

The VQ Landscape 2008

A review of vocational qualification achievements in the UK

23 July 2008



“There's simply no argument: the UK needs more people with vocational qualifications and we should celebrate and recognise the people who choose to take a vocational qualification on their path to success.”

Foreword



Andy Powell, Chief Executive,
Edge

Today is a landmark day for vocational qualifications in the United Kingdom. As a nation, the UK depends on the people who gain a vocational qualification every year.

For the first time, the success of the millions of people who gain qualifications every year will be celebrated – VQ Day. From accountants to zoo keepers, millions of people have worked hard to achieve the qualifications they need for success. VQ Day is their richly deserved moment in the spotlight.

To mark this occasion, Edge has commissioned the first annual review of vocational qualifications ever to be published in the UK. This report explores the vocational qualifications landscape in the UK today, provides the raw numbers of qualifications gained, explores who is gaining them, and discusses the role vocational qualifications play in the UK economy. Edge is pledging to continue this review for the foreseeable future.

The findings are exciting. Over three and a quarter million vocational qualifications were awarded last year, a rise of 8.3 per cent on the previous year and a 117 per cent increase on five years ago. This growth has been coupled with rising completion rates and a doubling in the number of schools offering vocational qualifications.

Britain currently has six million unskilled workers; by 2020 Lord Leitch has predicted that the country will need just half a million. Jobs requiring vocational skills and qualifications are expected to rise across all industry sectors including construction, science and engineering, but also in sales, customer service and personal service occupations.

There's simply no argument: the UK needs more people with vocational qualifications and we should celebrate and recognise the people who choose to take a vocational qualification on their path to success.

I congratulate every learner who has gained a vocational qualification this year – and the staff and employers who have supported them and worked so tirelessly to make the success outlined in this report possible.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andy Powell'.

Andy Powell

Contents and acknowledgements

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Acronyms

Acronyms

Acronyms used in this report.
Those marked * are explained in the Glossary

BME	Black and minority ethnic
FE*	Further education
HE*	Higher education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
I(C)T	Information (and Communications) Technology
NQF*	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ*	National Vocational Qualification
ONS	Office of National Statistics
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCF*	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SVQ*	Scottish Vocational Qualification
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VQ*	Vocational qualification
VRQ*	Vocationally-Related Qualification

Highlights

Highlights

Millions of people throughout the UK achieve a vocational qualification (VQ) each year – young people and adults, students and employees. In 2006–7 at least three and a quarter million VQs were achieved.

The number of VQs achieved is rising. 673,000 NVQs and their Scottish equivalents were awarded in 2006–7, an increase of 67 per cent over the last five years in these practical, skills-based qualifications. Well over two million vocationally-related qualifications (VRQs) levels 1–3 were awarded – a more than three-fold increase over the same period in these knowledge-based qualifications underpinning workplace skills.

VQs are achieved by adults. Over half of all NVQ/SVQ awards are achieved by people over 25, and a quarter by people over 40, reflecting their use in raising workforce skills and value to people of all ages.

VQs are achieved by young people. The majority of VRQs are achieved by young people. 56 per cent of all VRQs were achieved by under-25s and 27 per cent by those aged 14 to 19.

VQs are a rapidly growing feature of the school curriculum, particularly among those students aged 14–16. School centres accounted for at least 155,000 vocationally-related qualifications achieved in 2006–7, nearly double the previous year.

VQs motivate young people at school. Reports by Ofsted and others suggest that the use of VQs in schools is motivating more young people to achieve.

VQs are achieved in the full spectrum of occupational areas, with qualifications in healthcare, business administration, IT, retail, construction, engineering, leisure, travel and tourism among the most popular.

VQs are achieved at all levels, from pre-GCSE level to the highest professional levels of achievement.

Vocationally-related study is a significant feature of higher education. Six of the top ten subject areas of higher education qualifications awarded at all levels in 2007 were in work-related disciplines. Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs) and the growing number of Foundation degrees achieved are specifically vocational.

Highlights

VQs enhance employability.

The National Learner Satisfaction Survey found that nearly 80 per cent of people gaining vocational qualifications agreed that their course had provided them with skills they could use in a job. Other benefits to learners include higher earnings, a 'license to practise' a trade or profession, and progression to higher qualifications. 'Sandwich' degree students tend to achieve higher class degrees than non-placement students, and are quicker to gain full-time employment after graduating.

VQs benefit employers.

A recent survey of employers found that Apprenticeships (which normally involve achieving two VQs) raised workforce skills and improved competitiveness, productivity, staff motivation, retention and recruitment.

There are some marked gender differences in VQ achievement. More women achieve NVQs than men, particularly at the higher levels. The reverse is true of VRQs, where men's achievements outnumber women's at all levels. The large majority of VQs in health and care were achieved by women, whereas engineering and construction were heavily dominated by men.

Ethnic minority participation in VQ programmes is variable. Although ethnic minorities are generally well represented on college VQ programmes, their participation in Apprenticeships is relatively low, particularly among those of black African, Indian and Chinese ethnicity.

Take up of vocational qualifications varies from region to region, with 37 per cent of all post-16 learning (excluding higher education) in Wales and Scotland linked to vocational qualifications. This is higher than England (32 per cent) and Northern Ireland (26 per cent). The North West has the largest number of both NVQ and VRQ achievements.

Labour market projections point to a rising demand for VQs to meet future skills needs, notably in the construction, IT, science and engineering sectors. Other growth sectors include business services, health, education, culture, media and sport.

This Review provides a carefully researched and positive insight into previously uncharted – or poorly charted – territory.

Introduction

The research underpinning this report has proved a challenging task. Fundamentally, there is no standard definition of a VQ (vocational qualification), and the accuracy of some of the official data sources in this area is questionable.

The research is therefore based on detailed consideration of how VQs should be defined and careful examination of official data. Where the data available did not cover the specific information we required, we have very conservatively estimated the likely numbers based on a sampling of these qualifications on the relevant national database and discussions with the relevant national bodies.

Higher Education (HE) qualifications beyond HNCs, HNDs and Foundation degrees are a particularly challenging area in this respect, as Honours and higher degrees in work-related disciplines are widely perceived as 'academic' qualifications, regardless of their vocational content. Where we have made estimates, they are deliberately cautious and conservative, on the basis that it is better to under-estimate and correct upwards when a more accurate figure can be determined.

