



THE 3 KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACCREDITATIONS AND QUALIFICATIONS

The CPD Standards Office is a unique organisation and was founded with the vision of understanding and enabling positive and successful CPD and learning experiences. As a highly specialised expert team, our university led research has equipped us with extensive expertise on all things CPD.

Between the work of the Professional Development Consortium and the CPD Standards Office dual CPD research and accreditation activities sharpen our knowledge and expertise. This enables us to work with individual coaches, training providers, employers, and ‘membership organisation’s as a collaborative CPD network & community.

The 3 Key Differences Between Accreditations and Qualifications

The terms ‘Accreditations’ and ‘Qualifications’ have very different meanings and it is important not to confuse the two. They distinctly reference two areas of formal recognition:

Qualifications

Qualifications are only undertaken by individuals, and are not applicable to learning activities or organisations. They are designed to be a structured educational pathway, which once completed, have a formal ‘knowledge check’ in the form of an exam, written coursework or dissertation to verify that the student has learned all the relevant sections of the education. Once achieved, qualifications show employers, clients and educational establishments what an individual has learnt, and what they can do as a result of that achievement.

In the UK, qualifications are structured against a national framework called the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) (as detailed in the image below), which is overseen by the government Department of Education. Individuals usually undertake qualifications in formal educational establishments i.e. schools, colleges or universities.

The Regulated Qualifications Framework

The RQF (Regulated Qualifications Framework) came into force in 2015, and was designed to offer a simpler system for managing qualifications regulated by Ofqual.

The RQF is designed to help people understand qualifications, providing detail on the challenge and size of each qualification. The framework also shows where a qualification sits in relation to others of differing level and size.

There are 8 levels in total which are supported by 3 entry levels, as not all qualifications can be assigned to a single level.

UNIVERSITY	
Level 8	Doctorate PhD
Level 7	Masters Degree MA, MSc, Mphil, MEng etc.
Level 6	
Level 5	University Degree with Honours BA, BSc etc.
Level 4	Foundation Degree FdA, FdSc
	HND (Higher National Diploma)
	HNC (Higher National Certificate)
Level 3	A Levels, A2, AS
	Level 3 National Diploma Level 3 Extended Diploma Level 3 National Certificate
Level 2	GCSE Grades A*-C Grades 9,8,7,6,5,4
	Level 2 Diploma, Level 2 Certificate
Level 1	GCSE Grades D-G Grades 3,2,1
	Level 1 Diploma, Level 1 Certificate
Entry Level	Key Stage 3
	Entry Level Diploma
	SCHOOL / 6 th FORM
	F.E COLLEGE

Accreditations

Accreditation is a generic term often defined as ‘a process of recognising a person, course or organisation as meeting a set of designated official requirements against a particular area or topic’ and are considered visual benchmarks of a certain standard or quality.

Unlike qualifications, accreditations are not necessarily aligned to the national educational system. Instead, accreditations are offered by authoritative organisations such as regulators, professional bodies or quality focused organisations.

In terms of CPD and learning, accreditation is a documented verification that a particular learning activity has been externally checked by a third party and has been approved in terms of meeting various criteria, and therefore is of a high standard.

When a learning activity, person or organization becomes accredited they are generally issued a visual logo that can be displayed to ‘advertise’ the accreditation achievement. In comparison, completion of a qualifications does not result in a visual logo (regardless of their level on the RQF). For example, on completion of a GCSE an individual receives a certificate but not a logo.

Examples of Accreditations include:

- The CPD Standards Office
- British Standards Institute
- HSE (Health and Safety Executive)
- UKAS (United Kingdom Accreditation Service)



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- NCFE
- British Accreditation Council

As a General Rule of Thumb...

Qualifications are achieved by individuals, whereas accreditations are usually achieved by organisations.

A qualification is usually undertaken by an individual hoping to further their education and career. An accreditation is achieved by an organisation who wants to demonstrate the quality of their services by going through 3rd party verification.

A qualification provider can have a qualification accredited as well. For example, a Level 5 National Diploma can be CPD accredited, so once completed a student receives both a qualification and CPD points. This is useful if the delegate has a CPD requirement to maintain but also wants to undertake a qualification.

We hope you have found this factsheet helpful.

Please see www.cpdstandards.com for more information on our accreditation services or call **0203 745 6463** for further advice.