



# Guide to the Education Systems of the UK

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# Introduction

This guide is designed to support the understanding and recognition of UK qualifications around the world. It provides a comprehensive and accessible resource for credential evaluators and others seeking information on the education systems and qualifications of the UK.

It includes descriptions of [school](#), [technical and vocational education](#), [further education](#) and [higher education](#), with information on the main types of qualifications awarded. It also provides details of the [regulation and quality assurance](#) of UK qualifications and the [national qualifications frameworks](#) they belong to.

In addition to information on the current system and qualifications, the [appendices](#) include information on [previous qualifications frameworks](#), and [legacy awarding bodies](#) and [qualifications](#), to assist with the understanding and recognition of qualifications which are no longer offered.

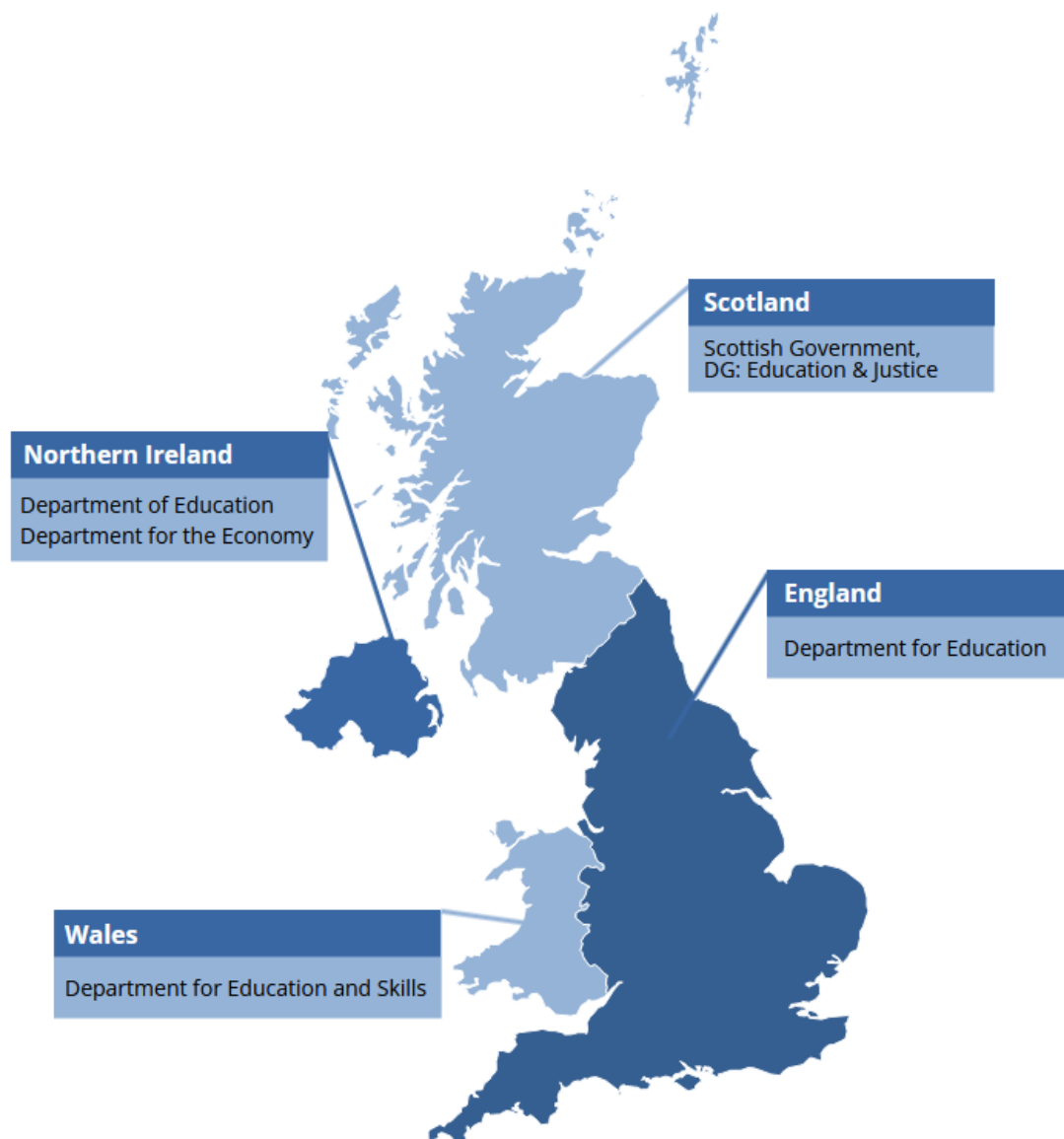
UK ENIC would like to thank the Scottish Government, Welsh Government, Qualifications Wales, the Department of Education NI and the Department for the Economy NI for their feedback and assistance with this guide.



## Overview

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Since 1998, devolution has transferred certain legislative powers from the central government in Westminster to the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament) and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Although a range of powers remain reserved to the UK Government (for example, national security, the constitution and foreign affairs), education is fully devolved to the governments of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.



The education systems of England, Wales and Northern Ireland remain similar, but with some divergence in recent years. The Scottish system is structured differently and offers distinct awards.



## Languages and the medium of instruction

The primary and de facto official language of the UK is English. There are a number of other languages spoken across different parts of the UK. Welsh (Cymraeg) is spoken in Wales, and has been recognised as an official language since 2011. Scots and Gaelic (Gàidhlig) in Scotland, Irish (Gaeilge) in Northern Ireland, and Cornish in Cornwall. The vast majority of speakers of these languages also speak English.

The medium of instruction at all levels of education is typically English, but is Welsh in some schools in Wales, Gaelic in some schools in Scotland, and Irish in some schools in Northern Ireland.

In Wales, there are Welsh-medium, dual language and English-medium schools. Welsh-medium education has been growing for decades and has played a key part in increasing the number of people able to speak Welsh. The Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy, Cymraeg 2050, sets targets to increase the proportion of each school year group receiving Welsh-medium education and transform how Welsh is taught to all learners, with the aim that 70% of learners will be able to speak Welsh when they leave school by 2050.

In Scotland, there are Gaelic-medium schools and Gaelic-medium education is an option made available to all.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education has a duty under the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education.

## Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories

### Crown Dependencies: Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man

Crown Dependencies are self-governing dependencies of the Crown but are not part of the United Kingdom. Crown Dependencies have their own directly elected legislative assemblies, administrative, fiscal and legal systems and their own courts of law.

There are three Crown Dependencies:

- The Bailiwick of Jersey
- The Bailiwick of Guernsey
- The Isle of Man.

Education within Crown Dependencies is administered by the local civil service. Education in Jersey is administered under the [Education \(Jersey\) Law \(revised\), 1999](#). Education in Guernsey is administered by the Education Department, which provides a range of statutory and non-statutory education, training and support services. The Department of Education, Sport and Culture operates the Isle of Man's schools and the University College Isle of Man.

With minor exceptions, education follows a similar model to England, and usually leads to the same qualifications.

Higher education is available through partnership arrangements between UK-based higher education institutions and local providers, such as Highlands College in Jersey, GTA University Centre in Guernsey and the University College Isle of Man (UCM).

Degree programmes studied in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man usually lead to a degree awarded by a [UK Recognised Body](#).

UK legislation on higher education does not cover the Crown Dependencies, so institutions are not subject to the same regulation and quality assurance as those based in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. As there is no regulatory framework for qualifications awarded by local providers, most higher education programmes lead to qualifications awarded by [UK Recognised Bodies](#).

### British Overseas Territories

The British Overseas Territories Act 2002 recognises 14 territories that retain a constitutional link with the United Kingdom:

- Anguilla
- Bermuda
- British Antarctic Territory
- British Indian Ocean Territory
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Falkland Islands

- Gibraltar
- Montserrat
- Pitcairn, Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands
- St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha (including Gough Island Dependency)
- South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands
- Sovereign Base Areas, Akrotiri and Dhekelia (in Cyprus)
- Turks and Caicos Islands.

The 2002 Act superseded the British Nationality Act 1981; the 14 territories previously designated as British Dependent Territories became British Overseas Territories and British citizenship was extended to inhabitants of all territories with the exception of those located in Cyprus.

The 14 Territories are largely self-governing with varying degrees of responsibility for domestic matters; each has its own constitution and government and enacts local laws.

Education at all levels is administered by the local government.

# National Qualifications Frameworks

## Overview

The following qualification frameworks are used across the UK:

- Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) (England and Northern Ireland)
- Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) (England, Northern Ireland and Wales)
- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)
- Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).

Previously, the following frameworks were used:

- Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) (2008-2015)
- National Qualifications Framework (to 2008)
- Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) (1999-2002).

Information on these frameworks can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

## Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)

Non-higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland fit into the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), which was introduced in October 2015.

The RQF includes general and vocational qualifications; these qualifications are regulated by the **Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)** in England and the **Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Regulation** in Northern Ireland. Qualifications regulated by Ofqual and CCEA Regulation are listed on the **Ofqual Register of Regulated Qualifications**.

The RQF consists of eight levels and three entry levels, with each level assigned its own level descriptors, broken down into knowledge and understanding, and skills. The award scope is expressed in terms of **Total Qualification Time (TQT)**, which encompasses both taught hours and self-study.

## Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)

The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) consists of levels 4-8 and includes qualifications awarded by degree-awarding bodies. It includes qualification descriptors for the outcomes and attributes associated with different types of qualifications at different levels.

The FHEQ is overseen by the **Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)**.

General and vocational education		Higher education	
Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF)		Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)	
RQF level	Example qualifications	FHEQ level	Example qualifications
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational, technical and professional qualifications</li> </ul>	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doctoral degree</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level 7 NVQ</li> <li>Vocational, technical and professional qualifications</li> </ul>	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Master's degree</li> <li>Integrated Master's degree</li> <li>Postgraduate Diploma</li> <li>Postgraduate Certificate</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Level 6 NVQ</li> <li>Vocational, technical and professional qualifications</li> </ul>	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor degree with Honours</li> <li>Graduate Diploma</li> <li>Graduate Certificate</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BTEC Level 5 Higher National Diploma (HND)</li> <li>Level 5 NVQ</li> </ul>	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation degree</li> <li>Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)</li> <li>Higher National Diploma (HND)</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BTEC Level 4 Higher National Certificate (HNC)</li> <li>Level 4 NVQ</li> </ul>	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)</li> <li>Higher National Certificate (HNC)</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCE Advanced (A) level</li> <li>GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level</li> <li>BTEC Nationals</li> <li>Level 3 NVQ</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCSE (grades 9-4 / A*-C)</li> <li>BTEC Firsts</li> <li>Level 2 NVQ</li> </ul>		
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCSE (grades 3-1 / D-G)</li> <li>Level 1 NVQ</li> </ul>		
Entry level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entry Level Certificate</li> </ul>		

## Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) includes all Scottish mainstream qualifications.

The SCQF uses two measures to describe qualifications and learning programmes: levels and credit points.

Levels indicate the level of difficulty of the learning. The SCQF Level Descriptors outline the general outcomes of learning at SCQF levels under five broad headings:

- knowledge and understanding
- practice (applied knowledge and understanding)
- generic cognitive skills (e.g. evaluation, critical analysis)
- communication, numeracy and IT skills
- autonomy, accountability and working with others.

Credit points show the volume of learning undertaken to achieve the qualification. One SCQF credit point represents 10 notional hours of learner effort by the average student.

SCQF level	SQA qualifications	Qualifications of higher education institutions	Apprenticeships and SVQs
12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional Development Award</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doctoral degree</li> </ul>	
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional Development Award</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Master's degree</li> <li>Integrated Master's degree</li> <li>Postgraduate Diploma</li> <li>Postgraduate Certificate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduate Apprenticeship</li> <li>Professional Apprenticeship</li> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional Development Award</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor (Honours) degree</li> <li>Graduate Diploma</li> <li>Graduate Certificate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduate Apprenticeship</li> <li>Professional Apprenticeship</li> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional Development Award</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor (Ordinary) degree</li> <li>Graduate Diploma</li> <li>Graduate Certificate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Graduate Apprenticeship</li> <li>Technical Apprenticeship</li> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher National Diploma (HND)</li> <li>Advanced Diploma</li> <li>Professional Development Award</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technical Apprenticeship</li> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advanced Highers</li> <li>Scottish Baccalaureate</li> <li>Higher National Certificate (HNC)</li> <li>Advanced Certificate</li> <li>Professional Development Award</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern Apprenticeship</li> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highers</li> <li>National Certificate</li> <li>Professional Development Award</li> <li>National Progression Award</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern Apprenticeship</li> <li>Foundation Apprenticeship</li> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National 5</li> <li>National Certificate</li> <li>National Progression Award</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modern Apprenticeship</li> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National 4</li> <li>National Certificate</li> <li>National Progression Award</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SVQ</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National 3</li> <li>National Certificate</li> <li>National Progression Award</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National 2</li> <li>National Certificate</li> <li>National Progression Award</li> </ul>		
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National 1</li> </ul>		



## Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)

The Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) was launched by the Welsh Government in 2003. The CQFW exists alongside the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and covers higher education, regulated vocational and general qualifications (including the Welsh Baccalaureate) and lifelong learning (utilised accredited learning, and vendor, industry and professional learning).

The CQFW is a fully inclusive learning framework, from the very initial stages (entry levels 1,2 and 3) to the most advanced (level 8). At each level there are generic descriptors, which outline the skills and aptitudes that learners are expected to have achieved.

According to the CQFW, one credit is awarded for every 10 hours of learning.

Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW)			
	General and vocational education	Higher education	
CQFW level	Example qualifications	Example qualifications	FHEQ level
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doctoral degree</li> </ul>	8
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> <li>Apprenticeships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Master's degree</li> <li>Postgraduate Certificate in Education</li> </ul>	7
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> <li>Apprenticeships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bachelor degree with Honours</li> <li>Professional Certificate in Education</li> </ul>	6
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> <li>Apprenticeships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foundation degree</li> <li>Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)</li> <li>Higher National Diploma (HND)</li> </ul>	5
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> <li>Apprenticeships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)</li> <li>Higher National Certificate (HNC)</li> </ul>	4
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCE Advanced (A) level</li> <li>GCE Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level</li> <li>Welsh Baccalaureate (Advanced)</li> <li>Access to HE</li> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> <li>Apprenticeships</li> <li>Essential skills</li> <li>Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales (from 2025)</li> </ul>		
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCSE (A*-C)</li> <li>Welsh Baccalaureate (National)</li> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> <li>Apprenticeships</li> <li>Essential skills</li> </ul>		
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCSE (D-G)</li> <li>Vocational qualifications</li> <li>Essential skills</li> </ul>		
Entry level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entry Level qualifications</li> <li>Essential skills</li> </ul>		

# Regulation and quality assurance

## Regulation of UK qualifications

Each of the four nations of the UK has its own regulatory body for general academic and vocational (non-higher education) qualifications.

General academic, vocational and technical qualifications in England are regulated by the **Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)**. Regulated qualifications are listed on the **Ofqual Register of Regulated Qualifications** which provides information on the content, level and size of qualifications, as well as recognised awarding organisations.

Academic, vocational and technical qualifications in Northern Ireland are regulated and accredited by the **Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)** under its CCEA Regulation function. CCEA is also an awarding body. Regulated qualifications are listed on the **Register of Regulated Qualifications**, which is shared with Ofqual.

Non-degree qualifications in Wales are regulated by **Qualifications Wales**. All regulated qualifications are listed in the **Qualifications in Wales (QiW)** database, as Approved, Designated or Regulated. Approved qualifications meet specific approval criteria, are specifically designed to meet the needs of learners in Wales and can be offered through publicly funded courses. Designated qualifications are non-Wales specific qualifications approved for use in publicly funded courses for young people. Other qualifications awarded by recognised awarding bodies are listed as Regulated.

In practice, many qualifications are offered across England, Northern Ireland and Wales and the regulators work closely together.

Non-higher education qualifications in Scotland are mainly awarded by the **Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)**. These include [National qualifications](#), [Higher National qualifications](#) and [vocational qualifications](#). SQA also accredits [Scottish Vocational Qualifications \(SVQs\)](#) and a range of qualifications from other providers. Schools in Scotland may also offer qualifications and awards which are not awarded or accredited by SQA.

### *Qualifications offered outside of the UK*

Many recognised UK awarding organisations offer qualifications internationally. These may be the same qualifications as they offer in the UK, or they may be different qualifications designed specifically or adapted for the international market.

Only qualifications offered in England, Wales or Northern Ireland are regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA Regulation respectively. Recognised awarding organisations may offer qualifications which are only available to learners outside of the UK, but these qualifications are not subject to regulation by these bodies.

SQA also offers qualifications outside of Scotland, including some qualifications designed specifically for the international market. Further information can be found under [Technical and vocational qualifications offered outside of the UK](#).

### *Previous regulatory bodies*

From 1997 until 2010, qualifications in England were regulated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency (QCDA). Ofqual took over this regulatory function in 2010. CCEA Regulation was established in Northern Ireland in 1998 to regulate general qualifications. In 2016, CCEA Regulation took over regulation of all non-higher education qualifications in Northern Ireland, when responsibility for regulation of vocational qualifications was transferred from Ofqual.

Qualifications Wales was established in 2015. Qualifications in Wales were previously regulated by the Welsh government.

### **Regulation of UK higher education**

Higher education is devolved to each of the four nations of the UK.

The following bodies oversee the funding and / or the regulation of higher education:

<b>England</b>	Office for Students (OfS)
<b>Wales</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)*
<b>Northern Ireland</b>	Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland (DfENI)
<b>Scotland</b>	Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

\* The Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 provides for the establishment of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) as the new regulator for higher education in Wales. HEFCW will be dissolved once the CTER is operational. More information can be found under [Higher Education](#).

Degree-awarding powers and the right to use the title of university are granted by the Privy Council, or the Office for Students (OfS) (in England since 2018). More information on [degree-awarding powers](#) and [university title \(UT\)](#) can be found under [Higher education institutions](#).

### *England*

The Office for Students (OfS) is the independent regulator for higher education in England. It was established by the [Higher Education and Research Act 2017](#) (HERA), which also sets out its powers and general duties.

The OfS maintains a list of recognised higher education providers in England. In order to be listed in the OfS Register, providers must meet a range of registration conditions set out in the OfS Regulatory Framework for Higher Education in England.

HERA gives the OfS powers to assess the quality and standards of academic experience at English higher education providers that seek, or wish to maintain registration, or apply for degree-awarding powers.

The OfS adopts a data-led, principles-based, student-outcomes focused, and risk-based approach to regulation. Once registered, each provider is regularly monitored to make sure it meets the conditions of registration on an ongoing basis.

Registration with the OfS allows higher education providers to recruit students who can access student support funding available through the Student Loans Company, to apply for a student sponsor licence from the Home Office to recruit international students, and to apply for degree-awarding powers and university title.

HERA also sets out provision for a body to be designated to perform the assessment functions on behalf of the OfS and to advise the OfS on applications from providers seeking registration or degree-awarding powers. Until 31 March 2023 this Designated Quality Body (DQB) role was held by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). From 1 April 2023 the OfS has taken on the quality and standards assessments previously carried out by the DQB.

### *Scotland*

The [Further and Higher Education \(Scotland\) Act 2005](#) sets out the Scottish Funding Council's duty to secure coherent, high-quality fundable further and higher education, and to ensure provision is made for assessing and enhancing the quality of this provision.

The SFC meets its statutory obligation for higher education provision through the Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF), Scotland's distinct enhancement-led approach to quality assurance, in partnership with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), Universities Scotland, NUS Scotland and Student Participation in Quality Scotland (Sparqs).

QAA Scotland is the quality body for higher education in Scotland. It carries out cyclical external quality assurance review for higher education institutions through an enhancement-oriented review method that from 2003 to 2021 was referred to by the title Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR). A new method, also enhancement-led, is currently in development.

### *Wales*

The [Higher Education \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) underpins the current higher education regulatory system for Wales, until the provision made under Tertiary Education and Research (Wales) Act 2022 becomes operational. It sets out the regulatory responsibility and powers of the Higher Education and Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). The Quality Assessment Framework (QAF) for Higher Education in Wales sets out the mechanisms through which HEFCW regulates and quality assures higher education providers in Wales.

Institutions wishing to become regulated higher education providers in Wales must undergo a Gateway Quality Review by a body specified by HEFCW, currently the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). Gateway Quality Reviews test higher education providers against the baseline quality regulatory requirements in Wales. An institution that successfully completes a Gateway Quality Review is able to recruit students who can access student support.

Regulated providers are required to commission an external quality assurance review at least every six years. Universities Wales have established a framework arrangement with the QAA to deliver this external quality assurance review. As part of the QAF, Quality Enhancement Review (QER) is the method by which Welsh higher education providers are reviewed.

### *Northern Ireland*

The statutory responsibility for the quality and standards of higher education in Northern Ireland rests with the Department for the Economy (DfENI), as set out under Article 102 of the [Education and Libraries \(NI\) Order 1986](#).

The current regulatory framework is based on the 2017/18 revised operating model for quality assessment. Recognised higher education providers are monitored on an annual basis through a data-led and risk-based approach known as the Annual Provider Review (APR).

A new model for quality assessment is currently under consideration.

### *The UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA)*

UKSCQA was established in 2016 to provide sector-led oversight of higher education quality assessment arrangements that are shared across the UK. It brings together the four UK regulatory and funding bodies with sector and student representative bodies from across the higher education sector, supporting a co-regulatory approach to quality and standards.

UKSCQA has strategic oversight of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code). The Quality Code sets out the key expectations associated with quality and standards for higher education providers in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In England these expectations are set out in the OfS Regulatory Framework.

### *Transnational education (TNE)*

UK higher education is subject to the same regulations and standards wherever it is offered, including programmes offered in learners outside of the UK through transnational education (TNE) provision.

Many institutions also participate in voluntary schemes to review and enhance the quality of TNE provision.

### *Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs)*

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) include professional bodies, regulators and organisations which have statutory authority over a specific profession. PSRBs set or regulate standards for entry to their professions.

In higher education, PSRBs often approve, recognise and accredit programmes of study in their respective fields that meet professional standards or enable access to a profession.

# School

## Overview

The devolved administrations of the UK govern their own primary and secondary education systems. While the system and awards offered in England, Northern Ireland, and Wales are broadly similar, the Scottish system is quite distinct from its counterparts.

### Compulsory education

In England, education is compulsory until the age of 18. In Northern Ireland, students must attend school until the end of the school year in which they turn 16. In Scotland and Wales, education is compulsory until the age of 15 or 16 (depending on when a student's birthday falls).

### Structure of the school system

The school systems are structured as follows:

#### England and Northern Ireland

	Stage	England	Northern Ireland
	Foundation stage	Early years / Reception	Primary 1-2 (Years 1-2)
Primary	Key Stage 1	Years 1-2	Primary 3-4 (Years 3-4)
	Key Stage 2	Years 3-6	Primary 5-7 (Years 5-7)
Secondary	Key Stage 3	Years 7-9	Secondary 1-3 (Years 8-10)
	Key Stage 4	Years 10-11	Secondary 4-5 (Years 11-12)
	Key Stage 5 / Post-16	Years 12-13	Secondary 6-7 (Years 13-14)

#### Wales

	School years	
Pre-primary	Early years / Reception	Foundation stage
Primary	Years 1-2	
	Years 3-6	
Secondary	Years 7-11	Post-16
	Years 12-13	

#### Scotland

	Stage	Level	School years
Pre-primary	Broad general education	Early	Early learning / Primary 1 (P1)
Primary		First	Primary 2-4 (P2-4)
		Second	Primary 5-7 (P5-7)
Secondary		Third and fourth	Secondary 1-3 (S1-3)
	Senior phase	Senior phase	Secondary 4-6 (S4-6)



## Curriculum

Each country of the UK has its own national curriculum which must be taught by all maintained schools:

- National Curriculum for England
- Northern Ireland Curriculum
- Curriculum for Excellence (Scotland)
- Curriculum for Wales.

## Primary education

The following subjects / curriculum areas are taught at primary level:

England	Northern Ireland	Scotland	Wales
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English (core)</li> <li>Mathematics (core)</li> <li>Science (core)</li> <li>Art and design</li> <li>Computing</li> <li>Design and technology</li> <li>Geography</li> <li>History</li> <li>Modern foreign languages</li> <li>Music</li> <li>Physical education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language and literacy</li> <li>Mathematics and numeracy</li> <li>Arts</li> <li>Personal development and mutual understanding</li> <li>Physical education</li> <li>The world around us.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expressive arts</li> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Languages</li> <li>Mathematics</li> <li>Religious and moral education</li> <li>Sciences</li> <li>Social studies</li> <li>Technologies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expressive arts</li> <li>Health and well-being</li> <li>Humanities</li> <li>Language, literacy and communication</li> <li>Mathematics and numeracy</li> <li>Science and technology</li> </ul>

There are no national examinations or qualifications awarded at primary level in the UK.

## Secondary education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

### Admission to secondary education

The majority of state secondary schools across the UK do not select by ability. However, in Northern Ireland and certain local authorities in England there are grammar schools, which require pupils to pass an examination to gain admission. In England, this test is known as the Eleven-Plus, and in Northern Ireland, the assessments are known as transfer tests.

Independent (private) schools may require pupils to sit an entrance examination.

### Key Stage 3 (England and Northern Ireland)

Key Stage 3 includes years 7-9 in England, and secondary 1-3 (years 8-10) in Northern Ireland.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 consists of the following subjects / subject areas:

England	Northern Ireland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• English (core)</li> <li>• Mathematics (core)</li> <li>• Science (core)</li> <li>• Art and design</li> <li>• Computing</li> <li>• Design and technology</li> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Modern foreign languages</li> <li>• Music</li> <li>• Physical education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language and literacy</li> <li>• Mathematics and numeracy</li> <li>• Environment and society</li> <li>• Modern languages</li> <li>• Arts</li> <li>• Physical education</li> <li>• Science and technology.</li> </ul>

There are no national examinations at the end of Key Stage 3.

### Key Stage 4 (England and Northern Ireland)

Key Stage 4 includes years 10 and 11 in England, and secondary 4-5 (years 11 and 12) in Northern Ireland.

In Key Stage 4, students study for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE). They may also study other qualifications at Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), such as BTEC Firsts or Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) qualifications at levels 1 and 2 in Northern Ireland.

### Years 7-11 (Wales)

Throughout secondary school (years 7 to 11) the following curriculum areas are taught which bring together traditional subject disciplines:

- Expressive arts
- Health and well-being (including relationships and sexuality education)
- Humanities (including religion, values and ethics)
- Language, literacy and communication (including English and Welsh)

- Mathematics and numeracy
- Science and technology

In years 10 and 11, learners must continue to receive teaching in each area but may specialise more in particular areas/subject disciplines.

The Curriculum for Wales is being rolled out on a phased basis: all year 7 and 8 learners will be learning under the curriculum from September 2023, to be followed by later years on a year-by-year basis.

### **Post-16 education**

A range of academic and vocational courses are offered at this level to prepare students for higher education or entry to labour market. Post-16 education is offered in secondary schools, sixth form colleges and [further education colleges](#).

## School qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

### General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE)

At the end of year 11, students sit GCSE examinations. All students sit examinations in English and mathematics. Students in England and Wales are also required to sit examinations in science. Welsh is also compulsory in Wales.

A wide range of other subjects are offered; students typically study 8 to 10 subjects.

GCSE subjects are offered by different examination boards and are regulated by Ofqual (England), CCEA Regulation (Northern Ireland) or Qualifications Wales.

The following examination boards offer GCSEs:

- AQA
- Pearson Edexcel
- OCR
- Eduqas
- Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) (Northern Ireland)
- WJEC (Wales).

WJEC offers Wales-specific GCSEs in Wales and offers qualifications in England and Northern Ireland under the name Eduqas.

In Wales, schools and colleges must usually deliver Wales-specific approved GCSEs offered by a single examination board (WJEC). In subjects where there is no Wales-specific approved GCSE, schools may choose a designated GCSE offered by any examination board (e.g. designated GCSEs offered by AQA, Edexcel, OCR or Eduqas).