A further challenge on the quantitative side was the tendency of official data to break down qualifications by level rather than by type. This reflects current learning targets, which do not tend to distinguish between 'academic' and 'vocational' programmes.

The more qualitative research sources, though less contentious than the numerical data, perhaps inevitably provide somewhat patchy coverage of such a large – some would say 'Cinderella' – area of learning.

Nevertheless, we believe that this first Review, while limited by the dearth and quality of available information, provides a carefully researched and positive insight into previously uncharted – or poorly charted – territory. We believe it sheds new light on the VQ landscape, providing VQ facts, figures, trends and baselines that can be tracked and developed in future years.

Definitions

Definitions

01 — What is a ‘vocational qualification’?

There is no standard definition of a vocational qualification (VQ). We have therefore had to make some decisions about what we consider to be in and out of ‘scope’. In brief, we have defined VQs as recognised awards designed primarily to give entry to, or advancement in, a specific line of work. A fuller definition is given in Annex 02.

VQs include:

- National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs), which assess competence in specific occupations.
- More knowledge-based Vocationally-Related Qualifications (VRQs), such as BTECs, City & Guilds and OCR Nationals.
- Higher education qualifications such as Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs), Foundation degrees and work-related Honours and higher degrees such as MBAs (Masters of Business Administration).
- Professional qualifications awarded by recognised professional bodies (with an emphasis on those which can be achieved through vocational, rather than purely academic, routes).

Apprenticeship programmes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland typically include the achievement of two vocational qualifications – an NVQ and a VRQ. The VRQ component is often called the ‘technical certificate’.

Definitions



Lynette Wieland, Advanced apprenticeship in business and administration

“I have learned how our education system can sometimes mislead young people into thinking that sixth form is the only way to succeed. I have tailored the further education system to my needs by following an NVQ programme as well as studying for an AS level in Biology through distance learning.”

02 — Qualification levels

VQs are available and achieved at all levels of the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF):

- Entry Level – for those not ready to achieve at level 1 and above.
- Levels 1 and 2 – GCSEs and levels 1 and 2 NVQs and VRQs are at these levels.
- Level 3 – A Levels and level 3 NVQs and VRQs are at this level.
- Levels 4 and 5 – such as HNC/HND, foundation degrees and level 4 NVQs.
- Levels 6, 7 and 8 – Honours degrees, higher degrees, level 5 NVQs.

Apprenticeship programmes are available at levels 2 and 3.

The level of a qualification refers to its level of difficulty, not the length of the course. This is particularly the case with VRQs, where qualifications at the same level may vary from awards requiring a few days’ tuition to large qualifications requiring many months of learning. With some VRQs, for example, a Level 2 Award in Retail Customer Service requires an estimated 20 hours of guided learning, while a Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery requires an estimated 450 hours – more than an A Level.

03 — Comparison with GCSEs and A Levels

This Review has deliberately tried to avoid direct comparisons with GCSEs and A Levels. Vocational qualifications are qualifications directly related to the working world – as distinct from more theoretical and ‘academic’ GCSEs and A Levels.

Numbers

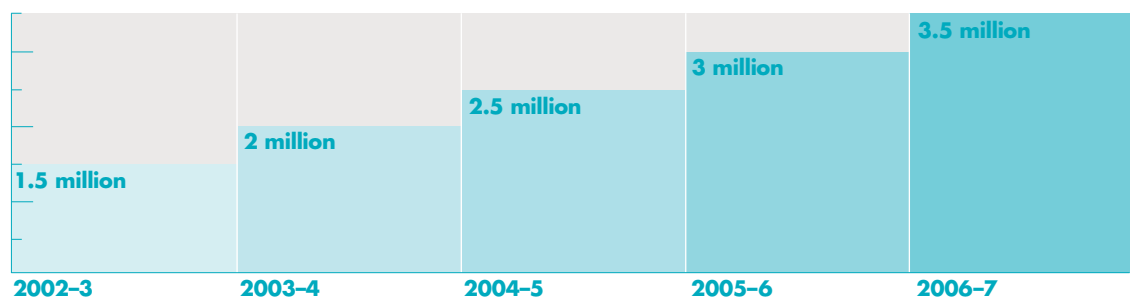
Numbers

04 — Vocational qualifications numbers

We calculate that at least 3,250,000 vocational qualifications were achieved in the UK in 2006–7. Figure 1 shows the growth of vocational qualifications over the previous five years.

Figure 1

Number of qualifications awarded per year



When these figures are broken down by different types of qualification, most areas are reporting significant increases in the last five years.

VQ achievements include 673,000 National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs, levels 1–5) – an increase of 67 per cent over the last five years and over 2.3 million VRQs (levels 1–3) – a more than three-fold increase over five years. At least 250,000 VQs at levels 2 and 3 were achieved through Apprenticeships, which typically include an NVQ and a VRQ. Numbers completing the full requirements of their Apprenticeship programme have increased nearly three-fold over the last five years.

The headline VQ figure also includes:

- Nearly 11,000 Foundation degrees achieved (level 5) – up 24 per cent on the previous year and representing close to four-fold growth since 2004.
- Nearly 30,000 HNDs and Diplomas of Higher Education achieved (level 5) – down slightly on 2006 but still very popular.
- At least 100,000 vocationally-related Honours, higher degrees and professional qualifications.

In England, nearly 14 per cent of 19 year-olds achieved level 2 (equivalent to 5 A*– C GCSEs) through vocational qualifications in 2007, an increase of 72 per cent since 2004. Over 10 per cent achieved level 3 (equivalent to two A Levels) via the vocational route, close to a three-fold increase over the same period.

05 — Where VQs are achieved

The vast majority of NVQs achieved in 2006–7 were through a roughly equal split of further education colleges (270,000 VQs, 40 per cent) and private training companies (260,000, 39 per cent). About 10 per cent are delivered by employers. Colleges are the biggest providers of VRQs. About half of VRQs are achieved through further education and tertiary colleges, with private training companies accounting for one-fifth (268,000, 19 per cent).

Numbers



Vanessa Stanley, Deputy
Head, The Hazeley School,
Milton Keynes

“The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport’s level 2 certificate qualification enables our most able students in Year 9 to gain a strategic understanding of business across the board. It is very much a management and leadership qualification with a focus on decision-making. There is no single ‘right answer’ to the problems posed, so it really develops the students’ thinking skills and they enjoy it.”

