

# The VQ Landscape 2009

## A review of vocational qualification achievements in the UK

An initiative by 

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# The VQ Landscape

**A revolution is happening.  
A revolution in the way people  
develop skills and knowledge.**

**A vocational revolution.**

**Foreword**



**Andy Powell**  
**Chief Executive, Edge**

**Last year Edge commissioned the first annual review of vocational qualifications to celebrate the inaugural VQ Day. We have repeated the task for VQ Day 2009 and there is simply no argument; a vocational revolution is taking place.**

The findings presented here are exciting: over 3.6 million vocational qualifications were achieved, up over 350,000 (11 per cent) on the previous year.

In the space of just a year the vocational landscape has changed quite dramatically. Young people are being given greater access than ever to vocational learning opportunities; businesses are using vocational qualifications to respond to changing business needs; and vocational qualifications are helping people of all ages follow one of the many paths to success.

**The revolution is happening in schools.**

Increasingly young people, including under-16s, are gaining vocational qualifications originally designed for adults. Young people in schools achieved 322,000 vocationally-related qualifications last year; the second year the number of VRQs achieved by young people has doubled.

**The revolution is happening in universities.**

VQs are increasingly being recognised as university entry qualifications in the UCAS points system and six of the top ten subject areas in higher education are vocationally-related disciplines. The biggest increase in graduations in 2008, at over 12 per cent, was in architecture, building and planning, followed by veterinary science.

**The revolution is happening in colleges and training companies.**

Well over a million VQs were achieved through colleges, including a significant number of higher-level qualifications. Private training companies accounted for a further 580,000.

**The revolution is happening in businesses.**

VQs are particularly attractive to employers seeking to improve business performance in a challenging economic climate. In an increasing range of occupations including accountancy, motor vehicles and exercise, the achievement of a designated VQ is seen as a 'licence to practise'.

At a time when we're fighting the effects of a world-wide recession, improving skills has to be a top priority for all of us. Vocational qualifications recognise the skills needed for work, today and tomorrow.

We should celebrate success: that's what VQ Day is all about.

And we should embrace the revolution.

Andy Powell  
 Chief Executive, Edge

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## **Acronyms**

### **Acronyms used in this report**

Those marked \* are explained in the Glossary on Page 32

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
FE*	Further Education
HE*	Higher Education
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HNC	Higher National Certificate
HND	Higher National Diploma
I(C)T	Information and Communications Technology
NQF*	National Qualifications Framework
NVQ*	National Vocational Qualification
ONS	Office of National Statistics
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
QCF*	Qualifications and Credit Framework
SCQF*	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SVQ*	Scottish Vocational Qualification
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
VQ*	Vocational Qualification
VRQ*	Vocationally-Related Qualification

## Highlights

### Highlights

**Millions of people throughout the UK achieve a VQ each year –**

young people and adults, students and employees. In 2007–8 3.6 million VQs were achieved, up over 350,000 (11 per cent) on the previous year.

**The number of VQs achieved is rising.** 773,000 National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs and SVQs) were awarded in 2007–8, up 100,000 on the previous year and an increase of 92 per cent since 2002–3. Over two and a half million vocationally-related qualifications (VRQs) were awarded – an increase of 8 per cent over the year and more than double the VRQ achievements of five years previously.

**VQs are achieved by adults.** Well over half of all NVQ/SVQ awards are achieved by people aged over 25 and over, and a quarter by people over 40, reflecting their use in raising workforce skills and value to people of all ages.

**VQs are achieved by young people.** A growing majority of VRQs are achieved by young people – 63 per cent by under-25s in 2007–8, compared to 56 per cent the year before.

**VQs are a rapidly growing feature of the school curriculum,** particularly for the 14–16 age group. Schools accounted for 322,000 vocationally-related qualifications achieved in 2007–8, more than twice as many as the previous year.

**VQs are achieved in the full spectrum of occupational areas,** including health and social care, business administration, IT, retail, construction, engineering and manufacturing.

**VQs are achieved at all levels,** from pre-GCSE level to the highest professional levels of achievement.

**Vocationally-related study is a significant feature of higher education.**

Six of the top ten subject areas of higher education qualifications awarded at all levels in 2008 were in work-related disciplines, with business and administrative studies the single biggest area of higher education achievement.

**VQs enhance employability.** The latest National Learner Satisfaction Survey found that 87 per cent of vocational learners agreed that their course had provided them with skills they could use in a job. Other benefits to learners include higher earnings, a 'licence to practise' a trade or profession, and progression to higher qualifications.

## **Highlights**

### **Training linked to qualifications is valued by employees and their employers.**

93 per cent of employees on the Train to Gain programme were motivated by the opportunity to gain a qualification. A substantial majority of employers surveyed by the CBI saw the assurance of workforce competence as a benefit of investing in VQs. Many saw training linked to VQs as an aid to recruitment and as a way of demonstrating workforce skills to external customers. In a survey by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) over 80 per cent of employers of Apprentices (whose training typically involves achieving two VQs) said they helped to improve productivity.

### **There are some marked gender differences in VQ achievement.**

A higher proportion of women than men overall currently hold a VQ, with women achieving more at the lower and some of the higher levels. Considerably more women achieved higher level NVQs/SVQs than men, although the gap has narrowed slightly. By contrast more VRQs were achieved by men than by women, particularly the VRQs requiring longer periods of study. Men continue to dominate qualifications in engineering and construction, while women greatly outnumber men in health, public services and care qualifications.

### **Ethnic minority participation in VQ programmes is variable.**

While the achievements of black and minority ethnic (BME) employees through England's Train to Gain programme are relatively high overall, numbers completing Apprenticeships continue to be quite low, particularly among those of black African, black Caribbean, Indian and Chinese ethnicity.

### **The achievement of vocational qualifications varies between the UK nations and regions.**

While the Scots have a higher proportion of people with VQs than the other UK nations, Northern Irish women are the highest VQ-qualified group by gender. The North West of England again has the largest total of combined NVQ and VRQ achievements, while the North East continues to generate a high share of achievements relative to its workforce.

### **Now is a good time to invest in VQs.**

Research suggests that businesses which invest in training are twice as likely to survive the recession as those that do not.

**Unlike GCSE and A Level exam results, vocational qualifications are achieved on almost every day of the year in a wide range of settings by children and adults, students and employees.**

## Introduction

### Introduction

This second VQ Landscape review updates and develops last year's report. Having the first report to build on has eased the task to some extent, but there was no shortage of challenges in getting to grips with the VQ data underpinning the facts, figures and commentary presented here.

The year has seen significant changes in the way official statistics are presented and published. These have been generally beneficial, with welcome improvements in the range and quality of VQ data available. The changes have meant that some of the most important sources have been published later than expected. Coupled with the earlier celebration of VQ Day this year, the timeframe for collecting and analysing data has been compressed. Nevertheless, we are able to present a uniquely comprehensive picture of VQ achievements in the UK.

Unlike GCSE and A Level exam results, vocational qualifications are achieved on almost every day of the year in a wide range of settings by children and adults, students and employees. Certification data are collected on a regular basis by government departments and agencies, and collated, analysed and published in different forms throughout the year. There is no annual 'big bang' announcement of VQ results. This accounts in part for the relatively low public profile and understanding of vocational qualifications – and the need for VQ Day.

Despite improvements in this year's official VQ statistics, caution is still advised for the unwary. One database understates VQ achievements because a large number of certifications are not fed into it, while another contains vastly inflated VQ figures because they include basic, generic and general qualifications that fall well outside our definition of 'vocational'. We have been rigorous in identifying truly VQ achievements, which are many, growing and various.

