

Qualifications and levels

Understanding qualifications and levels

Whether you've just reached 16 and you're wondering what to do next or have already started work, the various types of qualifications may seem bewildering. They become clearer once you've made decisions about your career direction because different sets of qualifications match different jobs and careers.

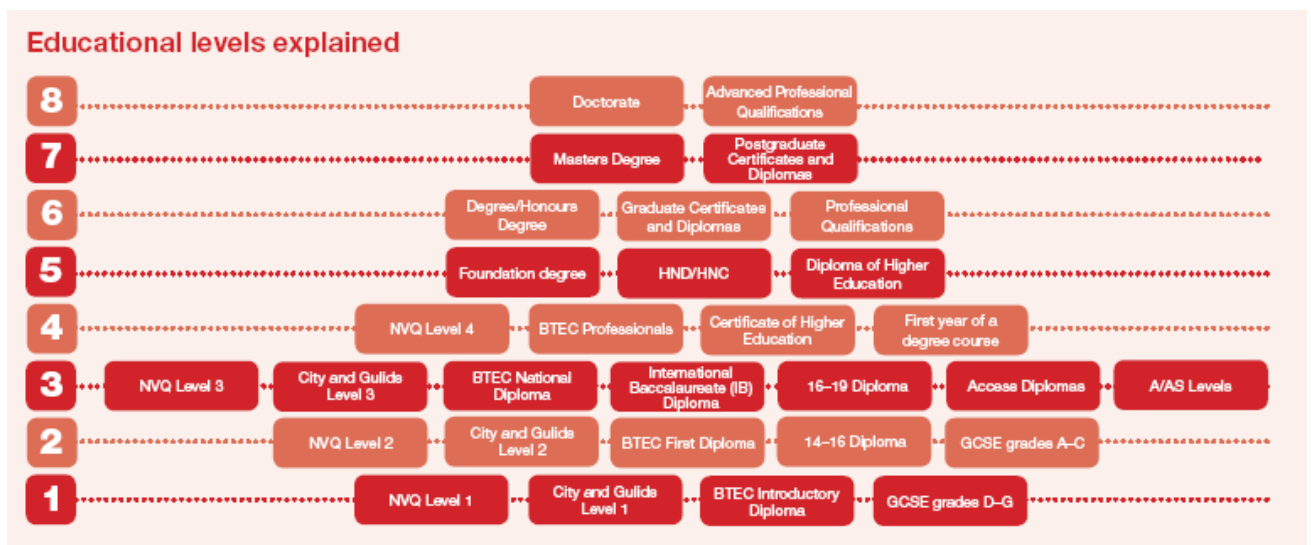
What's the difference between academic and vocational qualifications?

Vocational qualifications are usually related to a specific area of work and they prepare you for a profession in a chosen 'vocation' – for example, to be a plumber, doctor, engineer, electrician, administrator or hairdresser. Academic qualifications are subject specific and often involve less practical, hands-on, learning than vocational qualifications – for example, English literature, philosophy, geography, anthropology, science or maths. Whereas vocational learners are generally clear about the area of work they want to pursue, academic learners often make career decisions after they've started studying.

People who gain qualifications while they're working are therefore likely to be looking at vocational learning because they want to be able to do their job better or gain promotion. The phrase lifelong learning relates to individuals upgrading their skills or learning new skills throughout their careers in order to keep up with new technology or change career direction. So, whatever level you're at now, you can always return to learning.

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.