An increasing number of vocational qualifications are being achieved at school, mainly at levels 1 and 2, reflecting the growth of work-related learning in the 14–16 national curriculum. Often working closely with colleges, school centres accounted for over 155,000 VRQs in 2006–7 (nearly double the previous year) and 4,500 NVQs (an increase of 28 per cent). Other school children achieved vocational qualifications by attending a local college or training provider. More than 134,000 additional VRQs and NVQs were achieved this way.

Although higher-level VQs are achieved mainly through universities, further education colleges also play a very significant role. More than ten per cent of all higher education qualifications – mostly vocational – are delivered through colleges. Fifty-six per cent of Foundation degrees are delivered through colleges, with the remaining 44 per cent delivered wholly or partly at universities. Eighty-six per cent of HNCs and 59 per cent of HNDs are delivered in colleges, the remainder in universities.

06 — How VQs are achieved

NVQs/SVQs are achieved through the assessment of practical work against UK-wide industry standards of competence. Most long-course VRQs (as distinct from small certificates) are achieved through full-time study and include work experience placements.

Over 90 per cent of HNCs are done part-time, while most HND courses are full-time. Just over half of Foundation degrees (56 per cent) are done part-time by employees, with at least 20 per cent delivered in the workplace, particularly through work-based projects.

Most higher-level VQs, particularly professional qualifications, are achieved while working through part-time study. Distance learning is a widely used way of gaining higher VQs, as it enables people to combine their learning with work commitments.

“Vocational qualifications are for everyone and are not just courses designed to entice under-achievers back into learning.”

VQ Achievers

07 — Age of VQ achievers

Vocational qualifications are for everyone and are not just courses designed to entice under-achievers back into learning.

Over half of all NVQ/SVQ awards are achieved by people over 25, and a quarter by people over 40, reflecting their use in raising workforce skills and their value to people of all ages. A relatively small but growing number of NVQs are being achieved by 14–16s as part of the school curriculum – nearly 40,000 in 2007, up 10 per cent on the previous year.

The majority of VRQs are achieved by young people. In 2006–7 56 per cent of all VRQs were achieved by under-25s and 27 per cent by those aged 14 to 19. A larger and rapidly increasing number of VRQs are being achieved at school age – 289,000 in 2007, up nearly 50 per cent on the previous year. Over 25 per cent of VRQs at levels 1 and 2 are achieved by children aged 16 and under, who account for a much larger percentage, 40 per cent, of the bigger VRQs, rather than the smaller VRQ certificates.

Increasingly, young people, including under-16s, are gaining vocational qualifications originally designed for adults. Such courses include over 30 level 1 and 2 NVQs in sectors ranging from Food and Drink to IT; and professional qualifications such as the Association of Accounting Technicians' level 2 Certificate in Accounting. A relatively small but growing number of NVQs are being achieved by 14–16s as part of the school curriculum – nearly 40,000 in 2006–7, up 10 per cent on the previous year.

Over 60 per cent of Foundation degree graduates were over 21 when they started the course. Like many other higher vocational qualifications, most are taken by people in work.

VQ achievers



Sara Pullen, BTEC Higher National Certificate and a BTEC Higher National Diploma in manufacturing engineering.

“BTECs provided the basics for the Engineering degree I have completed and produced a great foundation for my current success. I saw graduates coming into the industry after university and they just didn’t have the practical skills I’d gained whilst undertaking a BTEC.”

08 — Gender differences

Considerably more women achieved higher level NVQs than men in 2006–7. Women achieved 62 per cent of all level 3 NVQs and 70 per cent of all NVQs awarded at levels 4 and 5.

Health, Public Services & Care accounted for 36 per cent of all NVQs achieved by women, compared to seven per cent of men. Education and Training NVQs were dominated by women, who also outnumbered men’s achievements in Business Administration and Law by two to one. By contrast just over half of all NVQs achieved by men were in the areas of Engineering and Construction, compared to just less than three per cent of those by women.

Unlike NVQs, more men achieved a VRQ than women, particularly the VRQs requiring longer periods of study. Six times as many men as women achieved a ‘large’ level 1 VRQ and twice as many a level 2.

Health, Public Services and Care was the largest sector subject area for VRQs achieved by women, particularly the larger qualifications, where more than four times as many were achieved by women than men. A similar pattern of gender applied to Engineering and Construction, where awards to women were greatly outnumbered by awards to men, particularly with the larger awards. Although more women than men achieved smaller VRQs in Business Administration, the balance was reversed with the ‘larger’ awards.

VQ Achievers

09 — Ethnic minority participation

Black and minority ethnic (BME) participation in (mainly vocational) college programmes is around 17 per cent. Bangladeshi, Black African and Black Caribbean communities are particularly well represented.

However, less than seven per cent of Apprentices are of BME origin, with participation particularly low among Indian, black African and Chinese communities. BME Apprentices are particularly underrepresented in the 'traditional' craft-based sectors, and in some of the more 'modern' frameworks such as customer service and hospitality. For example, just one person of Pakistani, Indian, Black African, Black Caribbean and Chinese ethnicity respectively completed a Construction Advanced Apprenticeship in England in 2006–7, compared to over 2,400 white Britons.

Only four Apprenticeship programmes – the two sporting excellence Apprenticeships, Community Justice and IT services and development – had 10 per cent or more BME Apprentices. Figure 2 shows that while FE numbers of BMEs remain healthy, take-up of Apprenticeships remains relatively low, with modest increases in only one or two categories. Most notably, there is persistently low participation in Apprenticeships by those of Chinese ethnicity.

Figure 2
 Ethnicity and take-up of vocational qualifications in England

Ethnicity	Approx. % of working age population	% learners		% learners	
		FE college 2006/7	2007/8	Apprentices 2006/7	2007/8
White	93.5	78.2	76.9	93.9	92.6
Mixed	0.4	2.3	2.5	1.3	1.5
Asian:					
Indian	1.5	2.3	2.3	0.6	0.6
Pakistani	1.0	2.7	2.8	0.9	0.9
Bangladeshi	0.4	1.1	1.2	0.4	0.6
Other Asian	0.4	1.5	1.7	0.3	0.3
Black:					
Caribbean	1.0	2.2	2.3	0.8	0.8
African	0.7	3.7	3.9	0.4	0.4
Other black	0.1	0.8	0.7	0.3	0.3
Chinese	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.1	0.1
Other	0.4	-	-	-	-

Sources: LSC (2008c), DCSF (2007), ONS (2006) and author's calculations

HNDs are popular among ethnic minority groups, accounting for more than 30 per cent of students. Those of Indian, Pakistani and Black African origin are particularly well represented. By contrast the proportion of HNC students of ethnic minority origin is much lower, at 13 per cent. Meanwhile, minority ethnic groups account for about 15 per cent of Foundation degree students – similar to that of undergraduate provision as a whole. However, the ethnic profile of full-time Foundation degree students is quite different to that of part-time entrants, with higher proportions of full-time entrants (19 per cent) coming from minority ethnic groups. Proportions of full-time Foundation degree students are particularly high among those of Asian and Chinese ethnicity.