The most accessible sources tend to be Anglo-centric, with Scotland's different and diverse system posing particular challenges in trying to do justice to all the UK nations. We have made some progress in this respect this year, but much remains to be done.

Where the specific data needed do not exist, we have again been very conservative in making estimates. This year's global figure of 3.6 million VQs almost certainly understates the actual scale of vocational achievement.

The VQ landscape this year is of course overhung by the dark clouds of recession, which has made future prospects very difficult to gauge, at least in the short term. The impact on VQ achievements is likely to be mixed. We point at some of the initiatives for re-skilling and up-skilling that will be underpinned by vocational qualifications, together with the latest longer-term skills projections. The case for investment in vocational skills and qualifications remains strong, perhaps stronger than ever in a difficult economic climate.

## Definitions

### Definitions

#### 01 – What is a ‘vocational qualification’?

We define VQs as recognised awards designed primarily to give entry to, or advancement in, a specific line of work. A fuller definition is given in Annex 2.

VQs include:

- National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs), which assess competence in specific occupations based on UK-wide national occupational standards.
- Vocationally-Related Qualifications (VRQs), such as Edexcel BTECs, City & Guilds and OCR Nationals. VRQs generally test *knowledge* of (or gained in) an occupational area, rather than the full range of *skills* needed to do a particular job.
- National Progression Awards (NPAs) in Scotland, designed to assess a defined set of skills and knowledge in specialist vocational areas.
- Higher education qualifications such as Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs), Foundation degrees and work-related honours and higher degrees such as Masters of Business Administration (MBAs).
- Professional Development Awards (PDAs) in Scotland. These are flexible higher qualifications made up of Higher National, SVQ and other vocational units.
- Professional qualifications awarded by recognised professional bodies (with an emphasis on those which can be achieved through vocational, rather than purely academic, routes).

Apprenticeship programmes in England, Wales and Northern Ireland typically include the achievement of two vocational qualifications: an NVQ (concerned with competence) and a VRQ (concerned with theory and knowledge, and sometimes called a ‘technical certificate’). Where appropriate, Apprenticeship programmes may contain a single accredited qualification spanning both elements. The equivalent programme in Scotland is the Modern Apprenticeship, which is based on the achievement of a relevant SVQ.

## **Definitions**

### **02 – Qualification levels**

VQs are available and achieved at all levels of the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

- Entry Level – for those not ready to achieve at level 1 and above.
- Levels 1 and 2 – GCSEs and levels 1 and 2 NVQs and VRQs are at these levels.
- Level 3 – A Levels and level 3 NVQs and VRQs are at this level.
- Levels 4 and 5 – such as HNC/HND, Foundation degrees and level 4 NVQs.
- Levels 6, 7 and 8 – honours degrees, higher degrees, level 5 NVQs.

Apprenticeship programmes are available at levels 2 and 3, with a small number of new Higher Apprenticeship programmes in engineering, IT and telecommunications being piloted at level 5.

The level of a qualification refers to its level of difficulty, not the length of the course. This is particularly the case with VRQs, where qualifications at the same level may vary from awards requiring a few days' tuition to large qualifications requiring many months of learning. A Level 2 Award in Retail Customer Service requires an estimated 20 hours of guided learning, while a Level 2 Diploma in Professional Cookery requires an estimated 450 hours – more than an A Level.

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework has 12 levels denoting the volume of accredited qualifications as well as their difficulty. Equivalences with the rest of the UK can be gauged through NVQs and SVQs levels 1 to 5, which are positioned on the Scottish framework at levels 4, 5, 6, 8 and 11.

### **03 – Comparison with GCSEs and A Levels**

Our report generally avoids direct comparisons with GCSEs, A Levels and other qualifications which might be regarded as 'academic' rather than 'vocational'. However, it is generally accepted that a level 2 NVQ is broadly equivalent to 5 GCSEs at grades A\* to C, and that a level 3 NVQ is equivalent to two A Level passes.

## **Numbers**

## **Numbers**

### **04 – Vocational qualifications numbers**

We calculate that at least 3,600,000 vocational qualifications were achieved in the UK in 2007–8.

When these figures are broken down by different types of qualifications, most areas are reporting significant increases in the last five years.

VQ achievements include 773,000 National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs/SVQs, levels 1–5) in 2007–8, up 100,000 (nearly 15 per cent) on the previous year and up over 90 per cent since 2003–4.

Over 2.5 million VRQs (levels 1–3) were awarded, up 8 per cent on the previous year and more than double the number achieved five years previously.

About 250,000 VQs at levels 2 and 3 were achieved through Apprenticeships, which typically include an NVQ and a VRQ. Numbers completing the full requirements of their Apprenticeship programme have doubled over the last five years.

168,000 VQs were achieved through the Train to Gain programme, a government scheme to encourage and support the vocational training of employees in England. 154,000 employees achieved a full level 2 qualification (equivalent to five GCSEs A-C) through the programme in 2007–8. A further 14,000 gained a full level 3 qualification (equivalent to two A Levels).

Over 6,000 National Progression Awards were awarded in Scotland (Scottish levels 5–6), up over a third on the previous year.

At higher levels the headline VQ figure includes the following achievements:

- Over 14,000 Foundation degrees (level 5) – up nearly 30 per cent on the previous year and more than double the number of students graduating with Foundation degrees in 2005.
- Over 54,000 Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs).
- Nearly 10,000 Professional Development Awards in Scotland (Scottish levels 7–9), up five per cent on the previous year.
- Over 126,000 vocationally-related honours and higher degrees and professional qualifications achieved by UK students and workers, up three per cent on the previous year and 20 per cent over five years.

Post-graduate VQs appear to have grown significantly overall, by an estimated 25 per cent since 2003. 2007 to 2008 saw a 20 per cent growth in one of the biggest titles, the Postgraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) taken by trainee teachers, with successful completions up by 4,600 to 26,800. There is also evidence of increasing demand for practice-based higher degrees such as master's degrees and doctorates in professional practice, particularly in the public sector.

## **Numbers**

Latest figures show that in England nearly 20 per cent of 19 year-olds in 2008 who had achieved at level 2 (broadly equivalent to 5 A\*–C GCSEs) did so through vocational qualifications, nearly doubling the 50,000 level 2 VQ achievers in 2004 to 98,000. The trend was even more apparent at level 3 (equivalent to two A Levels), achieved by over 25 per cent via the vocational route, a jump from 22,000 to 81,000 over the same period. VRQ achievements accounted for most of the increase, growing rapidly since 2004 – by over 25 per cent since 2007 alone at level 2, and by 28 per cent at level 3.

### **05 – Where VQs are achieved**

As last year, the majority of NVQs and SVQs achieved were through an almost equal split of further education colleges (298,000) and private training companies (297,000). 81,000 NVQs/SVQs were delivered by employers, 15,000 by adult education centres and 13,500 by the Armed Forces.

Although colleges were again by far the biggest providers of VRQs (778,000), the numbers achieved in schools more than doubled to 322,000, overtaking for the first time those achieved through private training companies (283,000).

The growth of vocational qualifications achieved at school continued apace, mainly at levels 1 and 2, reflecting the growth of work-related learning in the 14–16 national curriculum. As well as doubling their VRQ achievements, schools accounted for some 7,000 NVQs and SVQs, up more than 50 per cent on the previous year. Other school children achieved vocational qualifications by attending a local college or training provider part-time. More than 200,000 additional VQs were achieved by children this way.

Figures from the awarding body, Edexcel, demonstrate the growing use of VQs in schools. In 2007–8 115,000 BTECs were achieved in schools, well over double the previous year and a more than nine-fold increase over three years. The biggest increase was in BTEC first certificates and diplomas, up from 38,000 to 99,000 over two years.

