

Your guide to employing young people

Your guide to national qualifications

GCSEs

General Certificates of Secondary Education cover a wide range of academic and vocational subjects and are usually examined at the end of Year 11 (occasionally in Year 10). A number of GCSE subjects may also be available at colleges of further education. The grades awarded are A to E. Students need at least four grades A to C to study at the next level.

GNVQs

General National Vocational Qualifications cover broad vocational areas such as business, health and social care, hospitality and catering and leisure and tourism. They are available at foundation, intermediate and advanced level.

NVQs

National Vocational Qualifications have been developed by industry for industry. They record the skills achieved by the student and are related to skills needed to do the job.

AS and A2 (formerly known as A level)

Students can study academic and vocational subjects. An AS level is a one year stand-alone qualification which can convert to an A2 through a further year of study. An A2 is the equivalent to an old A level. These courses allow the student to move on to higher-education courses.

Applied A levels

The vocational A level was replaced by the applied A level in 2005. This is a new name for what was called the Vocational Certificate of Education (VCE). They have been designed to give students a broad introduction to a vocational area and help them to develop and apply knowledge in a variety of work-related situations.

BTEC Diplomas

BTEC Diploma courses are available in a range of vocational subjects, at introductory, first and advanced level.

International Baccalaureates

The International Baccalaureate (IB) is an alternative qualification to AS/A2 levels for students wishing to study a broader range of subjects.

Students choose six subjects in the IB programme, three at higher level and three at standard level from each of the following groups:

- English;
 - foreign languages;
 - individuals and societies;
 - sciences;
 - mathematics; and
 - either art or theatre arts.



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The National Qualification Framework

Key: (1) (2) (3) = the number of A levels the course is equal to.

The National Qualification Framework

The National Qualification Framework was developed as a way of arranging qualifications into levels so that equivalents can be more easily understood. They start at entry level and go up to level 8. The higher the level, the greater the depth of knowledge, skills and understanding that the student has to show to gain the qualification.

National Qualification Framework (NQF) level	Academic	Vocational Related Qualification (VRQ)	Work related
8	PhD (Doctorate)	BTEC Advanced Professional Dip/Cert/Awd	NVQ level 5
7	Masters, PG Cert, PG Dip	BTEC Advanced Professional Dip/Cert/Awd	
6	Degrees, Graduate Certificates and Diplomas	BTEC Professional Dip/Cert/Awd	NVQ level 4
4/5	DipHE, DipFE, Foundation Degree Higher National Diploma Certificate of Higher Education	BTEC HNDs and HNCs BTEC Professional Dip/Cert/Awd Level 4 Certificate in Early Years Practice	
3	A2 level (AS + A2 = full A level) AS levels International Baccalaureate (IB)	VRQ Level 3 GNVQ Advanced (2) BTEC National Diploma (3) BTEC National Certificate (2) BTEC National Award (1) OCR level 3 National Certificate, Diploma, Extended Diploma	NVQ level 3 Advanced Apprenticeship CACHE Diploma in Child Care and Education (3) City and Guilds Level 3 National Certificate and Progression Award
2	GCSE A* to C [was O level grades A to C CSE grade 1]	VRQ Level 2 GNVQ Intermediate BTEC First Certificate and Diploma OCR level 2 National Certificate	NVQ level 2 Apprenticeship CACHE Certificate in Child Care and Education City and Guilds Progression Awards level 2 City and Guilds National Certificate
1	GCSE D to G [was CSE grades 2 to 5]	VRQ Level 1 GNVQ Foundation level BTEC entry level - introductory certificates and diplomas OCR level 1 1st Award Certificate	NVQ level 1 City and Guilds Progression Award level 1
Entry		BTEC entry level courses - skills for working life	