

Qualifications and Levels

Understanding Qualifications and Levels

Higher education (HE) is any programme of study for which the level of teaching is at Level 4 or above on the national qualifications framework (see below).

Work experience and work-related Level 3 qualifications such as BTECs, NVQs, apprenticeships, 14-19 diplomas and A-levels all provide a good starting point for entry into vocational courses such as Foundation degrees and HNDs.

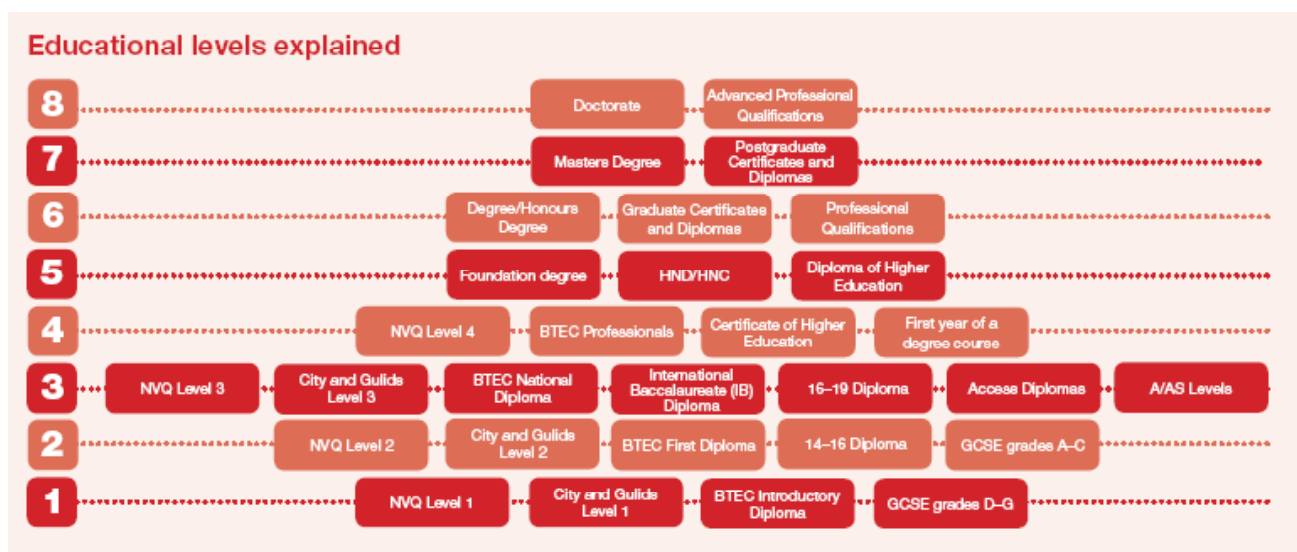
The new Diplomas for 14 to 19 year-olds, introduced in September 2008, mark a major shift in the country's education system because they combine theoretical and practical learning as preparation for higher education and work.

If you are not ready for higher education but want to study at levels 1 to 3, search your local area prospectus for qualifications and courses in your area. This website has been produced for 14–19 year-olds, but is useful whatever your age:

www.direct.gov.uk/14-19prospectus

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The NQF groups together qualifications that place similar demands on learners and sets out the level at which these qualifications can be recognised in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. Within any one level, qualifications can cover a wide mix of subjects, and take different amounts of time to complete.



The table above shows a selection of individual qualifications and how they appear in the current framework.

For more information on all accredited qualifications in the NQF visit *openQUALS* at www.qca.org.uk/openquals

Entry Tariff for higher education

The UCAS Tariff is the system for allocating points to qualifications used for entry to higher education. It allows students to use a range of different qualifications to help secure a place on an undergraduate course.

Universities and colleges use the UCAS Tariff to make comparisons between applicants with different qualifications. Tariff points are often used in entry requirements, although other factors (see below) are often taken into account.

For full information on entry requirements to higher education visit:

www.ucas.ac.uk/students/ucas_tariff

Prior experiential learning

When you apply for higher education, remember to include not only qualifications but also experience that might be relevant in case you are eligible for accreditation.

- **APL** is accreditation of prior learning – if you have completed part of a course at higher education level you can avoid repeating work you've already done.
- **APEL** is accreditation of prior experiential learning – for those who have relevant work experience rather than formal qualifications.

The rules for what experience can be counted in this way are set nationally by the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAAHE) and so any application has to be looked at carefully before a university or college can agree to this accreditation.

For example, a person who has worked in a business as a team leader with some responsibilities for many years, but without formal qualifications above Level 2 (GCSE level), could apply for this experience to be used as an alternative to having Level 3 qualifications. This could qualify them for entry to a relevant Foundation degree or HND. In some cases the work experience might be judged to equate with credits at Level 4 and so count towards the degree or HND itself.

For more information on APL have a look at:

www.learning-opportunities.org.uk/resources/LO-APL.pdf

Understanding credits in higher education

Each higher education qualification (Level 4 and above) requires you to gain a certain number of credits. You are awarded credits after you successfully complete each module or 'block of learning' during the course. Usually credits at more than one level are required and these are accumulated as you progress through the programme of study.

If you already have relevant credits from another course or another institution you may be able to transfer them to your new course.

For example:

- a typical Foundation degree requires a total of 240 credits across levels 4 and 5
- most Foundation degrees can be 'topped up' to an Honours degree by gaining 120 further credits at Level 6

For more information on academic credit arrangements in higher education in England go to Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at:

www.qaa.ac.uk/England/credit/creditframework.asp