# The UK assessment picture

The UK assessment system could be described as the most sophisticated or most complicated in the world depending on your point of view. The diagram below shows the way different aspects relate to each other and the subsequent commentary explains a strategy to unify the systems at school level in order to provide more understandable pathways for learners.
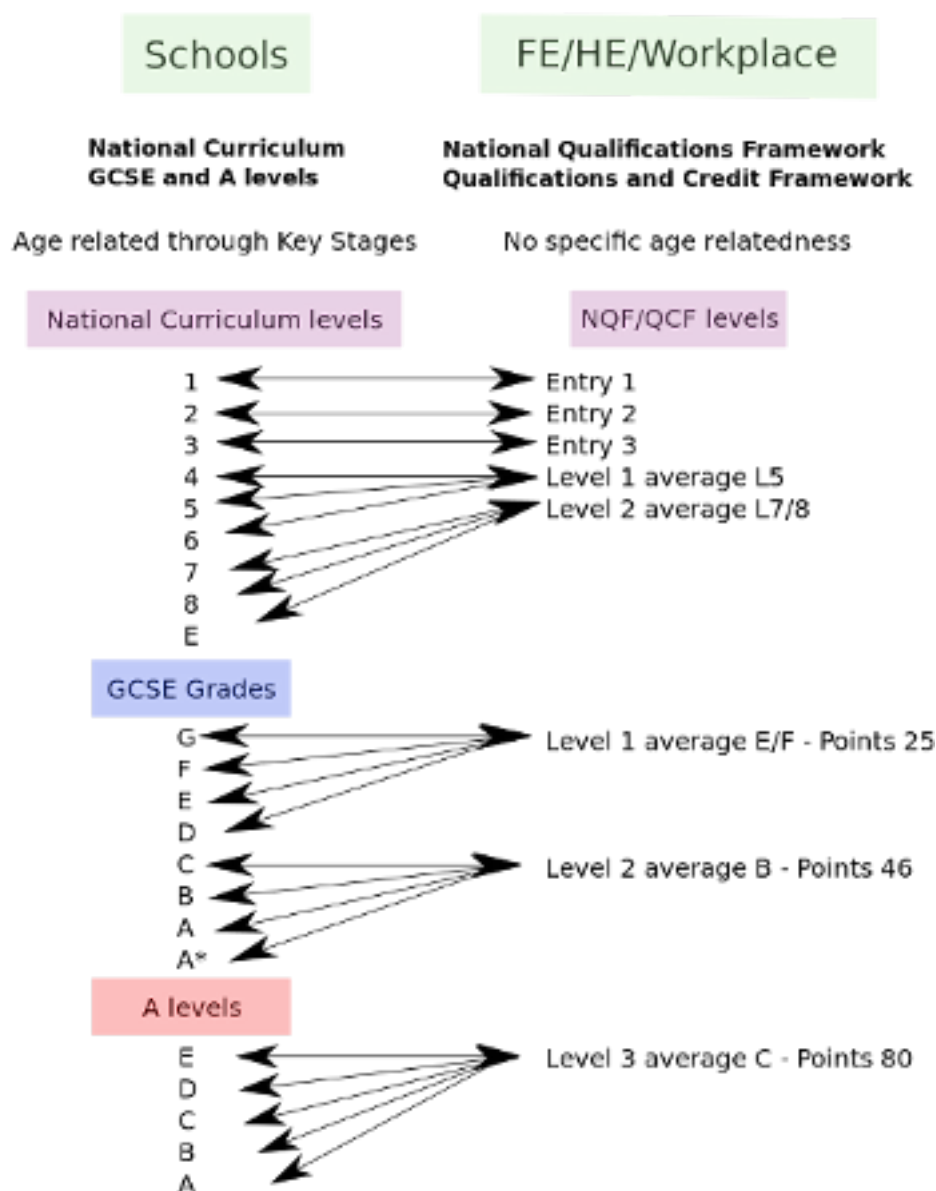
School qualifications and those used in further education and the work place have grown up from different roots.