Awarding organisations from other parts of the UK can offer qualifications in Northern Ireland, but qualifications for delivery by schools, such as GCSEs, must be approved by the Department for Education. Approved qualifications are listed on a database known as the NIEFQAN file.

The three largest examining boards in England offering GCSE qualifications, AQA, Edexcel and OCR, were created following the merger of a number of previous bodies in 1996. A list of previous examination boards can be found in [Appendix 2](#).

In Wales, qualifications currently taken by 14–16-year-olds are being reviewed and reformed in order to align with the Curriculum for Wales. This includes GCSEs, the Skills Challenge Certificate and a range of other qualifications that are available to learners. The new suite of GCSEs will be available for first teaching in 2025 and first certification in 2027.

In England, assessment for GCSE subjects is linear, with assessments at the end of the course, but in Wales and Northern Ireland some GCSEs allow for staged assessment during the course.

Each subject is graded on a scale of 9 (highest) to 1 (lowest) in England and A\* (highest) to G (lowest) in Wales and Northern Ireland.

In 2019, Northern Ireland introduced a C\* grade, which sits between C and B. This enabled the grades to align more closely with the 9-1 grading scale used in England.

The 9-1 grading system was first introduced in 2017 for English and mathematics and used for all subjects by 2019. Prior to 2019, pupils may have received a mixture of letter grades and numerical grades. Previously, the GCSE was graded on a scale from A\* (high) to G (low). The starred A grade (A\*) was first awarded in 1994 to recognise particularly high achievement.

A 'U' indicates an unclassified result (fail). A grade of 'C' or '4' is considered a good pass and is often required to access higher level qualifications, particularly in English and mathematics.

The following tables show how the grading systems compare.

9-1 grading structure (England)	A*-G grading structure (Wales; England and NI until 2019)
9	A*
8	
7	A
6	B
5	
4	C
3	D
2	E
1	
	F
	G
U	U

9-1 grading structure (England)	CCEA A*-G grading structure (Northern Ireland since 2019)
9	A*
8	A
7	
6	B
5	C*
4	C

3	D
	E
2	F
	G
1	U

GCSEs sit at level 1 (grades D-G / 3-1) and level 2 (grades A\*-C / 9-4) of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) and Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW).

Certificates for GCSEs are issued by the relevant examination board. WJEC certificates are bilingual in English and Welsh.

#### *GCSE short courses*

GCSE short course qualifications are available in a small number of subjects; the syllabuses occupy half the time of a full GCSE course and the resulting qualification counts as a half of a full GCSE.

#### *Tiered papers*

Tiered papers are available in some subjects, including English literature, mathematics, modern foreign languages and science subjects. A foundation tier covers grades 5-1 / C to G, and a higher tier covers grades 9-4 / A\* to D. Decisions about which paper to take are made towards the end of the GCSE course, and the two-grade overlap between tiers enables teachers to enter each pupil at the suitable level. No grades are awarded above or below the range of the tier.

#### *English Baccalaureate (EBacc)*

The English Baccalaureate (EBacc) was introduced in England in 2010 as a means of encouraging pupils to study a broad academic range of subjects at GCSE level. Those attaining a C / 5 grade or above in English, mathematics, history or geography, the sciences and a foreign language meet the requirements of the EBacc. The EBacc is a performance measure for schools rather than an award in its own right, so students do not receive a certificate.

#### **General Certificate of Education Advanced Level (GCE A level)**

The GCE Advanced level (commonly known as A level) has been offered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland since the 1950s. A levels are offered by different examination boards (see above under [GCSE](#)).

Three full A levels is the typical entry requirement for UK higher education institutions. A level courses are typically studied over two years; most students study three subjects.



In Northern Ireland and Wales, A level courses consist of two parts: Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level and Advanced (A2) level. In the first year of the A level course a student will typically sit AS unit assessments and receive an AS level qualification. In the second year students usually continue to study their chosen subjects in greater depth and if they successfully complete the course their AS level will contribute to their final A level grade for that subject.

In England, A level courses have had a linear structure since 2015, with all examinations taken at the end of the course. The Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level that had previously constituted the first part of the A level, has, as of September 2015, been decoupled from the A level in England and now exists as a one-year stand-alone award.

A levels are graded from A to E. A\* was introduced as the top grade at A level in 2010. Certificates are issued by the examination board.

### General Certificate of Education Advanced Subsidiary Level (GCE AS level)

As described under [A levels](#) above, the AS level makes up the first year of an A level course in Wales and Northern Ireland. In England, it is a standalone one-year award.

### Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification (WBQ)

The WBQ is available for students aged 14-19 in both English and Welsh. It is designed to combine traditional academic or vocational study with the development of students' personal skills.

The current WBQ is available at three levels: Foundation (level 1), National (level 2) and Advanced (level 3). The Foundation and National levels can be taken in Key Stage 4.

<b>GCSEs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>English or Welsh language</li> <li>Mathematics or mathematics - numeracy</li> </ul>
<b>Skills Challenge Certificate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Challenge (15%)</li> <li>Enterprise and Employability Challenge (20%)</li> <li>Global Citizenship Challenge (15%)</li> <li>Individual project (50%)</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting qualifications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A minimum of three additional GCSEs (grades A*-G for Foundation, grades A*-C for National) or 2 A levels (Advanced)</li> <li>Vocational qualifications.</li> </ul>

From September 2023, the Advanced Level Skills Challenge Certificate is being replaced with a new qualification called the Advanced Skills Baccalaureate Wales (Level 3). The overarching Advanced Welsh Baccalaureate framework will be discontinued to allow a focus on the new standalone skills-based qualification.

### Other qualifications

There are many other qualifications which are offered in schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. For information on vocational qualifications offered in schools, please see [Technical and vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#).

Other academic qualifications offered in schools include:

*Cambridge Pre-U*

The Cambridge Pre-U was developed as a qualification to prepare students for higher education and as an alternative to A levels.

The course has a linear structure, with examinations taken at the end of the two-year course. Cambridge Pre-U subjects can be taken separately, and are graded individually. Students may choose to combine them to achieve a full diploma.

To qualify for the full diploma a student must pass three principal Cambridge Pre-U subjects, as well as Global Perspectives and Research. One or two A levels may be substituted for principal subjects.

There are also additional short courses available in languages and mathematics.

The Cambridge Pre-U is graded as follows:

<b>Distinction</b>	D1 D2 D3
<b>Merit</b>	M1 M2 M3
<b>Pass</b>	P1 P2 P3

The Cambridge Pre-U has been discontinued, with the final examinations for most subjects held in 2023.

*International Baccalaureate*

International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes are offered by schools in many countries around the world, including the UK. In order to offer IB programmes, schools must be authorised by the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO). Authorised schools are known as IB World Schools.

The IBO offers four international education programmes:

- Primary Years Programme (PYP)
- Middle Years Programme (MYP)
- Diploma Programme (DP)
- Career-related Programme (CP).

The PYP is offered for students aged between 3 and 12 years old. There are no examinations in the PYP, but pupils complete an extended, in-depth project in the final year.

The MYP is for students aged between 11 and 16 years old. It is a five-year programme, but may be offered as a two-, three- or four-year programme in an adapted format. It is designed to prepare students for the DP or the CP.

The DP is a two-year pre-university course. The IB Diploma is awarded to students who complete the required courses. Certificates are also awarded to students who have taken single subjects, but not the full Diploma Programme.

The CP is offered to students between the ages of 16 and 19 and blends academic study with career-related and core skills study.

Certificates in individual subjects from the MYP and DP, as well as the IB Diploma, are recognised by Ofqual and Qualifications Wales. The IB is not offered by schools in Northern Ireland.

#### *Extended Project Qualification (EPQ)*

The Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) is an additional award students may take at the end of upper secondary education. It consists of a dissertation, an investigation or fieldwork, an artefact or a performance.

The EPQ is not offered in Northern Ireland.

#### *Advanced Extension Award (AEA)*

Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) were introduced in 2002 and aimed to stretch the top 10% of A level students by providing opportunities for them to demonstrate a greater depth of understanding. AEA is also intended to assist universities in their admissions procedures by differentiating between the most able candidates.

AEAs do not require any further teaching or additional content. They are designed to highlight the abilities of able students in critical thinking, analysis and creativity. AEAs are assessed by externally assessed examinations and are graded as *Merit* or *Distinction*.

This award is now only available for mathematics.

AEAs are not offered in Northern Ireland.

#### **Previous qualifications**

Information on legacy school qualifications, including the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary level (O level) and the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE), can be found in [Appendix 3](#).

## Secondary education in Scotland

### Admission to secondary education

State secondary schools in Scotland do not select by ability.

### Secondary 1 (S1) to Secondary 3 (S3)

Lower secondary education encompasses S1 to S3 and aims to provide a strong platform for later learning.

Studies are grouped into eight broad areas:

- Creative and aesthetic activities
- Language and communication
- Mathematical studies and applications
- Physical education
- Religious and moral education
- Scientific studies and applications
- Social and environmental studies
- Technological activities.

Under the Curriculum for Excellence, the number of subjects to be studied during the first three years of secondary school is determined by the school itself. In S2 and S3, students may choose to specialise in some subject areas. Religious and moral education in non-denominational schools and religious education in Roman Catholic schools is required to be taught by law for all pupils attending primary and secondary education.

There are typically no national examinations at this stage.

### Secondary 4 (S4) to Secondary 6 (S6)

Upper secondary education covers the senior phase in years S4, S5 and S6, and is for students from the age of 15 to 18 years old. These three years of education in schools and colleges are designed to prepare students for higher education, vocational training, or employment.

During the Senior Phase of Secondary Education in S4 to S6 (or earlier if they leave before S5 or S6), students undertake a range of courses leading to qualifications and awards. Schools have autonomy to plan their curriculum and most will offer a range which suits their particular circumstances and learners. There is no fixed number of subjects that students should take for any of the major awards which include, a suite of National Qualifications, vocational and technical qualifications and Youth Awards.

## School qualifications in Scotland

### National qualifications (NQs)

NQs are designed for students in secondary schools and are also offered in colleges of further education. They are offered in a range of academic and applied subjects.

NQs are designed and awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

NQs are offered at levels 1-7 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Students do not typically take NQs at all levels, instead they select them based on their individual needs, interests and aspirations.

### National 1, 2 and 3 (SCQF levels 1, 2 and 3)

National 1, 2 and 3 consist of units which are assessed exclusively by an individual's school or college and are subject to SQA's quality assurance procedures. National 1 and 2 are designed for learners who require additional support.

National 1, 2 and 3 are graded pass / fail.

### National 4 (SCQF level 4)

National 4 is assessed exclusively by an individual's school or college and is subject to SQA's quality assurance procedures. National 4 qualifications consist of units, including an added value unit, which assess breadth and / or depth of the subject. In order to pass, students must pass all of the units plus an added value unit assessment.

National 4 is graded pass / fail.

### National 5 (SCQF level 5)

This award comprises a course assessment including an exam and / or coursework. Course assessments are externally marked by SQA or in certain cases by the school or college (subject to SQA's quality assurance procedures).

National 5 courses are graded A to D or 'no award'.

### Higher (SCQF level 6)

Highers are aimed particularly at students who have passed National 5, although it is possible for some pupils to bypass National 5 qualifications. Adults wishing to study for Highers at college may not need previous qualifications.

Highers are the standard entry requirement for undergraduate study in Scotland. Courses are graded A to D or 'no award'.

Four or five Highers are commonly taken in S5 and S6 at secondary school or at a college of further education and studied in considerable depth, but this may vary depending on the school and / or individual. Highers are typically assessed by coursework and final examinations.

### Advanced Higher (SCQF level 7)

Advanced Highers are aimed at students who have passed Highers, and they are usually taken in the sixth year (S6) at school or at college. They extend the skills and knowledge gained at Higher and are additional qualifications that are useful for entry into higher education or the workplace.

Advanced Highers are graded A to D or 'no award'.

### Scottish Baccalaureate (SCQF level 7)

Scottish Baccalaureates consist of a group of qualifications, including an Interdisciplinary Project. The Interdisciplinary Project is a large unit at SCQF level 7 in which subject knowledge is applied in realistic contexts, and higher order thinking skills, such as critical analysis, evaluation, interpretation and research skills, are developed.

There are four Scottish Baccalaureates on offer in:

- Expressive arts
- Languages
- Sciences
- Social sciences.

The compulsory elements of the Baccalaureate are as follows:

Compulsory element	Qualification	SCQF level	SCQF points
Interdisciplinary Project Unit	Advanced Higher	7	16
2 eligible courses	Advanced Higher	7	64
1 eligible course	Higher	6	24

For the Languages Baccalaureate, one of the courses must be English (or ESOL or Gàidhlig). For the Science Baccalaureate, one of the courses must be mathematics (or mathematics of mechanics or statistics). For both the Expressive Arts Baccalaureate and the Social Sciences Baccalaureate, students must choose one of either English (or ESOL or Gàidhlig) or mathematics (or mathematics of mechanics or statistics). These compulsory courses may be taken at either Higher or Advanced Higher level. In addition, students choose either two core courses, or one core course and one broadening course.

### Skills for Work Courses

Skills for Work National Courses offer school students to become familiar with the world of work in a particular occupational sector. They involve a strong element of learning through practical activities. They are available at a range of levels (from SCQF level 3 to SCQF level 6) and are often delivered by a school and college working in partnership, often with workplace experience.

### Foundation Apprenticeships

Foundation Apprenticeships are taken by students in the senior phase of school (usually S5) and sit at SCQF level 6. They include elements of a Modern Apprenticeship, practical work experience and a knowledge-based qualification and can be studied alongside other qualifications such as National 5 or Highers. Part of the week is spent in the workplace to gain practical skills at college and experience in the workplace.

**SQA Awards**

Students can undertake [National Certificates \(NC\)](#) which prepare people for employment, career development or progression to more advanced study at HNC/HND level. They also develop transferable knowledge including Core Skills.

Many schools also offer [National Progression Awards \(NPA\)](#) which aimed at assessing a defined set of skills and knowledge in specialist vocational areas. They also link to the National Occupational Standards which are the basis of [Scottish Vocational Qualifications \(SVQs\)](#).