Although higher-level VQs are achieved mainly through universities, further education colleges also play a very significant role. More than 10 per cent of all higher education qualifications – mostly vocational – are delivered through colleges. 56 per cent of Foundation degrees are delivered through colleges, with the remaining 44 per cent delivered wholly or partly at universities. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland a significant minority of Higher National qualifications are achieved in universities, whereas in Scotland nearly all HNCs and HNDs are achieved in further education colleges.

### **06 – How VQs are achieved**

NVQs/SVQs are achieved through the assessment of practical work against UK-wide standards of competence. Most long-course VRQs (as distinct from certificates achieved through short courses) are achieved through full-time study and include work experience placements.

Over 90 per cent of HNCs are done part-time, while most HND courses are full-time. Just over half of all Foundation degrees (56 per cent) are studied part-time by employees, with at least 20 per cent delivered in the workplace, particularly through work-based projects.

Most higher-level VQs, particularly professional qualifications, are achieved while working through part-time study. Distance learning is a widely used way of gaining higher VQs, as it enables people to combine their learning with work commitments.

## Numbers

### 07 — Who awards vocational qualifications?

Vocational awarding bodies include City & Guilds, OCR, Edexcel, EDI and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). There are over 120 awarding bodies for NVQs and VRQs, including specialist organisations serving specific industry sectors.

Edexcel awards the BTEC suite of qualifications, including Higher National Certificates and Diplomas. HNCs and HNDs are also awarded by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, along with SVQs and Scotland's Professional Development Awards. OCR awards include OCR Nationals (a fast-growing alternative to GCSEs), NVQs and a range of ICT courses such as CLAiT, iPRO, and iTQ.

Vocational degrees, including Foundation degrees, are awarded by universities (though some colleges may also be granted Foundation degree-awarding powers in the near future).

Thousands of vocational qualifications achieved each year are professional qualifications awarded by professional bodies such as the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), Institute of Leadership & Management (ILM), Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS), Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX), Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) and Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB).

Since 2008 employers have been able to apply to become recognised awarding bodies in their own right. The Government is working with the CBI and the National Employer Service to encourage more employers to become involved.

Network Rail, Flybe and McDonald's were the first employers to gain recognition as awarding bodies. The Ministry of Defence and City College Norwich subsequently became the first public sector organisation and further education college respectively to become awarding bodies in the new credit-based system.

<b>VQs approved and awarded in 2009</b>	
<b>McDonald's</b>	<b>Level 3 Diploma in Shift Management</b>
<b>Ministry of Defence</b>	<b>Level 1 and 2 Certificates in Working in French</b>
<b>Network Rail</b>	<b>Level 2 Award in Rail Track Engineering Maintenance</b>
<b>City College Norwich</b>	<b>Levels 2 and 3 Awards in Introduction to the Financial Services Industry</b>
	<b>Level 5 Award in Developing Peer Reviewers</b>
	<b>Level 7 Certificate in Leading and Managing (Peer Review)</b>

## **VQ achievers**

### **VQ Achievers**

#### **08 — Age of VQ achievers**

Vocational qualifications are for suitable for people of all ages, not just young people still in education or initial training.

Well over half (57 per cent) of all NVQ/SVQ awards were achieved by people over 25, up two per cent on the previous year. Over a quarter (26 per cent) were achieved by people over 40, reflecting their use in developing workforce skills. By contrast most VRQs were achieved by young people – 63 per cent in 2007–8, compared to 56 per cent the year before.

Increasingly young people, including under-16s, are gaining vocational qualifications originally designed for adults. Such courses include over 30 level 1 and 2 NVQs in sectors ranging from Food and Drink to IT; and professional qualifications such the Association of Accounting Technicians' Level 2 Certificate in Accounting. The trend is most notable with VRQs, where a rapidly increasing number continue to be achieved by 14 to 16 year-olds – 311,000, well over double the previous year.

The biggest increase was in children achieving VRQs at school – 311,000, over double the previous year – reflecting the growing importance of work-related learning in the school curriculum. A relatively small but growing number of NVQs continue to be achieved by 14–16s – over 43,000 in 2007–8, up 10 per cent on the previous year. In addition, 300 under-16s completed a full level 2 Apprenticeship, doing a large of practical learning with an employer.

In England there was an impressive rise in the number of 16 to 24-year-olds completing Advanced Apprenticeships – 19,700, up 11 per cent on the previous year. There was also a particularly marked rise in the number of over-25s completing an Apprenticeship – 1,200 in 2007-8, six times more than the previous year – reflecting the raising of the age barrier for funding Apprenticeship programmes.

An evaluation of the Train to Gain service to raise the skills of the workforce in England suggests that it is helping to increase the proportion of older employees working towards a vocational qualification. Almost a third of Train to Gain learners were aged 36–45, and a further third were over 45.

Over 60 per cent of Foundation degree graduates were over 21 when they started the course. Like many other higher vocational qualifications, most are taken by people in work.

**VQ achievers**

**09 – Gender**

Figure 01 shows that in the adult workforce, a higher percentage of women than men hold VQs at levels 1, 4, 5 and 6. The picture is reversed in relation to the percentage of the workforce holding level 3 VQs.

Figure 01  
 % of UK workforce holding vocational qualifications

Gender	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Levels 4-6	Levels 7-8
Men	5%	7%	14%	9%	3%
Women	15%	7%	9%	12%	3%

**Source: LSC (2007)**

Considerably more women achieved higher level NVQs/SVQs than men, although the gap has narrowed slightly. Women achieved 61 per cent of all level 3s (60 per cent in 2006–7) and 69 per cent of all at levels 4 and 5 (70 per cent the previous year). By contrast more VRQs were achieved by men, particularly the VRQs requiring longer periods of study, where men achieved more at all levels.

There are marked gender differences by qualification sector. Men dominate qualifications in engineering and construction, while women greatly outnumber men in health, public services and care qualifications.

With VRQs, which can be of varying sizes, there are some significant gender differences within industry sectors. In business administration and law VRQs, for example, while women achieved 79 per cent more qualifications overall than men, the situation was reversed to some extent with the larger awards, where achievements by men were 19 per cent higher than those by women. In information and communication technology VRQs, a rough gender balance in achievements overall contrasts with much higher achievement in the larger qualifications among men, who accounted for more than two and a half times of the larger ICT awards than women.

**VQ achievers**

**10 – Ethnicity**

Figure O2 shows the proportions of VQ achievers by ethnic origin on two flagship vocational programmes, Apprenticeship and Train to Gain, 2006–8. The proportions of Train to Gain achievers of BME origin were notably higher than those for Apprenticeship in every case except those of Chinese ethnicity, where numbers were consistently low on both programmes. Differences across the programmes probably reflect the different aims of the programmes: Apprenticeships are substantial work-based programmes normally involving the achievement of two VQs at level 2 or 3 and are undertaken largely by young people entering the workforce; Train to Gain aims to develop the skills of the existing workforce of all ages, with an initial focus on those without level 2 qualifications.