Within schools themselves, A levels have been around longer than GCSE and GCSEs have been around longer than the National Curriculum.

With the increased use of vocational qualifications by schools there is a need to understand how the different measures of levels across these frameworks relate to each other.

There are overlapping areas and some of the equivalences are "fuzzy". By this I mean that they don't

always seem exactly compatible with each other. For example, a Level 4 in the National Curriculum in a primary school might not be the same as a Level 4 in a secondary school and might ave things in common wit Entry Level 3 and Level 1 in the QCF. To most people including teachers and learners this is confusing and illogical.

What we have attempted to do with the Schools ITQ is to unify these systems such that it does not matter how old you are, a National Curriculum Level 3 and an Entry Level Award require the same levels of demand and a good range of common content. They are not identical but one logical set of course activities can provide evidence of meeting both sets of criteria. Furthermore, if we provide suitable learning activities linked to the criteria teachers, and more importantly learners do not need to bother with the complexities behind the scenes. They just focus on the learning and we maximise the credit they get for their work.

In order to do this we provide guidance to assessors that relates to both the assessment criteria in the QCF and the assessment of pupil progress criteria in the National Curriculum. We then supplement that with on-line learning activities an exemplars that demonstrate coverage of the statutory programs of study.

The Entry level qualifications which we call the Bronze INGOT map directly into the first 4 levels of the National Curriculum making them suitable for use in primary schools or with older learners with a limited education background or special needs to provide confidence and motivation to continue wit their learning. This is in keeping with what is called Foundation Tier Learning. Providing pathways to Level 1 and Level 2, recognising learning through certification.

So we have

Bronze 1 - Entry Level 1 Support Award for the ITQ - My First INGOT   ------------> National Curriculum Level 1, QCF Entry 1

Bronze 2 - Entry Level 2 Support Award for the ITQ   ------------> National Curriculum Level 2, QCF Entry 2

Bronze 3 - Entry Level 3 Support Award for the ITQ   Pass   ------------> National Curriculum Level 3, QCF Entry 3

Bronze 3 - Entry Level 3 Support Award for the ITQ   Pass with Merit   ------------> National Curriculum Level 4, QCF Entry 3+

This provides an option to recognise both learning in the national Curriculum and learning in the QCF through certification and provides a vehicle for supporting common standards in teacher assessment across the lower levels of the National Curriculum.

What about Level 1 in the QCF?

Level 1 in the QCF maps to GCSE grades D-G and in turn that is the equivalent of approximately Levels 4 to 6 in the National Curriculum. Confusingly, levels 4-6 are linked to ages 11-14 in Key Stage 3 and D-G GCSE to 14-16 in Key Stage 4. In our view this has a bad effect on raising attainment for the following reason.

If a learner gets to Level 5 in the National Curriculum they should be capable of a solid pass at Level 1 in the QCF. The new Silver INGOT is the ITQ at level 1 adapted to fit to the KS3 NC at level 5. The next stage for a QCF learner would be to start Level 2 work. Instead the NC learner carries on with NC Level 6 and 7 for which they get no real credit. Let's say they are a higher attainer and reach Level 8 in the National Curriculum. They are then spending two years marking time in Key Stage 4 doing level 2 work they have already shown they can achieve by the end of KS3. Some of these problems are identified in the OFSTED report in March 2009, "The Importance of ICT".

So what we have with the New Silver INGOT is

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QCF Level 1 ITQ certificate in User Skills (Open Systems and Enterprise) --------> Level 5 of the National Curriculum

The ITQ national vocational qualification in ICT is a pass or fail qualification. It is not possible to give a pass with merit or pass with distinction. If a learner demonstrates that they have covered the National Curriculum programmes of study for Key Stage 3 and achieve a level 5, the law is satisfied so why not now go on to Level 2? That is a more natural progression route. If a high attainer can demonstrate Level 5 attainment in Year 7 (more likely if they have taken the Entry 3 qualification in KS2), why not start level 2 work and get to a full level 2 by the end of KS3?