Industries and employers

Industries and employers

10 — Sector subject areas and levels of achievement

The biggest areas of NVQ and VRQ awards in 2007 were Health, Public Services and Care, Retail and Commercial Enterprise, ICT, Business Administration & Law and Leisure, Travel and Tourism. Figure 3 shows the biggest industry areas of NVQ and VRQ achievements in 2007 as percentages of the total awarded, compared with the previous year.

Figure 3

Most common vocational qualifications by industry sector

NVQs/SVQs awarded	2007	2006	VRQs awarded	2007	2006
Health, Public Services & Care	23%	23%	ICT	19%	22%
Retail & Commercial Enterprise	20%	20%	Health, Public Services & Care	18%	14%
Business Administration & Law	16%	17%	Leisure, Travel & Tourism	12%	12%
Construction	12%	11%	Business, Administration & Law	11%	11%
Engineering	9%	9%	Engineering & Manufacturing	10%	11%
Manufacturing	4%	5%	Arts, Media & Publishing	7%	6%

Source: DCSF (2008b), DfES (2007) and author's calculations

There were some marked differences in NVQ and VRQ award levels:

- While most (56 per cent) Retail & Commercial Enterprise NVQs were at level 1, the largest proportion of Business Administration & Law NVQs (39 per cent) were at levels 4 and 5. The large majority of Construction, Planning and the Built Environment NVQs (81 per cent), meanwhile, were at level 2.
- VRQs are awarded at levels 1 to 3 only. While most ICT and Leisure, Travel and Tourism awards (63 and 58 per cent respectively) were at level 1, most Arts, Media and Publishing awards were at level 3 (52 per cent). In Engineering and Business, meanwhile, the biggest proportion of awards (49 and 46 per cent respectively) was at level 2.

Six of the top ten subject areas of higher education qualifications awarded at all levels in 2007 were in the more work-related disciplines, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Higher education qualifications awarded by subject area, with more vocationally-related disciplines are highlighted.

HE subject area	Qualifications awarded, 2007
Business & administrative studies	97,680
Subjects allied to medicine	84,360
Education	72,255
Social studies	60,415
Creative arts & design	46,595
Biological sciences	43,005
Engineering & technology	38,620
Languages	31,440
Computer science	31,270
Law	30,340

Source: HESA

Industries and employers



Lisa Wilson, OCR National
Level 3 in Health and
Social Care

“Because I knew I wanted to work in midwifery, I was looking for a course that provided me with plenty of practical hands on experience. This was the appeal of OCR Nationals. I was able to undertake a number of work experience placements at a holiday camp for disabled people and at a nursery. This meant I got to grips with practical aspects of the course as well as the theory. This combination will stand me in great stead for my degree and future career.”

11– The demand for skills and vocational qualifications

Government research suggests that, between 2004 and 2014, an estimated 650,000 construction workers, 500,000 IT workers, and 300,000 science and engineering workers will be needed, mainly to replace retirees in the ageing workforce.

Energy industry leaders have warned that a lack of skilled engineers and project managers could jeopardise the building of a new generation of nuclear power and green power generators. Construction workers and engineers are also badly needed to build homes and to deliver big infrastructure projects, such as Crossrail, and for new colleges and schools.

Jobs requiring high-level skills and qualifications are projected to rise steadily, with increasingly large proportions of the UK workforce working in management, professional, associate professional and technician roles. There will also be a growing need for people with lower-level qualifications to fill roles in sales, customer service and personal service occupations. Low-skill jobs are in steady decline.

In 2006 the Leitch Review of Skills highlighted that 70 per cent of the 2020 working age population had already left compulsory education and that the flow of young people would diminish. It is, therefore, at least as important to raise skills among the adult workforce as among young people entering the workforce.

Growth in employment is most marked in computing and related services, other business services, professional services, health and education, and construction. Other areas of rapid projected growth include culture, media and sports occupations.

“Jobs requiring high-level skills and qualifications are projected to rise steadily.”

The predicted demise of British manufacturing is somewhat exaggerated. This sector, together with construction and various other parts of the production sector, will continue to employ large numbers. While employment levels are falling, replacement demand remains significant. (Replacement demand refers to the number of job openings that occur as people leave their current jobs because of retirement and so on. Even occupations and industries that have experienced a sharp decline in employment rates can have substantial replacement demand requirements, especially if they have an older workforce. This is why there have been many skilled job openings in the manufacturing sector, despite the decline in overall employment levels).

Employers report the greatest volume of skills-shortage vacancies in professional, associate professional and skilled trades occupations. These three occupational groups, which make up one in four jobs, account for nearly half of all skills-shortage vacancies.

The sectors with the greatest overall incidence of vacancies are: public administration and defence (33 per cent of establishments reporting vacancies) education (27 per cent) health and social work (27 per cent) and electricity, gas and water (25 per cent).

A recent survey by the Sector Skills Council for Science, Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies found that 40 per cent of companies in the pharmaceutical industry had difficulty filling posts because of shortages of workers with scientific skills.

According to other skills research, ten per cent of employers in metals and metal goods, hotels and catering, public administration and defence, and health and social work report hard-to-fill vacancies. The national average for the incidence of hard-to-fill vacancies is 7.3 per cent. Seventy-one per cent of hard-to-fill vacancies are related to skills (a lack of the required qualifications, skills or experience), a figure virtually unchanged since 2005.

12 — Employers supporting vocational qualifications

The National Employer Skills Survey 2007 found that around a third of all employers (around 450,000) had trained 2.6 million staff towards a nationally recognised qualification in the previous 12 months, and just under half of these had trained 1.2 million staff towards an NVQ. This NVQ training was mostly at levels 2 and 3, with 15 per cent including training at level 4 and 10 per cent at level 1.