Numbers of BME trainees completing Apprenticeships remain relatively low overall. Although Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities are relatively well represented among Apprenticeship completers, others remain low despite some improvements over the two years. BME participation in Train to Gain was notably higher in Greater London, the Midlands and the East of England

Figure O2

Ethnicity of VQ achievers on Apprenticeship and Train to Gain programmes

Ethnicity	Approx. % of working age population	% VQ achievements		% VQ achievements	
		Apprenticeships		Train to Gain	
		2006/7	2007/8	2006/7	2007/8
<b>White</b>	<b>93.5%</b>	<b>94.5%</b>	<b>94.0%</b>	<b>85.8%</b>	<b>84.8%</b>
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>
<b>Asian:</b>					
<b>Indian</b>	<b>1.5%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>2.2%</b>
<b>Pakistani</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
<b>Bangladeshi</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
<b>Other Asian</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>1.1%</b>
<b>Black:</b>					
<b>Caribbean</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>1.2%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>
<b>African</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>	<b>2.8%</b>
<b>Other black</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.3%</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>	<b>0.6%</b>
<b>Chinese</b>	<b>0.5%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>	<b>0.1%</b>
<b>Other</b>	<b>0.4%</b>	<b>1.0%</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>3.9%</b>

Source: ONS/Data Service (2009)

**Industries and employers**

**Industries and employers**

**11- Sector subject areas and levels of achievement**

The biggest areas of NVQ and VRQ awards in 2007 were health, public services and care, retail and commercial enterprise, ICT, business administration & law and leisure, travel and tourism. Figure 3 shows the biggest industry areas of NVQ and VRQ achievements as percentages of the total awarded from 2005 to 2008. As VRQs vary considerably in size, it is also worth noting that Construction and Arts, Media and Publishing awards are particularly well represented among the larger VRQs awarded.

EAL, a major awarder of VQs in engineering and technology, reports a 47 per cent growth in building services qualifications awarded between April 2008 and March 2009, compared to the year before. This has been partly driven by the need to update the UK workforce in line with the latest IEE wiring regulations. Since 2008 1,500 new and existing electricians have achieved EAL's industry-recognised VRQs incorporating the new regulations.

Figure 03

Most common vocational qualifications by industrial sector

<b>NVQs/SVQs awarded</b>	<b>07/08</b>	<b>06/07</b>	<b>05/06</b>	<b>VRQs awarded</b>	<b>07/08</b>	<b>06/07</b>	<b>05/06</b>
<b>Health, Public Services &amp; Care</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>Health, Public Services &amp; Care</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Retail &amp; Commercial Enterprise</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>ICT</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Business Administration &amp; Law</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>Leisure, Travel &amp; Tourism</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>Construction</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>Engineering &amp; Manufacturing</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Engineering &amp; Manufacturing</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>Business, Administration &amp; Law</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>ICT</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>Retail &amp; Commercial Enterprise</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>10%</b>

Source: ONS/Data Service (2009), ONS/DCSF (2008b), ONS/DfES (2007) and author's calculations.

**Industries and employers**

**There were some marked differences in NVQ and VRQ award levels:**

In most sectors of industry, the majority of NVQs were at level 2, with the exception of Education and Training, where level 3 awards were highest. Health, Public Services & Care and Business Administration & Law had the highest proportions of NVQs awarded at the higher levels, 3, 4 and 5, while Retail & Commercial Enterprise and Agriculture, Horticulture & Animal Care had relatively high numbers at level 1.

Figure 04 gives a detailed breakdown of Apprenticeship completions in England by industry, 2005-8, rounded to the nearest 100. Apprenticeship programmes usually involve the achievement of both an NVQ (certifying competence to recognised UK industry standards) and a VRQ (certifying underpinning knowledge) at level 2 or 3, as well as Key Skills such as communication and working with others. The figures generally show vigorous growth, with some exceptions. Declines in some areas are often due to the superseding of 'old' Apprenticeship programmes by revised frameworks.

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Figure 04  
 Apprenticeship completions, 2005-8

<b>Title</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
Accountancy	2,900	2,600	2,700
Active Leisure and Learning	2,000	2,300	2,200
Agricultural Crops and Livestock	300	300	300
Amenity Horticulture	500	600	500
Animal Care	300	200	200
Automotive Industry	6,200	5,100	1,300
Aviation	100	100	200
Barbering	N/A	N/A	100
Beauty Therapy	300	500	500
Business Administration	10,400	11,300	10,500
Carry and Deliver Goods	200	N/A	200
Chemical, Pharmaceutical, Petrochemical Manufacturing & Refining	100	100	N/A
Children's Care Learning and Development	6,200	7,200	7,600
Communications Technologies (Telecoms)	1,200	1,000	1,300
Construction	9,400	12,400	12,800
Contact Centres	600	800	700
Customer Service	8,400	9,300	9,000
Dental Nursing	200	700	700
Driving Goods Vehicles	1,000	1,300	1,200
Electricity Industry	100	100	200
Electrotechnical	3,200	3,100	3,200
Engineering	8,100	7,200	7,800
Engineering Construction	100	200	100
Equine Industry	700	700	700
Fariery	N/A	N/A	100
Floristry	100	100	100
Food and Drink Manufacturing Operations	100	100	100
Furniture Industry	300	300	200
Gas Industry	500	500	500
Glass Industry	300	300	300
Hairdressing	8,300	9,800	9,700
Health and Social Care	3,500	4,100	4,100
Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration	600	800	700
Hospitality and Catering	7,400	7,100	7,500

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<b>Title</b>	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
Industrial Applications	700	900	800
Insurance	200	100	100
International Trade and Services	100	N/A	N/A
IT Services and Development	1,100	900	1,700
IT User	1,600	2,200	1,800
Land-based Service Engineering	200	300	200
Mail Services	N/A	100	100
Management	700	1,000	1,100
Marine Industry	100	100	100
Meat and Poultry Processing	100	200	100
Optical Advisor	100	100	100
Plumbing	2,100	2,900	3,500
Print and Printed Packaging	200	200	100
Property Services	100	200	200
Public Services	300	300	800
Rail Transport Engineering	100	200	200
Retail	3,900	3,800	4,300
Retail Financial Services	N/A	N/A	100
Roadside Assistance and Recovery	N/A	N/A	100
Sales and Telesales	N/A	100	200
Security Industry	500	700	500
Sporting Excellence	200	400	700
Storage and Warehousing	N/A	400	500
Textiles	500	300	100
Traffic Office	N/A	N/A	100
Transport Engineering and Maintenance	100	100	100
Travel and Tourism Services Leisure and Business	800	1,100	800
Vehicle Body and Paint Operations	N/A	500	600
Vehicle Fitting	100	700	600
Vehicle Maintenance and Repair	200	2,100	4,200
Vehicle Parts Operations	N/A	100	200
Veterinary Nursing	200	300	500
Wholesale, Distribution, Warehousing & Storage	600	600	500
Other	400	500	500
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>98,700</b>	<b>111,800</b>	<b>112,600</b>

Source: ONS/Data Service (2009), Supplementary Table S5.1

**Industries and employers**

A broad sector breakdown of VQ achievements by employees through the government's flagship Train to Gain programme in England provides an insight into use of VQs – predominantly level 2 NVQs – to assess and develop the skills of people in work, as distinct from their use by young people to equip them for entry to the workforce.

Figure 05  
 Train to Gain certifications, 2006–8\*

<b>Sector Subject Area</b>	<b>2006/07</b>	<b>2007/08</b>
<b>Health, Public Services and Care</b>	<b>12,300</b>	<b>38,200</b>
<b>Construction, Planning and the Built Environment</b>	<b>14,400</b>	<b>33,900</b>
<b>Retail and Commercial Enterprise</b>	<b>10,400</b>	<b>32,900</b>
<b>Business, Administration and Law</b>	<b>8,700</b>	<b>26,400</b>
<b>Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies</b>	<b>12,500</b>	<b>21,500</b>
<b>Leisure, Travel and Tourism</b>	<b>1,500</b>	<b>6,100</b>
<b>Agriculture, Horticulture and Animal Care</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>3,900</b>
<b>Information and Communication Technology</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>3,400</b>
<b>Education and Training</b>	<b>600</b>	<b>1,900</b>
<b>Arts, Media and Publishing</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Numbers include 'Skills for Life' qualifications (19,000 in 2007/8) that fall outside our definition of VQs

Source: ONS/Data Service (2009), Supplementary Table S6.2

Turning to higher education qualifications, six of the top ten subject areas are vocationally-related disciplines, as shown in Figure 06. Graduations in 2008 were higher than the previous year in every subject area except computer science, where there was a slight dip. Business and administrative studies were the single biggest area of higher education achievement, with over 100,000 qualifications awarded in 2008, a 7.4 per cent increase on the previous year. The biggest increase, at over 12 per cent, was in architecture, building & planning, followed by veterinary science.