The Key Stage 3 and Key stage 4 programmes of study for ICT are very similar. Where they are different it is generally in specifying things like "demanding problem solving" i KS4 which is perfectly doable for many learners in KS3. So going on to level 2 in KS3 or KS4 is not an issue in terms of the statutory programmes. What is an issue is the demand and progression routes particularly for higher attainling learners and practical implementation of a personalised learning agenda.

Level 2

Level 2 in the QCF is equivalent to GCSE grades A*-C. ITQ is a pass/fail qualification and so a QCF level 2 of this type is normally given points equivalent to a grade B at GCSE. So how do we provide a progression route beyond this for higher attainers?

Supporting progression using a vocational user route.

1. ITQ can be achieved with a minority of units at level 1.
2. Make this ITQ level equivalent in points to GCSE Grade C.
3. If all units are at level 2 make this equivalent to the points for a GCSE grade B.
4. For a Grade A points equivalent there must be at least 4 credits at level 3 (This is A level equvalent but only for about 25% of the work)
5. For a Grade A* points equivalent. Same as for a grade A but there must be a project drawing on the criteria that satisfies the criteria for exceptional performance in the National Curriculum.

Accredit a level 3 award that takes about 10% of curriculum time and can be achieved by higher attaining learners in Key Stage 4 if they successfully achieve level 2 by the end of Key Stage 3. This provides scope for choice in other curricular areas eg standard GCSEs in En, Ma, Sci, Hi, Art, Mu MfL, DT etc. This qualification could easily be designed to match the KS4 POS (although one has to question the importance of this if the student has already shown they have done so in KS3.)

Furthermore, this Level 3 qualification can also be accredited as specialist learning for the Advanced Diploma and therefore provide a progression route for the Diplomas where a personalised learning agenda contributes in a meaningful way to a better balance in the types of student going on to level 3 academic/vocational qualification.

Beyond Level 3

We are assuming here that even higher attainers might excel in IT and achieve level 3 by the end of KS4 but not yet be ready for Level 4 mathematics, for example. In the Sixth Form foundation degrees, combinations of A levels and vocational qualifications and the Advanced Diploma are all possible taking credit at Level 3 gained earlier on into the mix. Furthermore if the contexts for learning encourage learning how to learn and how to find free learning resources from the internet Sixth Form learners are empowered to direct their learning with much greater autonomy.

Points

Points for qualifications gained up to the age of 16 are aggregated at that age for the purpose of compiling school league tables. A GCSE grade A* is worth 58 points and a B is worth 46. So a learner

gaining the ITQ at level 2 needs another 12 points to make this the equivalent of an A*. This is further complicated because usually the points average is capped based on the best 8 subjects. Since the new ITQ does not have scope to provide the equivalent of A/A* we need a mechanism for allocating points to different versions of te ITQ with different level units. That could simply be a transcript in addition to the ITQ summarising the units achieved and their points value.

What does this look like from the learner point of view?

The learner covers mandatory level 2 units. Improving Productivity using IT, Web Software, Collaborative Technologies and an optional unit from the ITQ bank, say "bespoke software" . They set up a web site for a local business as part of their work experience using Google's "getting British Business on-line" initiative which is also backed by the Enteprise UK and e-skills. They set up an e-portfolio of work for their school subjects and discuss issues related to contemporary IT in society includig internet safety, copyright and social inclusion. They work in teams and match their work to the assessment criteria providing evidence to their assessor who records their progress in the on-line markbook. This is sufficient to get then the points equivalent of a GCSE grade B. Some take part in a project to modify open source Javascript puzzles to produce leaning resources for younger peers. They document these and meet the criteria for the Bespoke Software unit at ITQ Level 3 using Javascript as the Bespoke Software and on-line tutorials. The assessment for this work is demanding and represents attainment equivalent to an A or A* at GCSE.

Source URL: https://theingots.org/community/frameworks

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