The proportion of employers training at least some of their staff towards NVQs increases with size. As many as 45 per cent of the largest employers providing training include the achievement of NVQs. This falls to nine per cent among the smallest companies.

“The proportion of employers training at least some of their staff towards NVQs increases with size.”

Employers in the care, sport and leisure, food and drink manufacturing, construction and education sectors are most likely to provide training leading to recognised qualifications. Training leading specifically to NVQs is most common in the care sector.

Regionally, there is also great variance. Employers in the North East are the most likely to train through further education colleges and train towards nationally recognised qualifications and towards NVQs. Employers in London were the least likely to engage with any of these types of training activity.

In a survey of Institute of Director members, two-thirds of directors said they were familiar with the range of vocational qualifications in their sector, and two-fifths reported that their companies were involved in designing vocational courses and qualifications.

13 — Who awards vocational qualifications?

Vocational awarding bodies include City & Guilds, OCR, Edexcel and EDI. There are over 120 awarding bodies for NVQs and VRQs, including specialist organisations serving specific industry sectors.

Edexcel awards the BTEC suite of vocational qualifications, which include Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs). OCR awards include OCR Nationals (a fast-growing alternative to GCSEs), NVQs and a range of ICT courses such as CIAiT, iPRO, and iTQ.

Vocational degrees, including Foundation degrees, are awarded by universities (though some colleges may also be granted Foundation degree-awarding powers in the near future).



Simon Witts, Director of
Safety, Quality & Training,
Flybe

“As an airline which carries out many different types of training, we wanted to gain credit for this by means of a qualification framework across the business. Through the tests and trials of the Qualification and Credit Framework and by becoming an accredited training provider, we will have the ability to deliver officially recognised courses specifically designed to cater for our staff and business needs, increasing our competitiveness and recognising the hard work of our employees.”

Thousands of vocational qualifications achieved each year are professional qualifications awarded by professional bodies such as the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS), Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX), Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB).

As outlined in sections 11 and 12, employers are increasingly recognising the importance of vocational qualifications. In 2008 a number of employers became able to award nationally-recognised qualifications and credits towards vocational qualifications to their employees for the first time as part of a move towards a new credit-based framework for qualifications (see section 18). Network Rail, Flybe and McDonalds were the first employers to gain such powers. The Ministry of Defence and City College Norwich subsequently became the first public sector organisation and further education college respectively to become awarding organisations in the new credit-based system.

“Eighty per cent of people gaining vocational qualifications agreed that their course had provided them with skills they could use in a job.”

Benefits and demand

14 — Benefits

The benefits of people gaining vocational qualifications identified in this review include:

- More motivated young people and higher achievement.
- More entrants to the workforce with an appreciation of the world of work.
- Raised skills within the adult workforce.
- Higher earnings and career prospects.
- Improved staff retention.
- Progression to further learning.
- A ‘licence to practise’ in the relevant profession or industry.

Reports by Ofsted and others suggest that the growing use of vocational qualifications in schools at Key Stage 4 (14–16) is motivating some students to do better than expected in GCSEs as well.

The National Learner Satisfaction Survey found that nearly 80 per cent of people gaining vocational qualifications agreed that their course had provided them with skills they could use in a job. The proportion was 83 per cent for learners in further education and 95 per cent for those that were work-based.

Increased earnings by those achieving vocational qualifications up to level 3 are highest among those achieving the qualifications as part of an Apprenticeship programme (which normally involves the achievement of two VQs). Those with Apprenticeships at level 3 earn on average over 20 per cent more than people with a single NVQ or VRQ at level 3. At level 2 the differential is even more marked, with Apprentices typically earning at least 25 per cent more than those with a stand-alone vocational qualification at that level.

The earning benefits of vocational qualifications vary by qualification and sector, with manufacturing providing the highest returns for men. According to one report, BTEC First Diplomas and City & Guilds awards achieved by men and RSA First Diplomas achieved by women produce the highest wage returns at around 20 per cent.

Benefits and demand



Jeanette Pearce, AAT Technician
NVQ Level 4

“The Association of Accounting Technicians qualification has given me so much more confidence. I feel like I have really achieved some thing that I can be proud of. I would definitely recommend it to other people.”

The benefits to employers of Apprenticeships, the major part of which involves the achievement of an NVQ and VRQ, are well documented. In a recent survey of employers by the Learning and Skills Council:

- Over three-quarters felt Apprenticeship programmes made them more competitive and increased productivity.
- 83 per cent said they relied on their Apprenticeship programme to provide the skilled workers they need for the future.
- Two-thirds believed that their Apprenticeship programme helped them fill vacancies more quickly.
- 80 per cent believed that Apprenticeships improved staff retention and turnover.
- 88 per cent believe Apprenticeships had created a happier and more motivated workforce.
- 57 per cent report a high proportion of their Apprentices going on to management positions within the company.

In a government report on NVQs in 2006, 51 per cent of employers in England offering the qualifications cited increased productivity as a benefit, together with less waste (41 per cent) and increased profit (31 per cent). The employers also reported that NVQs:

- Improved skills and were relevant to the work situation.
- Were valuable in engaging staff in skills development.
- Were motivating for staff.
- Were flexible.

In a survey of Institute of Director members, 97 per cent of directors of companies providing training linked to vocational qualifications reported that it developed better trained staff, 88 per cent that it enhanced staff motivation and 78 per cent that it reduced staff turnover.

Research by ASET, the professional body that promotes higher work-based learning, found that students on sandwich courses were more likely to gain a first class degree and six per cent more likely to achieve an upper second than non-placement students. Sandwich degree undergraduates were also more likely to find full-time work after graduation.

Vocational qualifications also help employers to ensure they comply with current legislation. For example, a Level 1 award on disability awareness launched by EDI in 2007 is helping employers to meet their legal responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Benefits and demand

1.5 — Licence to practise

In an increasing range and number of occupations, the achievement of designated vocational qualifications are linked to a 'licence to practise' as a recognised professional. These are mostly voluntary schemes supported by industry and professional bodies to demonstrate that practitioners in their sectors are qualified and competent to do the job. In theory, for example, anybody can practice as an accountant, except in certain high-level, regulated areas of the profession. In reality, however, nobody can work professionally in accountancy without a recognised professional qualification, which is often obtained via a vocational, rather than academic, route.

Examples of this and other vocational routes leading to a 'licence to practise' are given below.