**Industries and employers**

Figure 06

Higher education qualifications awarded by subject area, with more vocationally-related disciplines in bold

Top 10 HE subject areas	HE Qualifications awarded (all levels)		% change
	2008	2007	
<b>Business &amp; administrative studies</b>	<b>104,870</b>	<b>97,680</b>	<b>+ 7.4%</b>
<b>Subjects allied to medicine</b>	<b>84,670</b>	<b>84,360</b>	<b>+ 0.4%</b>
<b>Education</b>	<b>75,520</b>	<b>72,255</b>	<b>+ 4.5%</b>
Social studies	63,880	60,415	+ 5.7%
Creative arts & design	50,345	46,595	+ 8.0%
Biological sciences	45,100	43,005	+ 4.9%
<b>Engineering &amp; technology</b>	<b>40,035</b>	<b>38,620</b>	<b>+ 3.7%</b>
Languages	32,775	31,440	+ 4.2%
Law	31,040	30,340	+ 2.3%
Computer science	29,255	31,270	- 6.5%
<b>Other vocationally-related subject areas in the top 20</b>			
<b>Architecture, building &amp; planning</b>	<b>19,030</b>	<b>16,940</b>	<b>+12.3%</b>
<b>Mass communications &amp; documentation</b>	<b>15,630</b>	<b>15,308</b>	<b>+ 2.1%</b>
<b>Medicine &amp; dentistry</b>	<b>14,805</b>	<b>13,960</b>	<b>+ 6.1%</b>
<b>Agriculture &amp; related subjects</b>	<b>4,860</b>	<b>4,750</b>	<b>+ 2.3%</b>
<b>Veterinary science</b>	<b>935</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>+ 11.3%</b>
<b>Total vocationally-related</b>	<b>420,650</b>	<b>406,323</b>	<b>+ 3.5%</b>

**Source: HESA and author's calculations. These figures include qualifications awarded to foreign students studying in the UK, who make up around 20 per cent of the total.**

HNCs and HNDs remain popular in computing, engineering, business, and creative arts and design, with beauty therapy, social care, early education and childcare featuring strongly among Higher National achievements in Scotland. Foundation degrees, meanwhile, are most popular in subjects allied to medicine, business, creative arts and design, and education.

**Industries and employers**

**12 – The role of VQs in the recession**

Research carried out by the University of Kent in 2007 for the Sector Skills Development Agency found that businesses that invested in training were less than half as likely to close down as those that did not. Commentators have used this finding to stress the importance of training during the recession in helping organisations weather the storm and prepare for the upturn when it comes. There are signs that some businesses, especially large employers, are using slack created by the downturn to improve their workforces' skills and qualifications in order to speed the recovery and take advantage of the opportunities economic revival is likely to offer.

Some VQs are proving to be particularly attractive to employers seeking to improve business performance in a challenging economic climate. One is EAL's suite of NVQs and SVQs levels 2 to 4 in Business-Improvement Techniques (B+IT). These qualifications are based on the principles of lean manufacturing to help employers in all sectors improve productivity and reduce waste. 10,000 B+IT certifications were made in the year to the first quarter of 2009, an increase of 88 per cent on the previous 12 months.

Train to Gain, the government's flagship service in England, helps employers of all kinds get advice and support to train their staff and gain vocational qualifications. Funding for Train to Gain will increase to over £1 billion by 2010–11.

Initially focused on low-skilled workers and the achievement of qualifications at level 2, Train to Gain has developed into a broader, more flexible programme in response to pressing employer needs, encompassing higher level training and qualifications up to level 4. The Government has freed up a proportion of the Train to Gain budget specifically to help small businesses develop their skills during tough economic times with a minimum of bureaucracy.

Earlier restrictions on funding the re-training of employees at the level of a qualification already held have been eased to allow for a significant amount of re-skilling as well as up-skilling. Sector Skills Councils have identified 'priority' level 2 and 3 VQs for re-training supported by Train to Gain, subject to available places. The approved list of VQs for re-training (i.e. at the same level of a qualification already held) is very broad at level 2, but more focused at level 3 on qualifications in skill shortage industries including construction, engineering, property, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, manufacturing, the media and advanced cooking. At both levels there is scope for re-training in cross-sector occupations leading to NVQs and VRQs in areas such as customer service, sales, IT and management.

The government has also committed to expanding Apprenticeships in the public sector, including 5,000 in the NHS, 7,500 in local government and 4,500 in schools and children's services. Recognising the risk of existing Apprentices being made redundant during the recession, the Government is taking steps to ensure that Apprentices can continue off-the-job training for up to six months after redundancy, while seeking a new employer.

In Scotland the government announced a cash injection of £24.7 million in European funding directed towards Scotland's economic recovery through programmes to develop the workforce and safeguard and create jobs. 79 new projects are expected to support 75,000 people in gaining or sustaining employment through training and skills development. In addition, changes to the Individual Learning Accounts Scotland Scheme coming into effect in 2009/10 will enable up to 250,000 more people in Scotland to develop their learning when changing jobs or facing redundancy.

## Benefits of VQs

### Benefits of VQs

#### 13 – The impact of VQs on future earnings

Men generally enjoy higher wage returns from VQs than women, notably at the highest levels, where a man with a post-graduate level VQ or NVQ level 5 earns an average of 31 per cent more than a man with an NVQ level 4 or higher certificate or diploma. This is the single biggest wage return linked to any qualification, vocational or academic, at any level. For women, the equivalent wage return is 22.5 per cent. Conversely, women achieve a higher average than men by progressing from level 3 to 4: 17 per cent, compared to 14 per cent for men.

Looking at graduate earnings, Figure 07 provides a 'top 10' of the highest wage returns to men and women graduates (including those who went on to achieve higher degrees) in the workforce by first degree subject area. Beyond accountancy, which provided the highest earnings returns (relative to arts graduates) for men and women, there were significant gender variations. Men enjoyed higher returns overall than women. There were bigger differences in wage returns among women graduates, with accountancy graduates enjoying more than two and a half times the return of graduates in business, nursing and mechanical engineering. Women graduates in medicine, law and education had relatively high returns, while for men engineering subjects featured more heavily at the high end.

Figure 07  
 Top 10 graduate earnings by first degree achieved

Men	% return*	Women	% return*
Accountancy	42%	Accountancy	37%
Electrical engineering	41%	Medicine and related subjects	28%
Maths and computing	37%	Law	24%
Mechanical engineering	34%	Education	22%
Medicine and related subjects	32%	Electrical engineering	19%
Engineering and technology	32%	Architecture and related subjects	19%
Civil engineering	29%	Maths and computing	18%
Economics	29%	Business and financial studies	14%
Law	28%	Nursing	14%
Education	27%	Mechanical engineering	14%

\* Relative to an Arts degree

Source: Sloane and O'Leary (2005)

There are also rewards to be gained from VQs above first degree level. According to a survey carried out by KPMG for the Financial Times, most MBA graduates from British business schools in 2005 had doubled their earnings by 2008. MBA graduates from the London Business School earned an average of \$147,000 (around £106,000) three years after graduating.

## **Benefits of VQs**

### **14 – Wider benefits**

The wider benefits of VQs include improved motivation, more entrants to the workforce with an appreciation of the world of work, raised skills within the adult workforce, re-skilling to address the challenges of recession, improved staff retention, progression to further learning and a 'licence to practise' in the relevant profession or industry.