**Previous qualifications**

Information on legacy school qualifications, including Standard Grades and the Certificate of Sixth Year Studies, can be found in [Appendix 4](#).



## School qualifications offered outside of the UK

### International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE)

IGCSEs are similar to GCSEs but designed for the international market. Some independent schools in the UK also offer IGCSEs as an alternative to GCSEs.

IGCSEs are offered by four examination boards: Cambridge Assessment International Education, Oxford International AQA Examinations, Pearson Edexcel and Learning Resource Network (LRN).

Unlike GCSEs, they are not regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA Regulation. This means they do not have to follow the content specified by the government or conform to other requirements set out by the regulators for GCSEs. However, they are aligned to GCSE standards by the awarding body and widely recognised.

IGCSEs are graded on the same 9-1 scale that is used for [GCSEs](#) in England, with the exception of Cambridge IGCSEs which offer a choice of either the 9-1 or A\*-G grading system.

### Cambridge International Certificate of Education (ICE)

Cambridge ICE is a group award, including subjects drawn from several curriculum areas in the Cambridge IGCSE. It offers a balanced curriculum across a range of five subject groups:

- Group I: Languages
- Group II: Humanities and Social Sciences
- Group III: Sciences
- Group IV: Mathematics
- Group V: Business, Creative, Technical and Vocational.

The Cambridge ICE is awarded to candidates who pass at least seven IGCSE subjects, including two from Group I and one from each of Groups II to V. The seventh subject may be chosen from any of the syllabus groups.

### Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary level (GCE O level)

Cambridge GCE O level examinations are offered by Cambridge International in a number of countries and are available in over 40 subjects. They were maintained for the international market after being phased out in the UK.

GCE O level results are reported on a six-point scale, A\*-E. Ungraded (U) indicates a standard below that required for grade E.

### International General Certificate of Education Advanced level (International A level)

International A levels are modelled on UK A levels but designed for the international market. They are offered by four examination boards: Cambridge Assessment International Education, Oxford International AQA Examinations, Pearson Edexcel and Learning Resource Network (LRN).

These qualifications are not regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA Regulation. This means they do not have to follow the content specified by the government or conform to other requirements set out by the regulators for A levels. However, they are aligned to A level standards by the awarding body and widely recognised.

### **Cambridge Advanced International Certificate of Education (AICE) Diploma**

The AICE Diploma draws on the full Cambridge International A and AS level syllabus provision.

The syllabuses are divided into three groups:

- Group A: Mathematics and Sciences
- Group B: Languages
- Group C: Arts and Humanities.

To earn a Cambridge AICE Diploma, a student must pass examinations from each of these three groups.

A candidate needs to take and pass subjects equivalent to a minimum of 6 credits to obtain the Cambridge AICE Diploma. The following credit ratings apply:

- A level = 2 credits
- AS level = 1 credit
- Research Project = 1 credit.

### **International Project Qualification (IPQ)**

The International Project Qualification (IPQ) is a project-based qualification for students aged 16-19. Students complete a 5,000-word research project, enabling them to demonstrate engagement with their chosen topic beyond preparation for examinations. It is graded A\*-E in the same way as International A Levels.

IPQs are offered by Cambridge International and OxfordAQA. It is an international version of the [Extended Project Qualification](#).

# Technical and vocational education

## Overview

A wide range of vocational qualifications are awarded across the UK and sit at different levels in the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF), Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) and Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

Vocational education is offered in schools, further education colleges and through apprenticeship providers.

Technical and vocational qualifications are regulated by the **Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual)** in England, the **Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) Regulation** in Northern Ireland and **Qualifications Wales** in Wales. In Scotland, many technical and vocational qualifications are awarded by the **Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)** awarding body. Technical and vocational qualifications from the SQA awarding body and other awarding bodies can be accredited by SQA accreditation. More information can be found under [Regulation of UK qualifications](#).

## Technical and vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

There are a wide range of technical and vocational qualifications available. Nationally recognised qualifications are regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA Regulation, and are listed on the [Ofqual Register](#) and / or [Qualifications in Wales](#). In Northern Ireland, qualifications must also be approved by the Department of Education and listed in the NIEFQAN file before they can be offered by schools.

Technical and vocational certificates and diplomas awarded by many different awarding bodies.

### National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)

NVQs are based on national occupational standards. They reflect the skills, knowledge and understanding that an individual needs in order to carry out a specific job. NVQs do not require a specific time-period for completion. They may be studied by people in employment, by school / college students who undertake work placements or part-time work, and are based on work-based or simulated work-based assessment.

NVQs are available at eight levels. They are awarded by many different awarding bodies. Some of the largest include City & Guilds, NCFE, Pearson Edexcel, OCR and VTCT.

Until 2015, a regulatory framework and code of practice were in place for NVQs. These were withdrawn with the introduction of the RQF, but qualifications have the key features of NVQs (links to occupational standards, work-based assessment and conferral of occupational competence) retain use of the title.

### Vocationally related qualifications (VRQs)

Some qualifications are classified as vocationally related qualifications (VRQs). VRQs provide the knowledge and skills required for a specific job role. Unlike [NVQs](#), they are structured, study-based programmes. They usually include written assessments as well as workplace-based assessments.

VRQs are available at entry level to level 8 in a wide range of different fields and are awarded by many different awarding bodies.

### Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) (England)

HTQs is an RQF level 4 or 5 qualification, for example a Higher National Certificate (HNC), Higher National Diploma (HND), Foundation degree, Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE) or Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE), which is approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) as meeting the knowledge and skills required by a specific sector. They are developed by awarding bodies in collaboration with employers, and can be studied at further education colleges, training providers or universities.

### T levels (England)

T levels were introduced in England as a vocational qualification for students to take after GCSEs. They are based on the same standards as apprenticeships, designed by employers and reviewed by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE).

T levels are two-year courses, consisting of around 1,800 hours of study, including an industry placement of at least 315 hours (approximately 45 days).

A T level is equivalent to 3 A levels and students may progress onto an apprenticeship, skilled employment or higher education.

T levels are available in a range of subjects, such as digital business services, education and childcare, finance and health. The first courses were offered from September 2020 and the first T levels were awarded in 2022. Programmes consist of three compulsory elements: a technical qualification and an industry placement. Students are also required to work towards the attainment of GCSE grade 4 or level 2 functional skills in English and mathematics if they have not already achieved this.

T levels are awarded by a number of different awarding bodies and regulated by Ofqual. They are graded Distinction\*, Distinction, Merit or Pass.

### CCEA vocational qualifications (Northern Ireland)

The CCEA offers Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) Level 1 and Level 2 awards for Key Stage 4 students in Northern Ireland. These qualifications are designed to be occupationally oriented and can be taken alongside GCSE subjects. Awards are offered in the following occupational areas:

- Business and Services
- Construction
- Design and Creativity
- Engineering
- Environment and Society
- Technology and Innovation.

These qualifications are Awards, Certificates and Diplomas, depending on the number of hours required for completion.

Title	Total Qualification Time (TQT)
Award	10-120 hours
Certificate	121-369 hours
Diploma	370+ hours

### BTEC qualifications

#### *BTEC Firsts*

This is an initial vocational qualification at RQF levels 1 and 2, providing work-related education to those who have already chosen the broad area in which they want to work.

They can be taken in subjects such as agriculture, animal care, information technology applications, motor vehicle studies, performing arts and public services.

The courses encourage the development of personal and work-related skills, and provide a foundation either for work or progression on to further study. They can be taken by students at Key Stage 4 alongside GCSE subjects or in further education.

BTECs at this level are structured as follows:

Title	Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	Total Qualification Time (TQT)
BTEC First Award	120	160
BTEC First Certificate	240	320
BTEC First Extended Certificate	360	490
BTEC First Diploma	480	650

BTEC Firsts are assessed through a combination of internal and external assessment, and graded Distinction\*, Distinction, Merit or Pass.

BTEC Firsts enable students to progress onto higher qualifications in a similar field, such as BTEC Nationals.

### *BTEC Nationals*

BTEC National programmes are related to broad occupational areas such as engineering, fashion, music, photography, public services and sports science. They are designed to train technician-level workers and are also widely accepted for entry to higher education. They are usually taken by students after GCSEs, sometimes alongside A level subjects or other RQF level 3 qualifications.

The following BTEC Nationals are offered:

Title	Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	Equivalent in size to
BTEC Level 3 National Certificate	180	0.5 A levels
BTEC Level 3 National Extended Certificate	360	1 A level
BTEC Level 3 National Foundation Diploma	510	1.5 A levels
BTEC Level 3 National Diploma	720	2 A levels
BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma	1080	3 A levels

This suite of qualifications was introduced in 2016 to conform to the RQF. Further information on BTECs offered before 2016 can be found in Appendix 3.

BTEC Nationals are assessed through a combination of internal and external assessment. Prior to 2016, they were internally assessed. BTEC Nationals are graded Distinction\*, Distinction, Merit or Pass.

### *BTEC Higher Nationals (HNC and HND)*

The Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) are specialised vocational qualifications which enable access to higher education or employment. The HNC

is at RQF level 4, the HND at level 5, corresponding to years 1 and 2 of an undergraduate degree respectively. They typically require RQF level 3 qualifications, such as BTEC Nationals or A levels for entry.

HNCs and HNDs can be awarded by Pearson (BTEC) directly or by higher education institutions under a licence from Pearson. The former are regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA Regulation. More information on HNCs and HNDs awarded by universities can be found under [higher education qualifications](#).

HNCs and HNDs are offered in a wide range of subjects, including business, construction, engineering, health and social care, IT, media, and sport.

The qualifications consist of core units (which are compulsory) and specialist units (which are optional and designed to provide flexibility with the exact focus of the qualification).

The awards are structured as follows:

- BTEC Level 4 HNC Diploma (480 guided learning hours or 120 credits)
- BTEC Level 5 HND Diploma (960 guided learning hours or 240 credits).

A HNC programme usually lasts one year and a HND programme is studied over 2 years, when studied full-time. They can also be studied part-time.

HNDs are accepted for entry to Bachelor degree programmes in related subjects and students are often able to enter the second or third year. They are graded Distinction, Merit or Pass.

### Cambridge Technicals

Cambridge Technicals are vocational qualifications are at RQF levels 2 and 3. They are offered as an alternative to A levels or BTEC Nationals. They are designed to train technician-level workers and are also widely accepted for entry to higher education.

Cambridge Technicals are structured as follows:

Title	Guided Learning Hours (GLH)
Level 2 Cambridge Technical Certificate	180
Level 2 Cambridge Technical Diploma	360
Level 3 Cambridge Technical Certificate	180
Level 3 Cambridge Technical Extended Certificate	360
Level 3 Cambridge Technical Foundation Diploma	540
Level 3 Cambridge Technical Diploma	720
Level 3 Cambridge Technical Extended Diploma	1080

Cambridge Technicals are graded Distinction\*, Distinction, Merit or Pass.

## Technical and vocational qualifications in Scotland

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the national body responsible for the provision of most technical and vocational qualifications in Scotland. Prior to the establishment of SQA in 1997, the Scottish Vocational Education Council (SCOTVEC) performed this function. Other technical and vocational qualifications, such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are awarded by other bodies and accredited by SQA.

### Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs)

SVQs are based on the National Occupational Standards and learning takes place in the workplace. There are no formal written exams; assessment is based on evidence gathered while carrying out work activities and may be completed in the workplace, or at a college or training provider.

SVQs are offered in a range of different sectors, including accounting, business and administration, childcare and construction.

Some SVQs or SVQ Units are incorporated into other awards or programmes including HNCs, National Progression Awards and Modern Apprenticeships. SVQs combine work-based competences and knowledge.

SVQs are available at levels 4 to 11 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

### National Certificates (NCs)

National Certificates (NCs) are generally provided through colleges and are aimed at 16–18-year-olds and adults in full-time education. They are available at levels 2-6 of the SCQF. NCs are offered in a wide range of different subjects.

- NCs at SCQF level 2-3 consist of units totalling a credit value of 54 SCQF credit points, half of which must be achieved at the SCQF level of the award including 27 credit points of mandatory units.
- NCs at SCQF level 4-6 consist of units totalling a credit value of 72 SCQF credit points, half of which must be achieved at the SCQF level of the award including 36 credit points of mandatory units.

Programmes are specific to a subject or occupational area and prepare students for employment, career progression or further study at Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma level.

### National Progression Awards (NPAs)

NPAs are at SCQF Levels 2-6 and are delivered in partnership between schools or colleges, and employers. Programmes link to National Occupational Standards and assess a defined set of skills within a specialised occupational area. They are available in a range of different sectors.



NPAs are often offered by colleges as part of short courses. The number of SCQF credit points varies between awards.

### **Professional Development Awards (PDAs)**

PDAs are qualifications for people already in employment who wish to further develop their existing skills, develop new skills or change their career direction.

PDAs vary in size and exist at SCQF levels 6 to 12.

At SCQF level 6 PDAs have a minimum value of 12 SCQF credit points, while at levels 7-12 they should confer a minimum of 16 SCQF credit points. All PDAs should consist of at least two units.

### **National Units**

[National Certificates \(NCs\)](#), [National Progression Awards \(NPAs\)](#) and [Professional Development Awards \(PDAs\)](#) are made up of National Units. National Units are also qualifications in their own right. An individual would typically be expected to attend 40 hours of teaching for a National Unit. Over 5,000 National Units are available.

### **SQA Awards**

SQA Awards are flexible qualifications aimed at a range of different learners at different levels. They recognise wider achievement beyond academic and vocational subjects and are offered at SCQF levels 1-6.

Subjects offered include the following:

- Business and enterprise
- Cycling
- Employability
- Internet safety
- Leadership
- Modern languages
- Personal finance
- Scots language
- Volunteering skills.

### **Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)**

Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) are vocationally oriented programmes, enabling students to enter the workplace with relevant professional skills. Many HN Awards also allow the holder entry into the second or third year of Bachelor degree programmes.

HNCs and HNDs comprise Higher National Units which are assessed against outcomes and performance criteria to ensure national standards.

All units in revised HNCs and HNDs are allocated SCQF credit points and levels. Units are normally at SCQF levels 7 or 8. Each unit has eight SCQF credit points.