- Each year thousands of people achieve recognised professional status in accountancy via the NVQ route. Progression through the accounting NVQs to level 4 provides recognition as a professional through the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT). Some 7,000 people a year achieve entry to the profession by achieving the NVQ level 4, which in turn opens up the work-based route to the chartered accountancy bodies' professional qualifications and chartered status.
- Over 10,000 skilled people in the motor retail industry – most already holders of the industry's NVQs and VRQs – have joined the register of ATA (Automotive Technician Accreditation) following assessment to NVQ standards and demonstration of commitment to the ATA code of conduct. Assessment is made at level 2, 3 or 4, level 4 conferring recognition as a Master Technician. Registration must be renewed at least every five years to ensure the currency of the technicians' knowledge and skills through continuing professional development. A growing number of employers are supporting the scheme, including dealerships such as BMW, Ford and Toyota, and service centres such as Kwik Fit, Nationwide Autocentres and Bosch. Although the scheme is only in its third year, one in three repair shops already have at least one ATA technician.

Benefits and demand



Brian Adams, Chief Executive
 CSCS.

“ CSCS provides workers and managers with a simple way to prove their occupational competence because to apply for a CSCS card they have to gain vocational qualifications appropriate to their job. These days many clients and contractors will not allow people on their sites if they do not have the relevant CSCS card so they may find it extremely difficult to get a job with a professional company without one.”

- Over 26,000 people with relevant vocational qualifications are registered on the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs). Registration is available at levels 2, 3 and 4 and is achieved and maintained through the achievement of recognised VQs linked to the NVQ standards of competence for exercise and fitness. Members must re-register each year by demonstrating they continue to be ‘fit to practise’ through continuing professional development. Launched in 2002, REPs is supported by local councils and other leading employers in the sector such as Fitness First, David Lloyd Leisure, Esporta, Bladerunner, Village Hotels and the Armed Forces.
- Since 2003 all the 150,000-plus door supervisors working in the nighttime economy must by law achieve a door supervision VRQ at level 2 as part of the Security Industry Authority’s licensing process.
- Over a million people in the construction sector – around half the workforce – hold CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) cards based on approved vocational qualifications and a health and safety test. All public sector and London Olympic Games construction contracts require workers at all levels to hold the relevant CSCS card, and all major contractors support the scheme. Different versions of the card demonstrate levels and types of competence. For example, the blue card for skilled workers requires the achievement of the relevant NVQ/SVQ level 2, while the gold card requires level 3. CSCS cards for managers can be awarded through the achievement of relevant higher NVQs or professional accreditation.

Around the UK

Around the UK

16 — Analysis by UK nation and English region

Take-up of vocational qualifications varies significantly from region to region, with 37 per cent of all post-16 learning (excluding higher education) in Wales and Scotland linked to vocational qualifications. This is higher than England (32 per cent) and Northern Ireland (26 per cent).

At six per cent, Wales also has a relatively high proportion of NVQ achievements in 2007, compared to its employment share of 4.6 per cent. Per head of population Wales does particularly well (one NVQ awarded per 80 people), compared with England (one per 100), Scotland (one NVQ per 130) and Northern Ireland (one per 120).

Although NVQ/SVQ achievements in Scotland, at 6.5 per cent, are only two percentage points below its employment share, the country's VRQ achievements are small, at just 1.5 per cent of the UK total in 2007. This is at least in part due to the fact that Apprenticeships in Scotland (branded Modern Apprenticeships) do not generally involve the achievement of a VRQ as they almost invariably do in the rest of the UK.

Wales and the West Midlands have relatively high shares of high-level NVQ achievements (6.8 and 12.1 per cent respectively of level 4 and 5 awards).

Proportionately more NVQs/SVQs are achieved at level 3, relative to level 2, in Scotland than the rest of the UK. England lags behind the other UK nations in this respect, with the North East having the lowest proportion of level 3 NVQs.

As shown in Figure 5, the proportion of employers in England reporting skill gaps within their workforce varies quite considerably by region, ranging from 13 per cent of employers in London to 23 per cent of employers in Yorkshire and the Humber, compared with the national figure of 16 per cent. When skill gaps were expressed as a percentage of employment, there was less variation. Only in Yorkshire and the Humber and the South East are the proportions of skill gaps reported greater than the proportions of employment in the region.

Around the UK

Figure 5
 Skills gaps identified by region

Region	% of establishments with any skill gaps	Number of employees not fully proficient (i.e. number of skill gaps)	% of reported as having skill gaps	Share of employment	Share of skill gaps
Overall	16%	1,265,000	6%	100%	100%
Yorks & Humber	23%	156,500	8%	10%	12%
North East	21%	53,300	6%	4%	4%
South East	18%	231,700	7%	16%	18%
North West	16%	165,000	6%	13%	13%
West Midlands	16%	110,200	5%	11%	9%
East Midlands	15%	106,700	6%	8%	8%
South West	15%	107,500	5%	10%	8%
Eastern	15%	115,100	5%	10%	9%
London	13%	218,800	6%	18%	17%

Source: LSC (2007) Skills in England Volume 2 (Research Report)

The North West has the largest number of both NVQ and VRQ achievements – over 14 per cent of the total awarded in 2007, which is above the region's percentage of the UK workforce at 11 per cent (as shown in Figure 6). By contrast, London has a relatively small share of NVQ achievements, just seven per cent of the UK total, reflecting the relatively low level of Apprenticeships in the capital. However, London's 12 per cent share of VRQs matches its share of the UK workforce. The North East's share of NVQ achievements, at seven per cent, is well above what would be expected from its employment share of four per cent.

While overall numbers of Foundation degree achievements are fairly evenly spread across England, there are marked regional differences between those achieved full and part-time. London has one of the highest shares of full-timers but one of the lowest shares of part-timers. In the West Midlands the pattern is reversed, with just 7 per cent full-time and 14 per cent part-time.

Figure 6
 Percentages of VQ awards compared to percentages of the UK working population by region

Region/country	Approx. % of UK working population	% of NVQs/SVQs awarded 2006/7	% of VRQs awarded 2006/7
North East	4.1	7.1	5.5
North West	11.1	14.5	14.1
Yorks & Humber	8.3	10.5	9.7
East Midlands	7.1	8.2	7.7
West Midlands	8.7	11.4	10.8
East	9.1	6.5	8.1
London	13.4	6.9	12.2
South East	13.7	11.1	12.5
South West	8.2	8.4	10.1
England	83.8	84.7	90.8
Wales	4.8	6.1	4.6
Scotland	8.5	6.5	1.5
Northern Ireland	2.9	2.1	1.8

Totals may be affected by rounding and, in the case of qualifications, a small percentage of overseas entries (<1%) Sources: DCSF (2008b), DCSF (2007 and author's calculations

Standards, progression, quality and the future

17 — Standards, progression and quality

Vocational qualifications achieved at 14–16 are motivating more school students to progress to further full-time education or work-based learning – 82 per cent on a pilot programme of students who might otherwise have ‘dropped out’.

