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Important information on higher-level national vocational qualifications (NVQs)

This statement provides important information for awarding bodies, which is also relevant for centres and learners, on level 4 and level 5 NVQs, in view of changes to the original National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Current arrangements

All accredited qualifications are contained within the NQF, which sets out the levels at which qualifications are recognised. The accreditation of qualifications makes sure they are of a high quality and that they meet the needs of learners, higher education providers and employers.

There are more than 1,000 accredited NVQs from levels 1 to 5 that link to the levels of Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs). Two hundred and fifty NVQs are at levels 4 and 5, which are the higher levels of the original NQF.

Changes to the National Qualifications Framework

The changes to the levels in the NQF, which will be completed by January 2006, will classify higher-level qualifications more precisely against an increased number of levels, so that broad comparisons can be made to higher education qualifications. However, these changes will not apply to NVQs, and the original levels, from 1 to 5, will still remain for NVQs so that clear links with SVQs can be maintained.

NVQs

Consideration of revised levels for NVQs will need to be taken forward in the context of future reform that seeks to increase flexibility in recognising learners' achievements. These reforms include the consideration of level and credit for NVQ units and qualifications.

In advance of this reform NVQs will continue to sit at the original NQF levels 1–5 and will be accredited into the NQF at these levels. The NVQ level descriptors, as published in the *Arrangements for the statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2000*, and as shown below, will continue to be valid.

The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2004, and *The NVQ Code of Practice 2001*¹ will remain enforceable for NVQs, including the requirement for assessors and internal verifiers to both meet the occupational competence requirements of the assessment strategy and be qualified to A1 or V1 standard.

¹ The *NVQ Code of Practice 2001* and *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2004* are available at www.qca.org.uk

NVQ level descriptors

The level descriptors that follow are intended to be indicative rather than prescriptive and are used as an aid to the development of national occupational standards and qualifications. Levels apply to a qualification as a whole rather than to its constituent units.

Level 1

Competences that involve the application of knowledge and skills in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine or predictable.

Level 2

Competences that involve the application of knowledge and skills in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts. At this level, there must be activities that are complex or non-routine and some individual responsibility and autonomy. Collaboration with others, perhaps through membership of a work group or team, may often be a requirement.

Level 3

Competences that involve the application of knowledge and skills in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy, and control or guidance of others is often required.

Level 4

Competences that involve the application of knowledge and skills in a broad range of complex technical or professional work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources is often present.

Level 5

Competences which involve the application of skills and a significant range of fundamental principles across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources feature strongly, as do personal accountabilities for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.

Original and revised NQF levels

The table below illustrates this re-classification of qualifications with the exception of NVQs. Although NVQs will not currently be classified according to the more precise revised levels, the alignment of the original and revised levels shows the range of levels that each NVQ potentially spans, as shown in the table below. Entry level and levels 1, 2 and 3 of the NQF remain unchanged.

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) – higher levels			Framework for Higher Education Qualification levels (FHEQ)
Original NQF levels	Revised NQF levels	National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)	
Original level 5	Revised level 8	NVQ level 5	D (doctoral)
	Revised level 7		M (masters)
Original level 4	Revised level 6	NVQ level 4	H (honours)
	Revised level 5		I (intermediate)
	Revised level 4		C (certificate)

Further information and examples of qualifications are available on the factsheet *Changes to the National Qualifications Framework* www.qca.org.uk/8856.html and on the searchable qualifications database openQUALS www.qca.org.uk/openquals. Further information on the FHEQ is available at www.qaa.ac.uk.