFR 11/2015 – Level 2 and 3 Attainment by Young People in England Measured Using Matched Administrative Data: Attainment by Age 19 in 2014**  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/level-2-and-3-attainment-by-young-people-aged-19-in-2014>

## **Queries**

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