Success rates (defined as percentage of starters achieving a qualification) in further education colleges increased from 68 to 78 per cent between 2003 and 2007. The success rate for those doing higher education qualifications in colleges was over 77 per cent – about the same rate as for higher education overall.

Ofsted judged the quality of provision in all colleges in England inspected in 2005–6 to be at least satisfactory. In 64 per cent of cases it was good or outstanding and the improving trend in the quality of work-based learning continues, with 93 per cent of training providers in England judged to be satisfactory or better, a five per cent improvement on the previous year. Provision in Wales was rated even higher by Estyn, the Welsh inspectorate. Since 2005/06, an impressive 93 per cent of college provision and 85 per cent of work-based learning inspected was judged to be good or excellent.

Achievement rates for NVQs increased to over 90 per cent in 2006–7, an increase of 7 per cent over two years, while success rates for Apprenticeships, i.e. those achieving the full requirements (which almost invariably involve the achievement of an NVQ and a VRQ) are steadily rising and currently stand at 63 per cent – a jump of 20 per cent over two years and comparable to the success rates of other European countries.

A national adult learner survey found that 90 per cent of holders of vocational qualifications felt they had “the qualification needed to get onto most courses.” About 50 per cent of vocational qualification holders progress to higher education.

“Success rates in further education colleges increased from 68 to 78 per cent between 2003 and 2007.”

“Vocational qualifications are increasingly being recognised as university entry qualifications.”

Vocational qualifications are increasingly being recognised as university entry qualifications in the UCAS points system. The first NVQ in the UCAS Tariff, a Level 3 in Accounting, was allocated 160 points, which is 40 points higher than an A grade A Level and equal to the points of two grade C A Levels. Top-grade BTEC and OCR Nationals are positioned at 360 points, equal to three grade A A Levels.

Over 70 per cent of Foundation degree students graduate successfully, and more than half progress to an Honours degree. Many such higher-level vocational qualifications, including degrees, are accredited by professional bodies, providing a stepping stone to professional registration and status.

Professional bodies are increasingly seeking to have their own qualifications officially accredited as vocational qualifications within the national qualifications framework. The Chartered Insurance Institute, for example, recently had its certificate, diploma and advanced diploma in financial planning accredited by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority at levels 3, 4 and 6 respectively – 6 being the level of an Honours degree.

18 — Future growth and development of vocational qualifications

VQs continue to develop and respond to the ever-changing needs of the economy and the increasingly global marketplace for the benefit of individuals, employers and the nation.

Apprenticeships are set to grow considerably following the recommendations of the Leitch Review of Skills. By 2013, Apprenticeship will be an entitlement for all suitably qualified 16 to 18-year-olds. Government funding of places will increase with a target of 190,000 annual Apprenticeship completions by 2020 – nearly twice the current figure. As nearly every Apprenticeship involves the achievement of two vocational qualifications, Apprenticeships will account for some 380,000 annual vocational qualification achievements by 2020.

A new Higher Apprenticeship model incorporating a higher vocational qualification has been successfully piloted in the engineering and IT sectors by employers, including BT and Airbus. If rolled out as a mainstream Apprenticeship brand, Higher Apprenticeship will promise to provide practical learners with an attractive, debt-free alternative to traditional full-time higher education.

“ The introduction of new applied 14 –19 Diplomas in England promises to energise vocational progression.”

Skills Accounts are to be introduced in 2010, providing ‘vouchers’ to help fund learning programmes and better access to the range of learning services. The government is also consulting on a proposal to give employees the legal right to request time to train from their employers.

Foundation degrees are also set to grow from the current 72,000 places to 100,000 places in 2010. This target may well be exceeded if college bids to award their own Foundation degrees are successful.

The introduction of new applied 14–19 Diplomas in England from September 2008 promises to energise vocational progression by developing a pool of able students attuned to work-related learning. The Diplomas will be an entitlement for all young people by 2013. Vocationally-related qualifications (VRQs) will be incorporated into the Diplomas through the Additional Specialist Learning component of every Diploma programme.

In Wales, meanwhile, vocational qualifications are already offered within the new Welsh Baccalaureate, which will also incorporate major parts of the English 14 –19 Diplomas, including Additional Specialist Learning, from September 2009.

Finally a new credit-based way of achieving qualifications, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), is being tested to make qualifications, particularly vocational qualifications, more flexible and easier to understand. Every unit and qualification in the framework will be accorded a credit value (one credit representing 10 hours’ learning) as well as level (between Entry level and level 8), enabling people to gain qualifications at their own pace along flexible routes. Qualifications will be grouped into three sizes – Awards (1 to 12 credits), Certificates (13 to 36 credits) and Diplomas (37 credits or more).

Edge will track these and other developments in support of future VQ Day celebrations.

Annex 01
Glossary

Vocational Qualification VQ	A recognised award designed primarily to give entry to or advancement in a specific line of work. (See Annex 2 for full definition and scope).
Advanced Apprenticeships 'Modern Apprenticeships' in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland	Recognised work-based training programmes at level 3 that normally include the achievement of an NVQ and VRQ at that level, together with general functional skills and other elements specified by the relevant industry. Typically take two years to complete. (Advanced Apprenticeships are technically not qualifications but learning programmes which include the achievement of vocational qualifications).
Apprenticeships 'Foundation Modern Apprenticeships' in Wales, 'Traineeships' in Northern Ireland and 'Skillseekers' in Scotland are broadly similar	Recognised work-based training programmes at level 2 that normally include the achievement of an NVQ and VRQ at that level, together with general functional skills and other elements specified by the relevant industry. Typically take one and a half years to complete. (Apprenticeships are technically not qualifications but learning programmes which include the achievement of vocational qualifications).
Awarding bodies	Organisations recognised by the qualifications regulators Ofqual in England, DCELLS in Wales and CCEA In Northern Ireland as able to develop, submit for accreditation and deliver qualifications. City & Guilds is the biggest awarding body for vocational qualifications. The regulators do not regulate qualifications awarded by universities (higher education institutions) or in general professional body awards.
BTEC	Vocational qualifications awarded by Edexcel.
Foundation degrees	Level 5 vocational qualifications combining academic study with workplace learning. They are designed to meet skills shortages at the higher technician and associate professional levels, and employers are closely involved in their development. Foundation degrees take two years full-time but many are undertaken part-time by employees over a longer period. They provide progression if desired to the final year of an Honours degree.
Further education FE	Post –16 learning up to level 3 delivered by a sixth-form college, further education college, higher education institution, private training provider or in the workplace. The majority of FE learning programmes are vocational.
Higher education HE	Learning at level 4 and above provided by universities, higher education colleges and some further education colleges. Vocational HE usually involves work placements or more substantial periods of work-based learning.
Higher National Certificates and Diplomas HNCs/HNDs	Level 5 BTEC qualifications delivered by colleges and universities, still popular despite the introduction of Foundation degrees.