All HNCs are at SCQF level 7 and are allocated 96 SCQF points, usually taking one year to complete. All HNDs are at SCQF level 8 and are allocated 240 SCQF points, usually taking two years to complete.

HNCs and HNDs in Scotland are awarded by SQA and delivered by colleges.

## Technical and vocational qualifications offered outside of the UK

Many UK-based awarding bodies also offer qualifications internationally. These may be the same qualifications as they offer in the UK, or they may be different qualifications designed specifically or adapted for the international market.

Qualifications offered in England, Wales or Northern Ireland are regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA Regulation. Qualifications which are only offered internationally are not regulated by these bodies.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) also offers qualifications internationally.

### International BTECs

BTEC International Specialist qualifications at levels 1, 2 and 3 and BTEC International Specialist qualifications at level 4 and above are offered outside of the UK. They are similar to BTEC qualifications offered within the UK but designed for the international market.

They are aligned to the RQF by the awarding body, but are not regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales or CCEA Regulation.

### SQA Advanced qualifications

Outside of Scotland, SQA offers SQA Advanced Certificate and SQA Advanced Diploma qualifications. The qualification aims, design principles, content, assessment standards and criteria are exactly the same as for the HNC/HND qualifications and they are likewise recognised at Levels 7 and 8 of the SCQF. The Certificate typically corresponds to one year of study and 96 SCQF credit points, while the Diploma typically represents two years of study and 240 SCQF credit points.

These programmes combine theory with practice and thus prepare students for both industry and onwards study. The SQA has articulation agreements with international institutions, enabling award holders to gain access to undergraduate degree courses with advanced standing.

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are offered across the UK, but there are differences between apprenticeship provision in each of the four nations.

Apprentices are paid employees who follow a recognised training programme which combines work-based learning with off-the-job study and training, often leading to a recognised vocational qualification.

### Apprenticeships in England

In England, apprenticeship programmes are approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE). Standards for apprenticeships are developed by employer-led groups.

To ensure that apprenticeships are assessed consistently, an organisation approved by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) must be involved in the end-point assessment of apprentices. The end-point assessment organisation is independent from the training provider. External quality assurance of end-point assessments is carried out by Ofqual, except for degree apprenticeships, which sit with the Office for Students (OfS).

Apprenticeship programmes may include vocational or professional qualifications. It is a requirement for 20% of an apprentice's time to be spent on off-the-job training, such as theory, practical training or written assignments.

Apprenticeships in England are offered at four levels:

- Intermediate - RQF level 2
- Advanced Apprenticeships - RQF level 3
- Higher Apprenticeships - RQF levels 4, 5, 6 and 7
- Degree Apprenticeships - RQF levels 6 (Bachelor degree) or RQF level 7 (Master's degree).

### Apprenticeships in Wales

In Wales, the Welsh Government is responsible for the development and funding of apprenticeship programmes. Qualifications Wales regulates the qualifications in apprenticeship programmes, apart from those delivered by higher education institutions, such as degree apprenticeships.

Apprenticeships involve work-based training to gain job-specific skills alongside study towards a nationally recognised qualification through a college or training provider.

Apprenticeships in Wales are available at three levels:

- Foundation Apprenticeships – CQFW level 2
- Apprenticeships – CQFW level 3
- Higher Apprenticeships – CQFW levels 4 and 5
- Degree Apprenticeships – CQFW level 6 (Bachelor degree).

### Apprenticeships in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, apprenticeships are approved by the Department for the Economy (DfENI) and operate using regulated qualifications.

Apprenticeships are offered from level 2 to level 7.

### Apprenticeships in Scotland

In Scotland, apprenticeships are approved by the Apprenticeship Approvals Group and regulated by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). Apprenticeship frameworks are developed in partnership with employers, employer groups, relevant trade bodies, trade unions and other key stakeholders. The Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) represents employers and industry to ensure that apprenticeships meet industry needs.

Three different levels of apprenticeship are offered in Scotland: Modern Apprenticeships, Foundation Apprenticeships and Graduate Apprenticeships.

#### *Modern Apprenticeships*

Modern Apprenticeships are open to employees over the age of 16. Programmes involve work-based training and lead to the award of [Scottish Vocational Qualifications \(SVQs\)](#) in the relevant occupational field.

Modern Apprenticeships can include SVQs from SCQF level 5 up to SCQF level 11, but the majority are at SCQF levels 6 and 7.

#### *Foundation Apprenticeships*

Foundation Apprenticeships are taken by students in the senior phase of school (usually S5) and sit at SCQF level 6. They include elements of a Modern Apprenticeship, practical work experience and a knowledge-based qualification and can be studied alongside other qualifications such as National 5 or Highers. Part of the week is spent in the workplace to gain practical skills at college and experience in the workplace.

Foundation Apprenticeships generally take two years to complete, although a one-year short duration model has recently been introduced, and can lead to progression to a Modern or Graduate Apprenticeship, as well as further and higher education.

#### *Graduate Apprenticeships*

Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs) provide higher level work-based learning for employees. Graduate Apprenticeships (GAs) are industry-recognised, accredited degree-level qualifications, available from Diploma up to Master's degree level and are mapped to the SCQF at levels 9, 10 and 11. Programmes are developed in partnership with employers and the further and higher education sector.

# Further education

## Overview

Further education (FE) is defined as study after secondary education which is not higher education (i.e. not part of an undergraduate or postgraduate degree).

The FE sector includes a number of different types of college:

- **General FE colleges** offer a broad range of academic, vocational and technical courses
- **Sixth form colleges** offer A level, T level (in England) and vocational and technical courses (e.g. BTECs) for students aged 16-18
- **Land-based colleges** specialise in agriculture, land and animal sciences
- **Art, design and performing arts colleges** specialise in the arts
- **Institutes of technology** specialise in higher technical education
- **Specialist colleges** provide post-16 education for students with learning difficulties or disabilities.

Qualifications offered in the further education sector include:

## Technical and vocational qualifications

A wide range of technical and vocational qualifications are delivered by further education colleges, including BTECs, T levels, NVQs and SVQs, and HNCs and HNDs. More information on these can be found under [Technical and vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#) and [Technical and vocational qualifications in Scotland](#).

## General academic qualifications

FE colleges often offer academic qualifications, such as GCSEs and A levels to post-16 and adult learners. Sixth form colleges focus on providing RQF level 3 qualifications, such as [A levels](#), [T levels](#) and [BTEC Nationals](#), to learners aged 16-18.

## Functional and essential skills qualifications

FE colleges offer qualifications in English and mathematics with a more applied focus, as well as other qualifications to develop general skills for the workplace.

### *Functional Skills Qualifications (England)*

Functional skills Qualifications in English and mathematics are offered by Ofqual-registered awarding organisations in England. They are typically studied in further education colleges by students who do not have a GCSE in English and mathematics.

Functional Skills Qualifications are offered at RQF entry levels, as well as level 1 and level 2. At entry levels, they are internally assessed and externally moderated; at levels 1 and 2 they are externally assessed through examinations with the exception of the speaking, listening and communication component of functional skills English.

*Essential Skills Wales*

Essential Skills Wales qualifications cover key skills for life, learning and employment. They are offered in further education, work-based learning, adult community learning and alternative settings in Wales. They cover four key skills:

- Application of number
- Communication
- Digital literacy
- Employability

All Essential Skills qualifications are available from CQFW entry level 1 to level 3, except for Essential Employability Skills, which is available from entry level 3 to level 3.

*Essential Skills (Northern Ireland)*

In Northern Ireland, Essential Skills qualifications assist those aged 16 and over in the development of their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills up to level 2. Essential Skills courses are delivered regionally by further education colleges, both in their main campuses and in venues throughout the community.

Essential Skills qualifications in Application of Number and Communications are available from RQF entry level 1 to RQF level 2. At entry levels, they are internally assessed and externally moderated; at levels 1 and 2 they are externally assessed through examinations. Essential Skills ICT are available at RQF Level 1 and 2 and assessed through a portfolio of evidence.

**Distance and blended learning**

Online college courses are widely offered and enable students to study at distance without attending the college in-person. A range of qualifications, including A levels and BTECs, are offered in an online mode.

Blended learning is also widely offered; students study through a combination of face-to-face teaching and distance learning.

**Higher education in FE colleges**

Many colleges also deliver undergraduate programmes, leading to [HNCs and HNDs](#), [Foundation degrees](#) or [Bachelor degrees](#). These qualifications are usually awarded by a university partner with degree-awarding powers, but some colleges have their own Foundation degree awarding powers. For further information, see [Recognised Bodies](#), [Listed Bodies](#) and [Degree-awarding powers](#).

# Admission to higher education

In the UK, higher education institutions are autonomous and set their own admissions requirements. Higher education qualifications can also be studied in a [further education setting](#).

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, admission to Bachelor degree programmes is typically based on three [A level](#) subjects. [BTEC Nationals](#) are also widely accepted by universities. In Scotland, admission is typically based on [Scottish Highers](#) in four subjects.

Qualifications such as Higher National Certificates (HNCs), Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) and Foundation degrees also allow access to Bachelor degree programmes.

A wide range of other qualifications are also accepted, depending on the institution and programme of study.

## Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Most applications for undergraduate study are managed by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Some universities and colleges accept direct applications.

UCAS provides information to students on courses and entry requirements. Students submit their applications to universities via UCAS, which then confirms offers and acceptances from universities to applicants.

### *UCAS tariff*

The UCAS tariff enables universities and colleges to compare the wide range of different qualifications presented by applicants. Grades achieved in different qualifications are converted to tariff points.

Universities may express their entry requirements in terms of tariff points or specify particular qualifications and grades. They are not required to accept every qualification listed in the tariff; admissions decisions are made by individual institutions.

## Access to Higher Education (HE) Diploma

The Access to HE Diploma is a recognised level 3 qualification offered in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is designed to enable those without traditional qualifications to access higher education.

Access to HE courses are offered by colleges and are available in a range of subjects, including nursing, social studies and law. Courses usually last one year when studied full-time, or can be studied part-time over two or more years.

The Access to HE Diploma is regulated by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and recognised by universities for admission to undergraduate programmes.



**Foundation years**

Many universities offer foundation years for students who do not meet the requirements for direct entry to an undergraduate programme. These students may include UK students who do not have A levels or other level 3 qualifications in the required subjects or have not achieved the required grades for the degree programmes they wish to study. Foundation years are also offered for international students whose academic qualifications do not meet the requirements for direct entry.

Foundation years are not nationally recognised qualifications as they provide preparation for admission to a specific institution or programme of study. However, universities may admit students on the basis of a foundation year taken at another institution at their discretion.

# Higher education

## Overview

Higher education is an area of devolved responsibility, so England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland each have different regulatory bodies and frameworks.

### England

The **Department for Education (DfE)** is responsible for higher education in England. The English higher education sector has been independently regulated by the **Office for Students (OfS)** since 2018, as set out in the [Higher Education and Research Act \(2017\)](#). All institutions in England must be registered with the OfS in order to apply for degree awarding powers and to maintain the right to award degrees.

### Northern Ireland

The **Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (DfENI)** formulates policy and administers funding to support education, research and related activities in the Northern Ireland higher education sector.

### Wales

The **Welsh Government's Department for Skills, Higher Education and Lifelong Learning (SHELL)** is responsible for higher education in Wales. The **Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)** distributes government funding to the higher education sector and regulates student fees and the quality of education provided by institutions and institutions' compliance with other regulatory requirements. The [Tertiary Education and Research \(Wales\) Act 2022](#) provides for the establishment of the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) as the new regulator for higher education in Wales. HEFCW will be dissolved once the CTER is operational. HEFCW's current regulatory powers will transfer to CTER for a transitional period, then be replaced by a register-based regulatory system to be established by CTER.

### Scotland

The Scottish Government funds higher education in Scotland primarily through the **Scottish Funding Council (SFC)**.

## Higher education institutions

UK degree-awarding bodies (typically universities, university colleges and some further education colleges with foundation degree awarding powers) award their own qualifications.

Degree-awarding bodies are responsible for setting and maintaining the academic standards and quality of their qualifications.

## Recognised Bodies

In the UK system, degree-awarding institutions are known as Recognised Bodies. A Recognised Body can offer programmes leading to a recognised UK degree and confer the final degree.

## Listed Bodies

A Listed Body is an institution which can offer a programme which leads to a recognised UK degree, but cannot confer the final degree. A Listed Body must cooperate with a Recognised Body; only the Recognised Body may confer the final degree.

## Degree-awarding powers

For institutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, degree-awarding powers are granted by the Privy Council. Prior to 2018, degree-awarding powers in England were also granted by the Privy Council, but since 2018 have been granted by the Office for Students (OfS). Older universities operate under a Royal Charter.

A number of universities were created by the [Further and Higher Education Act \(1992\)](#) and the [Further and Higher Education \(Scotland\) Act \(1992\)](#). Prior to 1992, these institutions were polytechnics and qualifications were awarded by the [Council for National Academic Awards \(CNAA\)](#).

There are three types of degree-awarding powers, which give the right to award different degrees:

- **Foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP)**  
These powers give further education colleges the right to award Foundation degrees only.
- **Taught degree awarding powers (TDAP)**  
These powers give institutions the right to award Bachelor degrees and taught Master's degrees.
- **Research degree awarding powers (RDAP)**  
These powers give institutions the right to award research Master's degrees and PhDs. Institutions that already hold TDAP may apply for RDAP.

## University title (UT)

University status is recognised and protected by UK law. In order to use 'university' in its title, a relevant higher education provider must be authorised to do so by virtue of an Act or Royal Charter, by approval of the Privy Council, or approval of the OfS (for institutions in England since 2018). The use of the word 'university' is also restricted under the [Companies Act 2006](#).

Applicants for UT must hold TDAP, and in Northern Ireland and Scotland they are also expected to hold RDAP. There are also conditions relating to the number of students enrolled at the institution.

**Where can I find a list of recognised higher education institutions?**

In England, the **Office for Students (OfS)** maintains the Register of registered higher education providers. Lists of **Recognised Bodies** and **Listed Bodies** are published in Recognised Bodies Orders and Listed Bodies Orders for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales every few years. These are available online.