In the latest National Learner Satisfaction Survey, 87 per cent of learners in colleges, the workplace and training companies agreed that their learning programme had given them the skills they could use in a job – slightly up on two years previously. A large majority felt more confident in their ability to learn, more creative and prepared to try new things, greater enthusiasm for the subject and more positive about learning than when they started.

An evaluation of the Train to Gain service found that by far the biggest driver of employee participation was the opportunity to achieve a qualification (93 per cent). Other motivations included a desire to improve their skills for their current job and to improve their standing in the labour market. 74 per cent of learners felt the training was benefiting both them and their employer. Specific benefits included greater awareness of the tasks they carried out at work and greater confidence in their ability to learn and handle difficult situations.

Of those who had completed a vocational qualification through Train to Gain:

- 73 per cent reported that they had gained skills that helped them do their current job better.
- 81 per cent felt that these skills would help them do a better job in the future.
- 43 per cent reported having received a pay rise.
- 30 per cent said they had had a promotion.

And amongst all Train to Gain learners:

- 70 per cent planned to stay with their current employer for the foreseeable future.
- 69 per cent hoped to continue studying for further qualifications.

In a survey carried out for the Learning and Skills Council in January 2009, 81 per cent of 500 businesses interviewed said Apprentices helped to generate higher overall productivity. The research also found that one in five of the businesses questioned were hiring more Apprentices to help them through tougher times, with 22 per cent actively recruiting.

The survey's other findings included:

- Two-thirds of employers believed their Apprentices helped to improve their competitiveness.
- 82 per cent said they relied on their Apprenticeship programme to give them the skilled workers they need for the future.
- 92 per cent of employers reported that Apprenticeships resulted in greater employee motivation and job satisfaction.

A survey of employers by the CBI found that the two most frequently given reasons for employers investing in qualifications were to provide assurance of workforce competence (64 per cent) and because they believed that employees value qualifications (62 per cent).

Over a third of the employers also saw the potential to gain qualifications as an aid to recruitment and as demonstrating workforce skills to external customers. The biggest barriers to training leading to qualifications were cost and releasing staff during work hours.

## **Benefits of VQs**

### **15 – Licence to practise**

In an increasing range of occupations, the achievement of a designated VQ is seen as a 'licence to practise'.

Some occupations are tightly regulated, such that only people with an approved qualification may take up that occupation. Examples include doctors, veterinary surgeons and gas fitters. In other cases, industry and professional bodies have developed voluntary schemes to demonstrate that practitioners are qualified and competent to do the job. Examples include:

**Accountancy:** Each year thousands of people achieve recognised professional status in accountancy via the NVQ route. Progression through the accounting NVQs to level 4 provides recognition as a professional through the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT). Some 7,000 people a year achieve entry to the profession by achieving the NVQ level 4, which in turn opens up the work-based route to the chartered accountancy bodies' professional qualifications and chartered status. The AAT is also a stand-alone qualification enabling those with the level 4 qualification to set up in self-employed practice.

**Motor vehicles:** Over 14,000 skilled people in the motor retail industry (up 40 per cent since last year) have joined the ATA (Automotive Technician Accreditation) register following assessment to NVQ standards and demonstration of commitment to the ATA code of conduct. Assessment is made at level 2, 3 or 4, level 4 conferring recognition as a Master Technician. Registration must be renewed at least every five years to ensure the currency of the technicians' knowledge and skills through continuing professional development. A growing number of employers are supporting the scheme, including dealerships such as BMW, Ford and Toyota, and service centres such as Kwik Fit, Nationwide Autocentres and Bosch. Although the scheme is only in its fourth year, one in three repair shops already have at least one ATA registered technician.

**Exercise:** Around 27,500 people with relevant vocational qualifications are listed in the Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs). Registration is available at levels 2, 3 and 4 and is achieved and maintained through the achievement of recognised VQs linked to national standards of competence for exercise and fitness. Members must maintain their registration through continuing professional development. Launched in 2002, REPs is supported by local councils and other leading employers in the sector such as Fitness First, David Lloyd Leisure, Esporta, Bladerunner, Village Hotels and the Armed Forces.

**Welding:** The Level 2 Positional Welding VRQ (awarded by EAL) allows successful candidates to apply for both The Welding Institute (TWI) Licence to Practise photocard and the International Institute of Welding (IIW) International Welder Diploma without the need for additional learning.

**Construction:** Over 1.3 million people in the construction sector – 30 per cent up on last year and around half the workforce – hold CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) cards based on approved vocational qualifications and a health and safety test. All public sector and London Olympic Games construction contracts require workers to hold the relevant CSCS card, and all major contractors support the scheme. The blue card for skilled workers requires the achievement of the relevant NVQ/SVQ level 2, while the gold card requires level 3. CSCS cards for managers can be awarded through the achievement of relevant higher NVQs or professional accreditation.

## Around the UK

## Around the UK

### 16 – Analysis by UK nation and English region

Figure 08 shows that among the UK nations Scotland has the highest proportion of people holding vocational qualifications with particularly high proportions at the higher levels 4-6 (Scottish levels 7-10). England and Wales have roughly equal proportions of VQs across the board. By gender Northern Ireland is markedly polarised – Northern Irish women are the highest VQ-qualified group by gender, while its men are the lowest.

The relatively small numbers of Northern Irish men with VQs may explain why they enjoy higher wage returns than those holding the same level of VQs in the rest of the UK. For example, Northern Irish men with a VQ at level 7-8 earn over 40 per cent more than male colleagues with a VQ at level 4-6, and 63 per cent more than a colleague with a VQ at level 3.

Figure 08  
 % of UK Nationals of working age holding Vocational Qualifications

<b>Men:</b>	<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4-6</b>	<b>Levels 7-8</b>
<b>England</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Wales</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>N Ireland</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>1%</b>
<b>Women:</b>					
<b>England</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Wales</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Scotland</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b>N Ireland</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>3%</b>

**Source: Dickerson (2008)**

Looking at the latest VQ achievements, Wales had a relatively high proportion of NVQ/SVQ achievements in 2007 at over six per cent, compared to its employment share of 4.6 per cent. Per head of working population Wales does particularly well (one NVQ/SVQ awarded per 24 people), compared with England (1:31), Scotland (1:49) and Northern Ireland (1:50).

Wales and the North East have relatively high shares of the highest-level NVQ achievements. Scotland's SVQ achievements are also at a relatively high level, with a higher proportion at level 3 than the other UK nations. NVQs in England as a whole are more concentrated at level 2 than the other UK nations.

At a little over one per cent of the UK total, Scotland's VRQ share is deceptively small because of its growing use of unitised programmes such as National Progression Awards (NPAs) which do not show in official UK-wide figures. Scotland has led the way in its credit-based approach to qualifications.

Other factors in Scotland are its Apprenticeship programmes (branded Modern Apprenticeships), which do not generally involve the achievement of a VRQ as they usually do in the rest of the UK; its relatively large number of HNC and HND achievements, which make up about a third of the UK total; and the growth of its higher unitised programmes, Professional Development Awards (PDAs).

### Around the UK

The North West has the largest combined total of NVQ and VRQ achievements – over 13 per cent of the total awarded in 2007/8, two percentage points higher than the region's working age population. By contrast, London continues to have a relatively small, though rising, share of NVQ achievements, just seven per cent of the UK total, reflecting the relatively low level of Apprenticeships in the capital, which are now however on the rise.

The North East continues to show a relatively high share of NVQ and VRQ achievements; seven and six per cent respectively, well above what would be expected from its employment share of four per cent.