Annex 01
Glossary

<p>National Qualifications Framework NQF</p>	<p>The current framework for positioning qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is a basic Entry Level and eight main levels of qualification:</p>																				
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="810 443 1082 488">Level</th> <th data-bbox="1086 443 1559 488">Examples</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 495 1082 539">Entry Level (1,2 and 3)</td> <td data-bbox="1086 495 1559 539">Entry Level Certificates and Awards</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 546 1082 629">Level 1</td> <td data-bbox="1086 546 1559 629">NVQ Level 1, GCSE grade D-G, BTEC Introductory Certificate</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 636 1082 680">Level 2</td> <td data-bbox="1086 636 1559 680">NVQ Level 2, GCSE A*-C, BTEC First</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 687 1082 732">Level 3</td> <td data-bbox="1086 687 1559 732">NVQ Level 3, A Level, BTEC National</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 739 1082 784">Level 4</td> <td data-bbox="1086 739 1559 784">University certificate</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 790 1082 835">Level 5</td> <td data-bbox="1086 790 1559 835">HNC/HND, Foundation Degree</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 842 1082 887">Level 6</td> <td data-bbox="1086 842 1559 887">Honours degree</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 893 1082 938">Level 7</td> <td data-bbox="1086 893 1559 938">Masters degree</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="810 945 1082 990">Level 8</td> <td data-bbox="1086 945 1559 990">Doctorate</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Level	Examples	Entry Level (1,2 and 3)	Entry Level Certificates and Awards	Level 1	NVQ Level 1, GCSE grade D-G, BTEC Introductory Certificate	Level 2	NVQ Level 2, GCSE A*-C, BTEC First	Level 3	NVQ Level 3, A Level, BTEC National	Level 4	University certificate	Level 5	HNC/HND, Foundation Degree	Level 6	Honours degree	Level 7	Masters degree	Level 8	Doctorate
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Level 4	University certificate																				
Level 5	HNC/HND, Foundation Degree																				
Level 6	Honours degree																				
Level 7	Masters degree																				
Level 8	Doctorate																				
<p>National Vocational Qualifications NVQs</p>	<p>Recognised practical qualifications based on National Occupational Standards that certify competence to do a particular job or job role. Available at five levels, from the performance of basic routine skills at level 1 (NVQ Level 1) to advanced skills at level 5 involving considerable responsibility and autonomy. All Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships involve the achievement of an NVQ. Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are the Scottish equivalent of NVQs.</p>																				
<p>Qualifications and Credit Framework QCF</p>	<p>The new way of recognising learning achievements by awarding credit for qualifications and units (small steps of learning). Subject to successful testing and agreement by ministers, the QCF will gradually replace the NQF as recognised qualifications are allocated credit within the new framework.</p>																				
<p>Sandwich courses</p>	<p>Higher education programmes incorporating a substantial period of work experience.</p>																				
<p>Vocationally-Related Qualification VRQs</p>	<p>A wide range of recognised work-related qualifications, including BTECs, City & Guilds and OCR Nationals. VRQs are typically knowledge-based qualifications but many also involve practical work. They are available at various levels and considerably varying sizes: a level 3 VRQ, for example, may involve learning ranging from just several days or that of more than two A Levels. For example, with City & Guilds VRQs, a Level 3 Foundation Award in Public Relations requires an estimated 30 hours' tuition, while a Level 3 Diploma in Advanced Professional Cookery requires 900 hours.</p>																				
<p>Work-based learning WBL</p>	<p>Learning delivered or facilitated by a university, college or training provider in the workplace, supported by a workplace mentor and/or supervisor.</p>																				

The VQ Landscape 2008
A review of vocational qualification
achievements in the UK

Annex 02
VQ definition and scope

<p>01 Brief definition</p>	<p>A VQ is a recognised award designed primarily to give entry to or advancement in a specific line of work.</p>
<p>02 Full definition</p>	<p>A VQ is a recognised award designed primarily to give entry to or advancement in a specific set of occupations. It assesses a person's knowledge and/or skills associated with a particular area of work, and its achievement may be a necessary condition for continued employment.</p> <hr/> <p>In scope are: Vocational Entry Level qualifications. National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). Vocationally-Related Qualifications (VRQs) of all sizes (BTECs, City & Guilds, work-related OCR awards etc.). Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs). Foundation degrees. Vocational Honours, higher degrees and professional qualifications (with an emphasis on those achieved through vocational, rather than purely academic, routes).</p> <hr/> <p>Out of scope are: Part-awards or units. Generic and basic skills qualifications such as Key Skills, Skills for Life and basic health and safety awards. 'Applied' qualifications such as Applied GCSEs, A Levels and the new 14-19 Diplomas per se (although it is envisaged that any accredited VQs achieved within a Diploma programme will be in scope – see note below).</p>
<p>03 Note</p>	<p>Apprenticeships are not qualifications as such but learning programmes. They do, however, generally include the achievement of two vocational qualifications, an NVQ and a VRQ. Although 14-19 Diplomas are not primarily vocational, it is expected that their Additional Specialist Learning component will often involve the achievement of a VQ.</p>

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Edge is dedicated to raising the profile of vocational and practical learning, with a skills rather than an academic focus. It wants educational standards raised through applying practical experience to learning and providing opportunities to excel through vocational, as well as academic, studies. Edge believes that this is essential for the future competitiveness of the nation.

For more information visit www.edge.co.uk or www.vqday.org