## Higher education qualification frameworks

### The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS)

The UK has two parallel framework for higher education qualifications - the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland (FQHEIS).

The frameworks adopt an outcomes-based approach to qualifications. The FHEQ and FQHEIS include qualification descriptors for the outcomes and attributes associated with different types of qualifications at different levels.

The FHEQ includes levels 4-8 and the FQHEIS corresponds to levels 7-12 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

The FHEQ and FQHEIS align with the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA).

### Credits

Across the UK, the national **Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS)** is used by many higher education institutions. In Scotland, credit is incorporated into the **Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)**. The **European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)** is also widely referred to by UK higher education institutions in transcripts where the European Diploma Supplement or Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) is produced.

CATS equates one credit (or credit point) with 10 hours of notional learning time (the time, on average, a learner takes to achieve the specified learning outcomes).

1 SCQF credit point is equivalent to 10 notional learning hours. This reflects the time spent on all activities that contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme and includes those that take place before and after delivery as well as the actual delivery itself.

1 ECTS credit equals 25-30 hours of student workload.

### Links to other UK frameworks

The UK has other qualification frameworks for general and vocational qualifications.

In England and Northern Ireland, the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) includes general and vocational qualifications. It also includes provision for higher qualifications (levels 4-8) which compare to the corresponding levels of the FHEQ.

The FHEQ also forms part of the Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales (CQFW) which encompasses all types of education and training in Wales.

The FQHEIS corresponds to levels 7-12 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).

[Qualifications can cross boundaries](#) is a document that shows how qualifications and qualification frameworks from England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Ireland compare.

Further details can also be found under [National Qualification Frameworks](#).

FHEQ	FQHEIS	Typical higher education qualifications	QF-EHEA
FHEQ level	SCQF level		
8	12	<b>Doctoral degrees</b> (e.g. PhD / DPhil, EdD, DBA)	Third cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
7	11	<b>Master's degrees</b> (e.g. MA, MSc, MPhil, MRes)	Second cycle (end of cycle) qualifications
		<b>Integrated Master's degrees</b> (e.g. MChem, MEng, MPhys)	
		<b>Primary qualifications (or first degrees) in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science</b> (e.g. MB BS, MB ChB, BDS, BVSc, BVMS)	
6	10	<b>Postgraduate Diplomas</b>	
		<b>Postgraduate Certificates</b>	
		<b>Bachelor degrees with Honours</b> (e.g. BA Hons, BSc Hons)	
		<b>Bachelor degrees</b> (e.g. BA, BSc)	
5	9	<b>Graduate Diplomas<sup>1</sup></b>	
		<b>Graduate Certificates<sup>2</sup></b>	
5	N/A	<b>Foundation degrees</b> (e.g. FdA, FdSc)	Short cycle (within or linked to first cycle) qualifications
	8	<b>Diplomas of Higher Education (DipHE)</b>	
	N/A	<b>Higher National Diplomas (HND)<sup>3</sup></b>	
4	7	<b>Certificates of Higher Education (CertHE)</b>	
	N/A	<b>Higher National Certificates (HNC)<sup>4</sup></b>	

<sup>1</sup> Graduate Diplomas in Scotland can be at either SCQF level 9 or level 10.

<sup>2</sup> Graduate Certificates in Scotland can be at either SCQF level 9 or level 10.

<sup>3</sup> Higher National Diplomas (HND) do not feature on the FQHEIS as they are not offered by universities in Scotland, but are at SCQF level 8.

<sup>4</sup> Higher National Certificates (HNC) do not feature on the FQHEIS as they are not offered by universities in Scotland, but are at SCQF level 7.

## Higher education qualifications

### Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education (CertHE and DipHE)

Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education are short-cycle higher education qualifications, at the level of the first and second years of an undergraduate (Bachelor) degree.

The CertHE and DipHE are most frequently offered as an exit award after the equivalent of one year or two years of full-time study respectively, but may also be offered as qualifications in their own right.

Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)		Diploma of Higher Education (DipHE)	
<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)	<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)
<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)	<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)
<b>FHEQ level:</b>	4	<b>FHEQ level:</b>	5
<b>SCQF level:</b>	7	<b>SCQF level:</b>	8
<b>Duration:</b>	One year	<b>Duration:</b>	Two years
<b>CATS points:</b>	120	<b>CATS points:</b>	240
<b>SCQF credits:</b>	120	<b>SCQF credits:</b>	240
<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework	<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework
<b>Grading system:</b>	Pass / fail	<b>Grading system:</b>	Pass / fail

### Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs)

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, HNCs and HNDs may be awarded by degree-awarding bodies under licence from Pearson, or directly by Pearson. Only those awarded by degree-awarding bodies fall within the FHEQ.

Pearson is an awarding organisation regulated by Ofqual, which is responsible for regulating its qualifications, including HNCs and HNDs (see [Technical and vocational qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland](#)).

In Scotland, HNCs and HNDs are awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) (see [Technical and vocational qualifications in Scotland](#)).

A HNC programme usually lasts one year and a HND programme is studied over 2 years, when studied full-time.

HNCs and HNDs are accepted for entry to Bachelor degree programmes in related subjects and students are often able to enter the second or third year.

Higher National Certificate (HNC)		Higher National Diploma (HND)	
<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)	<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)
<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)	<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)
<b>FHEQ level:</b>	4	<b>FHEQ level:</b>	5
<b>SCQF level:</b>	7	<b>SCQF level:</b>	8
<b>Duration:</b>	One year	<b>Duration:</b>	Two years
<b>CATS points:</b>	120	<b>CATS points:</b>	240
<b>SCQF credits:</b>	120	<b>SCQF credits:</b>	240
<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework	<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework
<b>Grading system:</b>	Pass / fail	<b>Grading system:</b>	Pass / fail

## Foundation degrees

Foundation degrees have been offered since 2001 and were designed in collaboration with employers in order to address skills shortages in key areas. They combine academic study with practical, commercial experience. Foundation degrees are available at universities and at colleges of further or higher education in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Upon completion of a Foundation degree, students may enter the workplace at higher technician level. Holders of a Foundation degree may also top-up their qualification to Bachelor degree level (which will require a further 12-15 months of study) or study for higher professional qualifications within their chosen field.

Foundation degree	
<b>Common titles:</b>	Foundation in Arts (FdA), Foundation in Science (FdSc)
<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions, further education colleges with foundation degree awarding powers
<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions, further education colleges
<b>FHEQ level:</b>	5
<b>Duration:</b>	Two years
<b>CATS points:</b>	240
<b>SCQF credits:</b>	240
<b>Assessment:</b>	Practical tasks, written assignments, projects, written tests
<b>Grading system:</b>	Distinction, Merit, Pass

## Bachelor degrees

### *Bachelor degrees with Honours*

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, typical undergraduate programmes last for three or four years (if taken full-time) and lead to a Bachelor degree with Honours, such as Bachelor of Arts (BA(Hons)) or Bachelor of Science (BSc (Hons)). Honours programmes are highly specialised and students focus on one or two subjects throughout the duration of their degree.

In Scotland, the Bachelor (Honours) degree is typically offered through the equivalent of four years of full-time higher education. Programmes consist of at least 480 SCQF credits of



which a minimum of 180 are at SCQF levels 9 and 10 including a minimum of 90 at SCQF level 10.

Bachelor degree with Honours			
England, Wales and Northern Ireland		Scotland	
<b>Common titles:</b>	Bachelor of Arts with Honours (BA(Hons)), Bachelor of Science with Honours (BSc(Hons))	<b>Common titles:</b>	Bachelor of Arts with Honours (BA(Hons)), Bachelor of Science with Honours (BSc(Hons)), <a href="#">Master of Arts with Honours (MA (Hons))</a>
<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)	<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)
<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)	<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)
<b>FHEQ level:</b>	6	<b>SCQF level:</b>	10
<b>Duration:</b>	Three or four years	<b>Duration:</b>	Four years
<b>CATS points:</b>	360 - 480	<b>SCQF credits:</b>	480
<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework	<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework
<b>Grading system:</b>	First class (1st), upper second class honours (2.1), lower second class honours (2.2), third class (3rd)	<b>Grading system:</b>	First class (1st), upper second class honours (2.1), lower second class honours (2.2), third class (3rd)

### *Bachelor (Ordinary) degrees*

In England, Northern Ireland and Wales, Bachelor (Ordinary) degrees are much less common. They consist of taught courses and generally cover a broader base than Honours programmes. These courses are assessed by examinations and coursework. Ordinary degrees are also known as Pass degrees.

In Scotland, the Bachelor (Ordinary) degree is typically achieved after the equivalent of three years of full-time higher education. Programmes consist of at least 360 SCQF credits of which a minimum of 60 are at SCQF level 9.

Bachelor (Ordinary) degree			
England, Wales and Northern Ireland		Scotland	
<b>Common titles:</b>	Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc)	<b>Common titles:</b>	Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Science (BSc), <a href="#">Master of Arts (MA)</a>
<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)	<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)
<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)	<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)
<b>FHEQ level:</b>	6	<b>SCQF level:</b>	9
<b>Duration:</b>	Three years	<b>Duration:</b>	Three years
<b>CATS points:</b>	360	<b>SCQF credits:</b>	360
<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework	<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework
<b>Grading system:</b>	Pass / fail	<b>Grading system:</b>	Pass / fail

**Undergraduate degree titles at Scottish ancient universities**

In the Universities of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and St Andrews in Scotland, undergraduate degrees are titled MA (Master of Arts) or MA (Master of Arts) (Hons).

**Graduate Certificates and Diplomas**

These qualifications are typically for graduates or those with equivalent qualifications, but are not of postgraduate level. They are benchmarked at FHEQ level 6 / SCQF level 9 and cover undergraduate level content. They are usually offered as professional conversion courses; for example, the Graduate Diploma in Law for graduates in non-law subjects who wish to enter the legal profession.

To complete the Graduate Certificate students must typically complete at least 40 credits and to complete the Graduate Diploma they must complete at least 80 credits.

*Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PgCE/ProfGCE)*

The Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PgCE or ProfGCE) is a qualification for graduates who wish to qualify as teachers. It sits at FHEQ level 6, the same level as the final year of a Bachelor Honours degree. Some PgCE / ProfGCE programmes lead to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England and Wales. Others qualify individuals to teach in the further or adult education sectors.

**Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas**

These qualifications provide further specialisation in the field of study and assessment is usually based on coursework and examinations. They are at FHEQ level 7 / SCQF level 11 and can form the taught component of a Master's degree; students who complete the taught component but not the dissertation requirement for a Master's degree may be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma. A Postgraduate Certificate represents the minimum amount of study required at postgraduate level.

For a Postgraduate Certificate students must typically complete at least 40 credits and for a Postgraduate Diploma at least 80 credits.

*Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma in Education (PGCE / PGDE)*

The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) is a qualification for graduates who wish to qualify as teachers. It leads to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in England and Wales, Eligibility to Teach in Northern Ireland, or eligibility to register with the General Teacher Council for Scotland (GTCS). It sits at FHEQ level 7 and credits can often be transferred towards Master's degrees.

**Master's degrees**

Master's degrees are awarded after completion of taught courses, programmes of research, or a mixture of both. Longer, research-based programmes often lead to the degree of Master of Philosophy (MPhil) or Master of Research (MRes). All Master's degrees are at level 7 of the FHEQ / level 11 of the SCQF.

Most Master's courses last at least one year (if taken full-time), and are taken by graduates with Honours degrees (or equivalent achievement).

<b>Master's degree</b>	
<b>Common titles:</b>	Master of Arts (MA), Master of Science (MSc), Master of Research (MRes), Master of Philosophy (MPhil)
<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)
<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised and Listed Bodies)
<b>FHEQ level:</b>	7
<b>SCQF level:</b>	11
<b>Duration:</b>	Minimum one year
<b>CATS points:</b>	120-240
<b>SCQF credits:</b>	180
<b>Assessment:</b>	Examinations, coursework, dissertation
<b>Grading system:</b>	Distinction, Merit, Pass

### **Master of Arts (MA) awarded by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge**

The Master of Arts (MA) awarded by the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge is not an academic qualification. It is granted to graduates with a Bachelor degree with no further study or assessment. At the University of Oxford, the MA may be granted 21 terms after matriculation, and at the University of Cambridge the MA may be granted six years after the end of the first term.

Master's degrees from these universities do not have the title MA; other titles including Master of Science (MSc), Master of Studies (MSt) and Master of Philosophy (MPhil) are awarded on completion of postgraduate courses.

### **Integrated Master's degrees**

Integrated Master's degrees are degrees which typically consist of four years' study, encompassing three years of undergraduate study and one year of Master's level study. These programmes are typically offered in engineering, mathematics, pharmacy and science subjects.

### **First degrees in dentistry, medicine and veterinary science**

Degrees in dentistry, medicine and veterinary science are also integrated programmes combining study at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Programmes typically last five years. They are placed at level 7 of the FHEQ.

For historical reasons, these qualifications retain the use of 'Bachelor' in their titles, despite being at the same level of the FHEQ as Master's degrees: Bachelor of Dentistry (BDS), Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS, MBChB or BMBS) and Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine (BVMed) / Bachelor of Veterinary Science (BVSc).

### **Doctorates**

#### *Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)*

Doctorates are awarded for the creation and interpretation of knowledge, which extends the forefront of a discipline, usually through original research. Holders of doctorates will be able to conceptualise, design and implement projects for the generation of significant new knowledge and / or understanding. They will have the qualities needed for employment requiring the ability to make informed judgements on complex issues in specialist fields, and innovation in tackling and solving problems.

In some universities and faculties, students may be allowed to proceed to a PhD course after an initial year of study and / or research common to both a PhD and a Master's degree.

All PhD students present a thesis; some may be required to take an examination paper as well as being examined orally on their thesis.

The titles PhD and DPhil are commonly used for doctorates awarded on the basis of original research. A doctorate normally requires the equivalent of three years' full-time study.

### *Professional Doctorate*

Professional doctorate programmes combine a research component with a taught element and usually confer a discipline-related title (e.g. Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)).