Figure 09

Percentages of VQ awards compared to percentages of the UK working population by region

Region/country	Approx. % of UK population of working age	% of NVQs/SVQs awarded		% of VRQs awarded	
		2006/7	2007/8	2006/7	2007/8
North East	4.2	7.1	6.8	5.5	5.9
North West	11.1	14.5	14.0	14.1	13.0
Yorks & Humber	8.5	10.5	10.3	9.7	10.0
East Midlands	7.2	8.2	9.5	7.7	8.6
West Midlands	8.6	11.4	10.9	10.8	11.4
East	9.1	6.5	7.4	8.1	9.0
London	13.5	6.9	7.4	12.2	11.8
South East	13.4	11.1	11.9	12.5	13.2
South West	8.2	8.4	7.8	10.1	9.3
England	83.9	84.7	86.0	90.8	92.8
Wales	4.7	6.1	6.1	4.6	4.5
Scotland	8.5	6.5	5.8	1.5	1.1
Northern Ireland	2.9	2.1	1.6	1.8	1.7

**Totals may be affected by rounding and, in the case of qualifications, a small percentage of overseas entries (<1%)**

**Sources: ONS/DCSF (2009), ONS/DCSF (2008b), DCSF (2008) and author's calculations**

While overall numbers of Foundation degree achievements are fairly evenly spread across England, there are marked regional differences between those achieved full and part-time. London has one of the highest shares of full-timers but one of the lowest shares of part-timers. In the West Midlands the pattern is reversed, with just 7 per cent full-time and 14 per cent part-time.

## **Standards, progressions, quality and the future**

### **17– Standards, progression and quality**

Success rates in further education colleges (defined as the percentage of starters achieving a qualification) increased from 68 to 78 per cent between 2003 and 2007, and by a further two per cent to 80 per cent in 2008. The success rate for those doing higher education qualifications in colleges was over 77 per cent – about the same as for higher education overall.

Success rates for employees on the Train to Gain programme increased from 67.5 per cent in 2005/6 to 70.6 per cent in 2006/7. Final success rates for 2008/9 were not yet available but provisional figures suggested that the rise was continuing. Highest success rates were in land-based, construction and leisure sectors, and in the West Midlands and the North East.

The proportion of colleges in England that are good or outstanding in their overall effectiveness has risen from 62 per cent of those inspected in 2006/07 to 71 per cent in 2007/08. Colleges judged outstanding jumped from 19 to 32 per cent over the same period. In Wales in 2007/8 the standards achieved by learners in 80 per cent of sessions observed in colleges and in 85 per cent observed in work-based learning were judged to be good or better by Estyn, the Welsh inspectorate.

The overall picture in work-based learning is one of improving provision, according to Ofsted. On average, the proportion of good or outstanding provision rose from 48 per cent to 58 per cent in 2007/8. Of the 16 outstanding training providers, six were employers offering highly specialised programmes in gas, nuclear and railway engineering. 93 per cent of training providers were judged to be satisfactory or better, the same as the previous year. Overall, three subject areas showed particular strengths – engineering, business administration and construction.

Achievement rates for NVQs (not yet available for 2007–8) increased to over 90 per cent in 2006–7, an increase of 7 per cent over the previous two years, while success rates for Apprenticeships in England, i.e. those achieving the full requirements continue to rise and currently stand at nearly 64 per cent, a success rate comparable to those of other advanced economies. This represents a five percentage point increase on the previous year and jump of over 15 percentage points over two years.

About 50 per cent of people with VQs progress to higher education. Indeed, VQs are increasingly being recognised as university entry qualifications in the UCAS points system. The first NVQ in the UCAS Tariff, the AAT NVQ level 3 in Accounting, was allocated 160 points, which is 40 points higher than an A grade A Level and equal to the points of two grade C A Levels. Top-grade BTEC and OCR Nationals are positioned at 360 points, equal to three grade A A Levels. Looking ahead, UCAS plans to incorporate all Advanced Apprenticeship programmes into its points system, alongside A Levels and other university entry qualifications.

Over 70 per cent of Foundation degree students graduate successfully, and more than half progress to an Honours degree. Many such higher-level vocational qualifications, including degrees, are accredited by professional bodies, providing a stepping stone to professional registration and status.

The qualifications of an increasing number of professional bodies are accredited as vocational qualifications within the national qualifications framework. These include qualifications awarded by the chartered institutes for building, environmental health, insurance, logistics, marketing, personnel, public relations and management. Many traditional professional body qualifications such as in medicine and law are recognised as higher degrees.

**Standards, progressions, quality and the future**

**18 – Future growth and development of vocational qualifications**

Apprenticeships are set to grow considerably following the recommendations of the Leitch Review of Skills. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Bill provides a statutory entitlement to an Apprenticeship for suitably qualified 16 to 18-year-olds in England. Government funding of places will increase with a target of 190,000 annual Apprenticeship completions by 2020 – a 70 per cent increase on the current figure. As nearly every Apprenticeship involves the achievement of two vocational qualifications, Apprenticeships are set to account for some 380,000 annual vocational qualification achievements by 2020.

In England there are moves to increase opportunities for Apprentices to progress to higher education and training, including degrees. The government has also signalled its desire to see a new type of vocational degree developed, tailored to the needs of students entering via the vocational route.

A Higher Apprenticeship model incorporating degree-level study has been successfully piloted in the engineering and IT sectors by employers including BT and British Aerospace. If rolled out as a mainstream Apprenticeship brand, Higher Apprenticeship could provide practical learners with an attractive, debt-free alternative to traditional full-time higher education.

Foundation degrees are set to grow from the current 72,000 places to 100,000 places in 2010. This target may well be exceeded if college bids in England to award their own Foundation degrees are successful.

Higher-level vocational provision in further education colleges, particularly Foundation degree courses, is set for further growth. In 2009-10 Newcastle College will receive more public funding for its higher-level courses (£11.8 million) than about 30 higher education institutions.

The introduction of 14-19 Diplomas in England from September 2008 may boost vocational progression by developing a pool of able students attuned to work-related learning. Access to Diplomas will be an entitlement for all young people by 2013. Vocationally-related qualifications (VRQs) can be incorporated into the Diplomas through the Additional Specialist Learning that is a component of every Diploma programme.

In Wales, vocational qualifications are already offered within the Welsh Baccalaureate, which is available at Foundation, Intermediate and Advanced levels (levels 1 to 3 respectively). From September 2009 major parts of the curriculum originally developed for the English 14-19 Diplomas will be available within the Welsh Baccalaureate Qualification framework.

A new credit-based approach to achieving qualifications, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) was officially launched in England in November 2008 to make qualifications, particularly VQs, more flexible and easier to understand. Every unit and qualification in the framework is accorded a credit value (one credit representing 10 hours' learning) as well as level (between Entry level and level 8), enabling people to gain qualifications at their own pace along flexible routes. Qualifications are grouped into three sizes – Awards (1 to 12 credits), Certificates (13 to 36 credits) and Diplomas (37 credits or more). The QCF is being populated with unitised VQs and already contains over 1,200 titles.