Doctoral degree	
<b>Common titles:</b>	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD / DPhil), Doctor of Education (EdD), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), Doctor of Clinical Psychology (DClinPsy)
<b>Awarding body:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)
<b>Course provider:</b>	Higher education institutions (Recognised Bodies)
<b>FHEQ level:</b>	8
<b>SCQF level:</b>	12
<b>Duration:</b>	Three years
<b>Assessment:</b>	Thesis, viva voce
<b>Grading system:</b>	Pass / fail

### Higher Doctorates

Higher doctorates are conferred upon experienced academics who are able to provide evidence of a considerable portfolio of independent research publications. Higher doctorates are designated on a faculty basis, e.g. DD (Doctor of Divinity), DLitt (Doctor of Letters), and DSc (Doctor of Science); candidates are usually required to have at least a Master's degree from the awarding university.

Senior doctorates are conferred on more mature and established workers, usually in recognition of distinguished published contributions to their field.

### Honorary degrees

Most universities confer Honorary degrees on persons of distinction in academic and public life, and on others who have rendered service to the university or to the local community. These awards are not of an academic nature and do not form part of the higher education framework.

## Flexible, open and distance learning

### Distance learning

Many UK universities offer undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes via distance learning in addition to on-campus provision. Degrees can be completed on a full- or part-time basis. Some programmes require attendance at some face-to-face sessions; many can be completed fully online.

### The Open University (OU)

The Open University (OU) was founded by Royal Charter in 1969. It offers flexible, part-time, supported distance and open learning for undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications.

Undergraduate qualifications at the Open University have no formal entry requirements. An undergraduate degree is typically required for entry to postgraduate qualifications, but relevant professional qualifications or experience may also be accepted, depending on the programme.

### Credit transfer

Decisions on credit transfer are made by individual higher education institutions. Universities often accept credits transferred from other UK or overseas universities. They may also accept credits from regulated qualifications at RQF / CQFW levels 4 to 7 or professional qualifications.

### Micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are short courses or learning experiences, typically with a professional or vocational focus. They are frequently aimed at employees looking to reskill or upskill, and at enabling lifelong learning.

Micro-credentials have standalone value, but may also contribute to larger packages of learning or traditional qualifications, such as Bachelor or Master's degrees.

Many universities in the UK offer micro-credentials. The format and mode of delivery varies, but they are frequently offered as online courses lasting 10 to 12 weeks.

## Transnational education (TNE)

### Overview

Many UK universities offer degree programmes to learners outside of the UK through a range of different transnational education (TNE) provision. Where the final degree certificate is awarded by a UK Recognised Body, it is a recognised UK degree. UK degrees delivered outside of the UK are subject to the same regulatory requirements and standards as those delivered in the UK.

### Types of TNE

There are many different types of TNE as provision reflects the needs and interests of prospective students, partner countries and institutions and UK universities.

#### *Franchised delivery*

In a franchised delivery model, an overseas partner institution, such as a college, is authorised to deliver a degree programme on behalf of a UK university. The UK university is responsible for the curriculum and quality assurance, and awards the final qualification. The partner institution is typically responsible for some or all of the teaching, as well as administrative support.

#### *Validation*

In validation arrangement, the overseas partner institution develops and delivers its own programme, which is validated by the UK university. The UK university approves the programme as if it were developed and delivered by the university itself. The partner institution is responsible for the curriculum, admissions, teaching and assessment. The UK university is responsible for quality assurance.

#### *International branch campuses*

An international branch campus is a campus of a university which delivers and awards degrees of the home institution in another country. International branch campuses are often established in collaboration with a local partner and are typically subject to local regulations and quality assurance requirements.

#### *Joint and double / dual degrees*

Two (or more) partner institutions jointly develop a degree programme and students typically spend time studying in both (or at least two) institutions. For a joint degree, students receive one degree certificate on completion, jointly awarded by the partner institutions. For a dual or double degree, students receive separate degree certificates from each of the partner universities.

#### *Top-up, credit transfer and articulation agreements*

UK universities may accept credits gained at overseas institutions, or grant advanced standing onto degree programmes to holders of international qualifications. These arrangements may be formalised in an articulation agreement between institutions.

*Distance learning*

Many UK universities offer degrees via distance learning to students outside of the UK. Support for learners may be provided by approved local study centres.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Previous national qualification frameworks

### Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) (2008-2015)

The QCF was introduced in England and Northern Ireland in 2008. Qualifications were assigned a credit value as well as a level. The QCF was replaced by the [Regulated Qualifications Framework \(RQF\)](#) in 2015. the QCF had nine levels, entry level to level 8.

Qualifications which conformed to the QCF were made up of units. Each unit had a credit value. The credit value gave an indication of how long it would take to complete a unit, with one credit typically requiring 10 hours of learning.

There are three different types of qualification in the QCF: Award, Certificate and Diploma. The title indicated the size of the qualification:

- Award: 1 – 12 credits
- Certificate: 13 – 36 credits
- Diploma: at least 37 credits.



	Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NVQs at level 5*</li> <li>Award, Certificate and Diploma in Strategic Direction</li> </ul>	Doctorates
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fellowships and fellowship diplomas</li> <li>Diploma in Translation</li> <li>NVQs at level 5*</li> <li>Advanced professional awards, certificates and diplomas</li> </ul>	Master's degrees  Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Diploma in Professional Production Skills</li> <li>NVQs at level 4*</li> <li>BTEC Advanced Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>	Bachelor degrees  Graduate Certificates and Diplomas
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher National Diplomas</li> <li>Other higher diplomas</li> <li>NVQs at level 4*</li> <li>HNCs and HNDs</li> <li>BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>	Diplomas of Higher Education  Foundation degrees  Higher National Diplomas
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Skills level 4</li> <li>NVQs at level 4*</li> <li>BTEC Professional Diplomas, Certificates and Awards</li> </ul>	Certificates of Higher Education  Higher National Certificates
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>AS/A levels</li> <li>Advanced Extension Awards</li> <li>International Baccalaureate</li> <li>Key Skills level 3</li> <li>NVQs at level 3</li> <li>Cambridge International Awards</li> <li>Advanced and Progression Diploma</li> </ul>	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCSEs graded A*-C</li> <li>NVQs at level 2</li> <li>Key Skills level 2</li> <li>Skills for Life</li> <li>Higher Diploma</li> </ul>	
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>GCSEs graded D-G</li> <li>NVQs at level 1</li> <li>Key Skills level 1</li> <li>Skills for Life</li> <li>Foundation Diploma</li> </ul>	
Entry levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entry level certificates</li> <li>Skills for Life at Entry level</li> </ul>	

\* NVQ levels continued to be based on the original National Qualifications Framework which had six levels (entry level to level 5).

### National Qualifications Framework (pre-2008)

The NQF originally consisted of six levels. Following a 2004 review by regulatory authorities, the number of levels in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was increased to eight, helping to link the NQF to the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) levels.

The following table provides an indication of the levels of the NQF (pre- and post-2004) and the FHEQ:

National Qualifications Framework (NQF)		Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
Original levels (pre-2004)	Revised levels (post-2004)	
<b>5</b> Level 5 NVQ Level 5 Diploma	<b>8</b> Specialist awards	<b>D (Doctoral)</b> Doctorates
	<b>7</b> Level 7 Diploma	<b>M (Masters)</b> Master's degrees Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas
<b>4</b> Level 4 NVQ Level 4 Diploma Level 4 BTEC Higher National Diploma Level 4 Certificate	<b>6</b> Level 6 Diploma	<b>H (Honours)</b> Bachelor degrees Graduate Certificates and Diplomas
	<b>5</b> Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diploma	<b>I (Intermediate)</b> Diplomas of Higher Education Foundation degrees Higher National Diplomas
	<b>4</b> Level 4 Certificate	<b>C (Certificate)</b> Certificates of Higher Education
<b>3</b> Level 3 Certificate Level 3 NVQ A levels		
<b>2</b> Level 2 Diploma Level 2 NVQ GCSEs Grades A*-C		
<b>1</b> Level 1 Certificate Level 1 NVQ GCSEs Grades D-G		
<b>Entry</b> Entry Level Certificate in Adult Literacy		

### Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (NICATS) (1999-2002)

NICATS was developed by the Department of Education in 1999. It aimed to encompass all traditional and non-traditional learning achieved in schools, colleges, the workplace and the community.

NICATS used a system of credits to record the volume of each learner's achievements and a framework of eight levels to denote the standard of each course and the demands that were placed upon learners. At each level there were generic descriptors which outlined the skills that learners were expected to have achieved.

NICATS was discontinued in 2002.

NICATS	Qualifications	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ)
8		Doctorate
7	NVQ Level 5*	Master's degree Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate
6		Bachelor degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate
5	NVQ Level 4*	Diploma of Higher Education Foundation degree Higher National Diploma
4		Certificate of Higher Education Higher National Certificate
3	NVQ Level 3 GCE AS and A level	
2	NVQ Level 2 GCSE A*-C	
1	NVQ Level 1 GCSE D-G	
Entry level	Entry level qualifications	

\* NVQ levels continued to be based on the original National Qualifications Framework which had six levels (entry level to level 5).

## Appendix 2: Legacy examination boards

Previously there were many different examination boards in the UK.

In 1996, regional examination boards in England merged to create three larger examination boards.

The following table includes a list of previous bodies and where their records are now held:

Historical Exam Board	Acronym	Successor Organisation
Associated Examinations Board	AEB	AQA
Associated Lancashire Schools Examining Board	ALSEB	AQA
Business and Technology Education Council	BTEC	Pearson Edexcel
Business Education Council	BEC	Pearson Edexcel
East Anglian Examinations Board	EAEB	OCR <b>and</b> Pearson Edexcel
East Midland Regional Examinations Board	EMREB	OCR
Education Development International	EDI	Pearson Edexcel
Joint Committee for Business Studies and Public Administration	JCBSPA	Pearson Edexcel
Joint Matriculation Board	JMB	AQA
London Chamber of Commerce and Industry	LCCI	Pearson Edexcel
London East Anglia Group	LEAG	Pearson Edexcel
London Regional Examining Board	LREB	Pearson Edexcel
Metropolitan and Middlesex Regional Examining Boards	M&MREB	Pearson Edexcel
Midland Examining Group	MEG	OCR
North Western Regional Examining Board	NWREB	AQA
Northern Examinations and Assessment Board	NEAB	AQA
Northern Examining Association	NEA	AQA
Northern Ireland School Examinations and Assessment Council	NISEAC	CCEA
Northern Ireland School Examinations Council	NISEC	CCEA
Oxford and Cambridge Examinations and Assessment Council	OCEAC	OCR
Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board	OCSEB	OCR
Royal Society of Arts	RSA	OCR
Scottish Certificate of Education Examination Board	SCEEB	SQA
Scottish Examination Board	SEB	SQA
South East Regional Examinations Board	SEREB	AQA

South Western (Regional) Examinations Board	SWExB	AQA
Southern Examining Group	SEG	AQA
Southern Regional Examinations Board	SREB	OCR
Southern Universities Joint Board for Schools Examinations	SUJB	OCR
Technician Education Council	TEC	Pearson Edexcel
The West Yorkshire and Lindsay Regional Examinations Board	TWYLRB	AQA
University Entrance and Schools Examinations Council	UESEC	Pearson Edexcel
University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate	UCLES	OCR
University of London Examinations and Assessment Council	ULEAC	Pearson Edexcel
University of London Schools Examination Board	ULSEB	Pearson Edexcel
University of Oxford Delegacy of Local Examinations	UODLE	OCR
West Midlands Examinations Board	WMEB	OCR
Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Examinations Board	YHREB	AQA

## Appendix 3: Legacy school qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

### General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary level (O level)

The General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary level (O level) was offered from 1951 until the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in 1988.

O levels were awarded by English and Northern Irish examination boards listed in [Appendix 2](#) and by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) in Wales.

O levels were aimed at more academically able students, typically those who attended grammar (selective) schools or independent schools.

From 1975 until 1986, O level subjects were graded from A (highest) to E (lowest). Prior to 1975, they were graded on a pass / fail basis.

### Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE)

The Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) was offered from 1965 until the introduction of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in 1988.

CSEs were awarded by English and Northern Irish examination boards listed in [Appendix 2](#) and by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) in Wales.

The CSE was introduced to enable students who did not sit O levels to obtain a school leaving qualification.

CSE subjects were graded 1 to 5 as follows:

Grade	Description
1	Indicates a standard achieved which may have resulted in an A, B, or C grade, had the learner elected to do a GCE Ordinary Level (O-Level) qualification instead of a CSE.
2 / 3	Given in approximately equal number to all candidates, Grades 2 and 3 would indicate a higher than average* standard, but not within the top percentile of students taking the CSE exams.
4	Indicates an average* standard expected from a learner who has followed a CSE course in a subject.
5	Indicates a standard below that of a Grade 4, but of a level that was still certifiable.

### General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Supplementary level

General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Supplementary (AS) courses were introduced in 1990 to enable students to study a broader curriculum. They were worth half of a full A level, but separate from A level courses (unlike the [GCE Advanced Subsidiary \(AS\) level](#)).

Take up of Advanced Supplementary courses was low and they were phased out around 2000.

## Appendix 4: Legacy school qualifications in Scotland

### Standard Grades

Standard Grades were generally taken over the third and fourth years at secondary school (S3-S4), with an examination at the end of S4. Students often took seven or eight subjects, including mathematics and English.

There were three levels of study: Foundation, General and Credit (SCQF levels 3, 4 and 5, respectively). Students usually took examinations at two levels: Credit and General, or General and Foundation.

Standard Grades were graded on a scale of 1-7 (1 being the highest). Both subject parts (elements) as well as overall performance were graded.

Level	Grade	SCQF Level
Credit	1 or 2	5
General	3 or 4	4
Foundation	5 or 6	3
Course complete	7	-

Standard Grades at Foundation, General and Credit levels were replaced by [National 3](#), [National 4](#) and [National 5](#) respectively in 2013/14.

### Intermediate 1 and 2

Intermediate 1 and 2 qualifications were designed for students who had completed Standard Grades or Access 3, or for those who wished to take up a new subject at school or college not covered by Standard Grades. They offered a more flexible style of learning. For some students, Intermediate 2 was a stepping stone to taking a Higher. Some schools offered Intermediate Units and Courses as alternatives to Standard Grades in S3 and S4.

Intermediate 1 and 2 were graded A-D.

Intermediate 1 and 2 were dual run with [National 4](#) and [National 5](#) qualifications in 2013-14 and 2014-15 before being discontinued.

### Access 1, 2 and 3

Access 1 was designed for students who required considerable support with their learning, while Access 2 was designed for students with more moderate support needs. Access 3 was comparable to Standard Grade Foundation level. Learning at Access levels 1, 2 and 3 was assessed by the school or college and it did not involve sitting an examination.

From 2013-14 the Access 1, 2 and 3 awards were revised and renamed as [National 1, 2 and 3](#) respectively.

### Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS)

The Certificate of Sixth Year Studies (CSYS) was awarded from 1970 until 2002. From 1970 to 1999 it was awarded by the Scottish Examination Board (SEB); from 2000 to 2002 it was awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

As the title suggests, it was taken by students in Secondary 6 (S6), following [Highers](#). It was replaced by [Advanced Highers](#) in 2002.

**Ordinary Grade (O Grade)**

The Ordinary Grade (O Grade) was awarded from 1962 to 1990. It was awarded by the Scottish Certificate of Education Examination Board (SCEEB) (later the Scottish Examination Board (SEB)).

It was replaced by the [Standard Grade](#) from 1986.



## Appendix 5: Legacy technical and vocational qualifications

### GCE Advanced Level (A level) in applied subjects

GCE A levels in applied subjects were offered between 2005 and 2017. Like the academic A levels offered at that time, applied A levels consisted of AS and A2 levels and were broken down into units.

The following subjects were offered:

- Applied art and design
- Applied business
- Applied ICT
- Applied science
- Engineering
- Health and social care
- Leisure studies
- Media: communication and production
- Performing arts
- Travel and tourism.

### Vocational A levels (VCE)

In 2000 Vocational A levels replaced [Advanced GNVQs](#). These awards placed an emphasis on knowledge, skills and understanding in the following broad range of vocational areas:

- Art and design
- Business
- Construction and built environment
- Engineering
- Health and social care
- Hospitality and catering
- Information and communication technology
- Leisure and recreation
- Manufacturing
- Media (communication and production)
- Performing arts
- Retail and distributive services
- Science
- Travel and tourism.

There were three different types of VCE:

Qualification	Units	Equivalence
Advanced Subsidiary VCE (ASVCE)	3	1 AS level
Advanced VCE (AVCE)	6	1 A level
Advanced VCE (AVCE) double award	12	2 A levels

The last VCEs were awarded in June 2006, with students able to re-sit examinations until January 2007. Some VCEs were replaced by [A levels in applied subjects](#).

### BTEC Nationals (before 2016)

BTEC level 3 qualifications offered from 2010 were benchmarked on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and were structured as follows:

Title	Credits	Guided Learning Hours (GLH)	Equivalent in size to
BTEC Level 3 Certificate	30	180	0.5 A levels
BTEC Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma	60	360	1 A level
BTEC Level 3 90-Credit Diploma	90	540	1.5 A levels
BTEC Level 3 National Diploma	120	720	2 A levels
BTEC Level 3 National Extended Diploma	180	1080	3 A levels

Prior to 2010, BTEC Nationals were structured as follows:

Title	Equivalent in size to
Level 3 BTEC National Subsidiary Award	0.5 A levels
Level 3 BTEC National Award	1 A level
Level 3 BTEC National Subsidiary Certificate	1.5 A levels
Level 3 BTEC National Certificate	2 A levels
Level 3 BTEC National Diploma	3 A levels

### 14-19 Diploma (England)

The 14-19 Diploma was introduced in England in 2008 as an alternative to GCSEs and A levels which combined academic and vocational subjects.

Diplomas were offered in several different subject areas, including engineering and travel and tourism, and available at three levels:

Level 1 Foundation Diploma	Comparable to 4 or 5 GCSEs at grades D-G
Level 2 Higher Diploma	Comparable to 5 or 6 GCSEs at grades A*-C
Level 3 Advanced Diploma	Comparable to 3.5 A levels

A shorter course – the level 3 Progression Diploma – was also available. Within this students had to study the principal learning and generic learning aspects of the full Diploma. 720 guided learning hours were required for completion and the course was broadly comparable to a programme of 2.5 GCE A levels.

The 14-19 Diploma was graded as follows:

Diploma Type	Grades
Foundation	A*, A, B, U
Higher	A*, A, B, C, U
Advanced / Progression	A*, A, B, C, D, E, U

The 14-19 Diploma was last awarded in 2014.

### Vocational GCSEs

Vocational GCSEs (VGCSEs) were introduced in September 2002 to replace the [Foundation, Intermediate and Part One GNVQs](#) described below.

Vocational GCSEs were based upon the design of the Part One GNVQ. They were open to 14-16-year-old students and considered equivalent to two traditional GCSEs. Assessment was mainly based on coursework and courses relate to work in a particular vocational area.

They were available in the following subjects:

- Applied art and design
- Applied business
- Applied ICT
- Applied science
- Engineering
- Health and social care
- Leisure and tourism
- Manufacturing.

VGCSEs are now known simply as GCSEs where offered in vocational subjects.

### General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ)

GNVQs were offered in 14 broad vocational areas and at three levels between 1990 and 2007.

GNVQ level	Equivalence
Foundation	4 GCSEs (grades D-G)
Intermediate	4-5 GCSEs (grades A*-C)
Advanced	2 GCE A levels

GNVQs were unit-based qualifications assessed through a combination of continuous portfolio assessment and short test papers. Providing they met all the necessary requirements, students could be awarded certificates for each unit they completed, even if they did not obtain the full award. Part One GNVQs were equivalent to two, rather than four, GCSEs.

Courses were widely available in the further education sector, and many schools offered units or Foundation level awards. GNVQs were awarded by BTEC, City & Guilds and the RSA Examinations Board.

GNVQ students could achieve a Pass, Merit or Distinction grade, depending on their performance against set criteria.

## Appendix 6: Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA)

The Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) acted as the awarding body for higher education institutions which did not have university status or their own degree-awarding powers between 1965 and 1992. These institutions were typically polytechnics, colleges of art, colleges of education and colleges of technology.

At the time, it was the largest awarding body in the UK, with over 140 institutions offering CNAA-approved degree programmes.

Qualifications awarded by the CNAA included:

- Bachelor degrees
- Master's degrees
- Doctorates
- Certificates in Education
- Diplomas of Higher Education
- Postgraduate Certificates in Education
- Postgraduate Diplomas
- Higher Diplomas in Art and Design
- Scottish Diplomas in Art and Design.

CNAA awards were comparable to qualifications awarded by universities.

The CNAA was abolished by the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

CNAA records are now held by the Open University (OU). The OU can verify CNAA awards, but only holds the information that would appear on a final certificate. The OU cannot reissue CNAA certificates or transcripts.

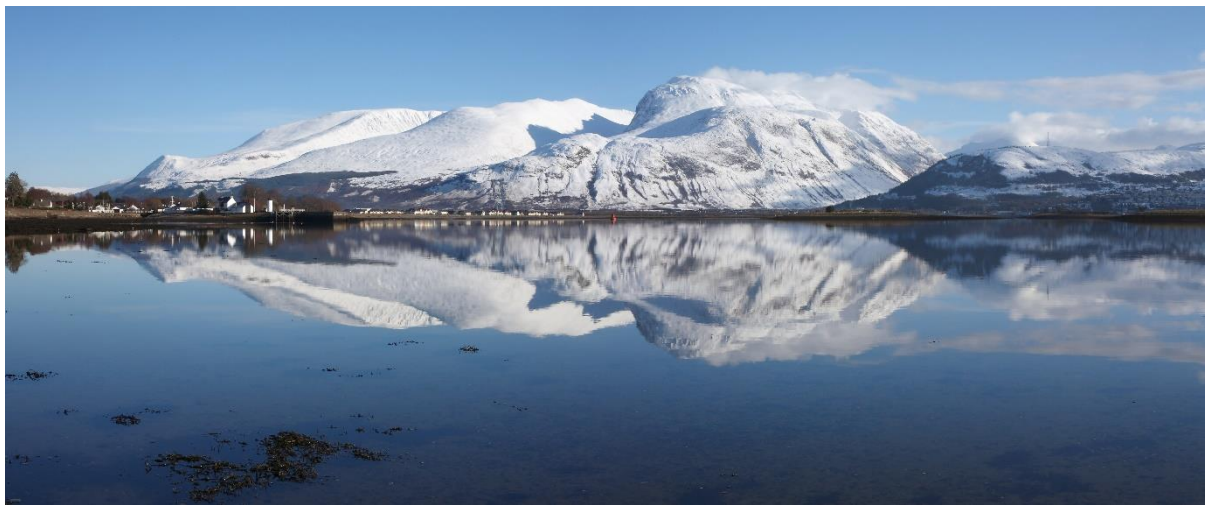
# Glossary

<b>AEA</b>	Advanced Extension Award
<b>AICE</b>	Advanced International Certificate of Education
<b>A Level</b>	Advanced Level
<b>AS level</b>	Advanced Subsidiary Level
<b>AVCE</b>	Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education
<b>BA</b>	Bachelor of Arts
<b>BA Hons</b>	Bachelor of Arts with Honours
<b>BDS</b>	Bachelor of Dental Surgery
<b>BSc</b>	Bachelor of Science
<b>BSc Hons</b>	Bachelor of Science with Honours
<b>BVMed</b>	Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine
<b>BVMS</b>	Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine and Surgery
<b>BVSc</b>	Bachelor of Veterinary Science
<b>CATS</b>	Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
<b>CCEA</b>	Council on the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
<b>CertHE</b>	Certificate of Higher Education
<b>CNAA</b>	Council on National Academic Awards
<b>CQFW</b>	Credit and Qualifications Framework for Wales
<b>CSE</b>	Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>CSYS</b>	Certificate of Sixth Year Studies
<b>DBA</b>	Doctor of Business Administration
<b>DClinPsy</b>	Doctor of Clinical Psychology
<b>DD</b>	Doctor of Divinity
<b>DfENI</b>	Department for the Economy Northern Ireland
<b>DipHE</b>	Diploma of Higher Education
<b>DLitt</b>	Doctor of Letters
<b>DPhil</b>	Doctor of Philosophy
<b>DQB</b>	Designated Quality Body
<b>DSc</b>	Doctor of Science
<b>EBacc</b>	English Baccalaureate
<b>ECTS</b>	European Credit Transfer System
<b>EdD</b>	Doctor of Education
<b>EPQ</b>	Extended Project Qualification
<b>ESFA</b>	Education and Skills Funding Agency
<b>FdA</b>	Foundation in Arts
<b>FDAP</b>	Foundation Degree Awarding Powers
<b>FdSc</b>	Foundation in Science
<b>FE</b>	Further Education
<b>FHEQ</b>	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
<b>FQHEIS</b>	Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland
<b>GCE</b>	General Certificate of Education
<b>GCSE</b>	General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>GNVQ</b>	General National Vocational Qualification
<b>GTCS</b>	General Teaching Council for Scotland

<b>HEFCW</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
<b>HNC</b>	Higher National Certificate
<b>HND</b>	Higher National Diploma
<b>HE</b>	Higher Education
<b>IB</b>	International Baccalaureate
<b>IB CP</b>	International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme
<b>IB DP</b>	International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme
<b>IB MYP</b>	International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme
<b>IB PYP</b>	International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme
<b>ICE</b>	International Certificate of Education
<b>IGCSE</b>	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>IPQ</b>	International Project Qualification
<b>LRN</b>	Learning Resource Network
<b>MA</b>	Master of Arts
<b>MA Hons</b>	Master of Arts with Honours
<b>MB BS</b>	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
<b>MB ChB</b>	Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery
<b>MChem</b>	Master of Chemistry
<b>MEng</b>	Master of Engineering
<b>MPhil</b>	Master of Philosophy
<b>MPhys</b>	Master of Physics
<b>MRes</b>	Master of Research
<b>MSc</b>	Master of Science
<b>MSt</b>	Master of Studies
<b>NC</b>	National Certificate
<b>NPA</b>	National Progression Award
<b>NQ</b>	National Qualification
<b>NICATS</b>	Northern Ireland Credit Accumulation and Transfer System
<b>NQF</b>	National Qualifications Framework
<b>NVQ</b>	National Vocational Qualification
<b>Ofqual</b>	Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
<b>OfS</b>	Office for Students
<b>O Grade</b>	Ordinary Grade
<b>O Level</b>	Ordinary Level
<b>OU</b>	Open University
<b>PDA</b>	Professional Development Award
<b>PgCE</b>	Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
<b>PGCE</b>	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
<b>PGDE</b>	Postgraduate Diploma in Education
<b>PhD</b>	Doctor of Philosophy
<b>ProfGCE</b>	Professional Graduate Certificate in Education
<b>PSRB</b>	Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies
<b>QAA</b>	The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
<b>QCDA</b>	Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency
<b>QCF</b>	Qualifications and Credit Framework
<b>QiW</b>	Qualifications in Wales
<b>QTS</b>	Qualified Teacher Status
<b>RDAP</b>	Research Degree Awarding Powers

<b>RQF</b>	Regulated Qualifications Framework
<b>SAAB</b>	Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board
<b>SCEEB</b>	Scottish Certificate of Education Examination Board
<b>SCOTVEC</b>	Scottish Vocational Education Council
<b>SCQF</b>	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
<b>SEB</b>	Scottish Examination Board
<b>SFC</b>	Scottish Funding Council
<b>SQA</b>	Scottish Qualifications Authority
<b>SVQ</b>	Scottish Vocational Qualification
<b>TDAP</b>	Taught Degree Awarding Powers
<b>TNE</b>	Transnational Education
<b>TQT</b>	Total Qualification Time
<b>UCAS</b>	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
<b>UKSCQA</b>	UK Standing Committee on Quality Assessment
<b>VCE</b>	Vocational Certificate of Education
<b>VCSE</b>	Vocational General Certificate of Secondary Education
<b>VRQ</b>	Vocationally Related Qualification
<b>WBQ</b>	Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification
<b>WJEC</b>	Welsh Joint Education Committee





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