Annex 01  
Glossary

<b>VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS VQ</b>	Recognised awards designed primarily to give entry to or advancement in a specific line of work. (See Annex 2 for full definition and scope)																				
<b>Advanced Apprenticeships</b> 'Modern Apprenticeships' in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland	Recognised work-based training programmes at level 3 that normally include the achievement of an NVQ and VRQ at that level, together with general functional skills and other elements specified by the relevant industry. Typically takes two years to complete. (An Apprenticeship is technically not a qualification, but a learning programme through which vocational qualifications will be gained.)																				
<b>Apprenticeships</b> 'Foundation Modern Apprenticeships' in Wales. 'Traineeships' in Northern Ireland and 'Skillseekers' in Scotland are broadly similar	Recognised work-based training programmes at level 2 that normally include the achievement of an NVQ and VRQ at that level, together with general functional skills and other elements specified by the relevant industry. Typically takes one and a half years to complete. (An Apprenticeship is technically not a qualification, but a learning programme through which vocational qualifications will be gained.)																				
<b>Awarding bodies</b>	Organisations recognised by the qualifications regulators Ofqual in England, Welsh Assembly Government in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland as able to develop, submit for accreditation and deliver qualifications. City and Guilds is the biggest awarding body for vocational qualifications. The regulators do not regulate qualifications awarded by universities (higher education institutions) or professional qualifications that are not accredited within the NQF.																				
<b>BTEC</b>	Brand of vocationally-related qualifications awarded by Edexcel																				
<b>Foundation degrees</b>	Level 5 vocational qualifications combining academic study with workplace learning. They are designed to meet skills shortages at the higher technician and associate professional levels, and employers are closely involved in their development. Foundation degrees take two years full-time but many are undertaken part-time by employees over a longer period. They provide progression if desired to the final year of an Honours degree.																				
<b>Further education FE</b>	Post-16 learning up to level 3 delivered by a sixth-form college, further education college, higher education institution, private training provider or in the workplace. The majority of FE learning programmes are vocational.																				
<b>Higher education HE</b>	Learning at level 4 and above provided by universities, higher education colleges and some further education colleges. Vocational HE often involves work placements or more substantial periods of work-based learning.																				
<b>Higher National Certificates and Diplomas HNCs/HNDs</b>	Higher vocational qualifications delivered by colleges and universities and awarded by Edexcel BTEC and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. An HNC is about 60 per cent of the size of an HND. An HND is roughly equivalent to a Foundation degree. Both qualifications are positioned at level 5 on the NQF and at levels 7 and 8 respectively in Scotland on the SCQF.																				
<b>National Qualifications Framework NQF</b>	The current framework for positioning qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (see SCQF for Scotland). There are a basic Entry Level and eight main levels of qualification:																				
<b>NVQs levels 4 and 5 do not have fixed positions on the QCF but are in the range of QCF levels 4-8.</b>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Level</th> <th>Examples</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Entry Level (1,2 and 3)</td> <td>Entry Level Certificates and Awards</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 1</td> <td>NVQ Level 1, GCSE grade D-G, BTEC Introductory Certificate</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 2</td> <td>NVQ Level 2, GCSE A*-C, BTEC First</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 3</td> <td>NVQ Level 3, A Level, BTEC National</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 4</td> <td>University certificate</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 5</td> <td>HNC/HND, Foundation degree</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 6</td> <td>Honours degree</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 7</td> <td>Masters degree</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Level 8</td> <td>Doctorate</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Level	Examples	Entry Level (1,2 and 3)	Entry Level Certificates and Awards	Level 1	NVQ Level 1, GCSE grade D-G, BTEC Introductory Certificate	Level 2	NVQ Level 2, GCSE A*-C, BTEC First	Level 3	NVQ Level 3, A Level, BTEC National	Level 4	University certificate	Level 5	HNC/HND, Foundation degree	Level 6	Honours degree	Level 7	Masters degree	Level 8	Doctorate
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**Annex 01**  
**Glossary**

<b>National Vocational Qualifications NVQs</b>	Recognised practical qualifications based on National Occupational Standards that certify competence to do a particular job or job role. Available at five levels, from the performance of basic routine skills at level 1 (NVQ Level 1) to advanced skills at level 5 involving considerable responsibility and autonomy. All Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships involve the achievement of an NVQ. Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) are the Scottish equivalent of NVQs.	
<b>Qualifications and Credit Framework QCF</b>	The new way of recognising learning achievements by awarding credit for qualifications and units (small steps of learning). Subject to successful testing and agreement by ministers, the QCF will gradually replace the NQF as recognised qualifications are allocated credit within the new framework.	
<b>Sandwich courses</b>	Higher education programmes incorporating a substantial period of work experience.	
<b>Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework SCQF</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Example</b>
	Level 12	Doctorates
	Level 11	SVQ 5 Masters
	Level 10	Honours Degree Graduate Diploma/Certificates
	Level 9	Ordinary Degree
		Graduate Diploma/Certificates Professional Development Awards
	Level 8	SVQ 4 Certificate of Higher Education Diploma of Higher Education
		Graduate Diploma/Certificates Professional Development Awards
	Level 7	Higher National Certificate Advanced Higher
	Level 6	SVQ 3 Higher
	Level 5	SVQ 2 Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade
	Level 4	SVQ 1 General Standard Grade Intermediate 1
	Level 3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade
	Level 2	Access 2
	Level 1	Access 1
<b>Train to Gain</b>	Train to Gain is a government programme providing subsidised training to UK employees. Launched in April 2006 and rolled out fully in September that year, it was initially aimed particularly at employees who do not already hold a full level 2 qualification (equivalent to five GCSEs A*-C). Its scope has been broadened to support the acquisition of higher level qualifications.	
<b>Vocationally-Related Qualifications VRQs</b>	A wide range of recognised work-related qualifications, including BTECs, City & Guilds and OCR Nationals. VRQs are typically knowledge-based qualifications but many also involve practical work. They are available at various levels and considerably varying sizes: a level 3 VRQ, for example, may involve learning ranging from just several days or that of more than two A Levels. For example, with City and Guilds VRQs, a Level 3 Foundation Award in Public Relations requires an estimated 30 hours' tuition, while a Level 3 Diploma in Advanced Professional Cookery requires 900 hours.	
<b>Work-based learning WBL</b>	Learning delivered or facilitated by a university, college or training provider in the workplace, supported by a workplace mentor and/or supervisor.	

**Annex 02**  
**VQ definition and scope**

<p><b>01</b> Brief definition</p>	<p><b>A VQ is a recognised award designed primarily to give entry to or advancement in a specific line of work.</b></p>
<p><b>02</b> Full definition</p>	<p><b>A VQ is a recognised award designed primarily to give entry to or advancement in a specific set of occupations. It assesses a person's knowledge and/or skills associated with a particular area of work, and its achievement may be a necessary condition for continued employment.</b></p> <hr/> <p><b>In scope are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vocational Entry Level qualifications.</li> <li>- National and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (NVQs and SVQs).</li> <li>- Vocationally-Related Qualifications (VRQs) of all sizes (BTECs, City &amp; Guilds, work-related OCR awards etc.</li> <li>- Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs).</li> <li>- Foundation degrees.</li> <li>- Vocational Honours, higher degrees and professional qualifications (with an emphasis on those achieved through vocational, rather than purely academic, routes).</li> </ul> <hr/> <p><b>Out of scope are:</b>      Part-awards or units generic and basic skills qualifications such as Key Skills, Skills for Life and basic health and safety awards 'applied' qualifications such as Applied GCSEs, A Levels and the new 14-19 Diplomas per se (although it is envisaged that any accredited VQs achieved within a Diploma programme will be in scope – see notes below).</p>
<p><b>03</b> Notes</p>	<p><b>Apprenticeships are not qualifications as such but learning programmes. They do, however, generally include the achievement of two vocational qualifications, an NVQ and a VRQ.</b></p> <p><b>Although the new 14-19 Diplomas introduced in September 2008 are not primarily vocational, it is expected that their Additional Specialist Learning component will often involve the achievement of a VQ.</b></p>

Annex 03  
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**Edge is an independent education foundation. It is dedicated to raising the status of practical and vocational learning, so that all young people have the opportunity to achieve their potential, and the UK's future workforce is equipped with the skills to be successful in the modern economy. Edge believes that 'learning by doing' is as important as academic learning, and that there are many paths to success.**

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