Good practice
in validation of learning outcomes

England

Qualifications "Digital skills"
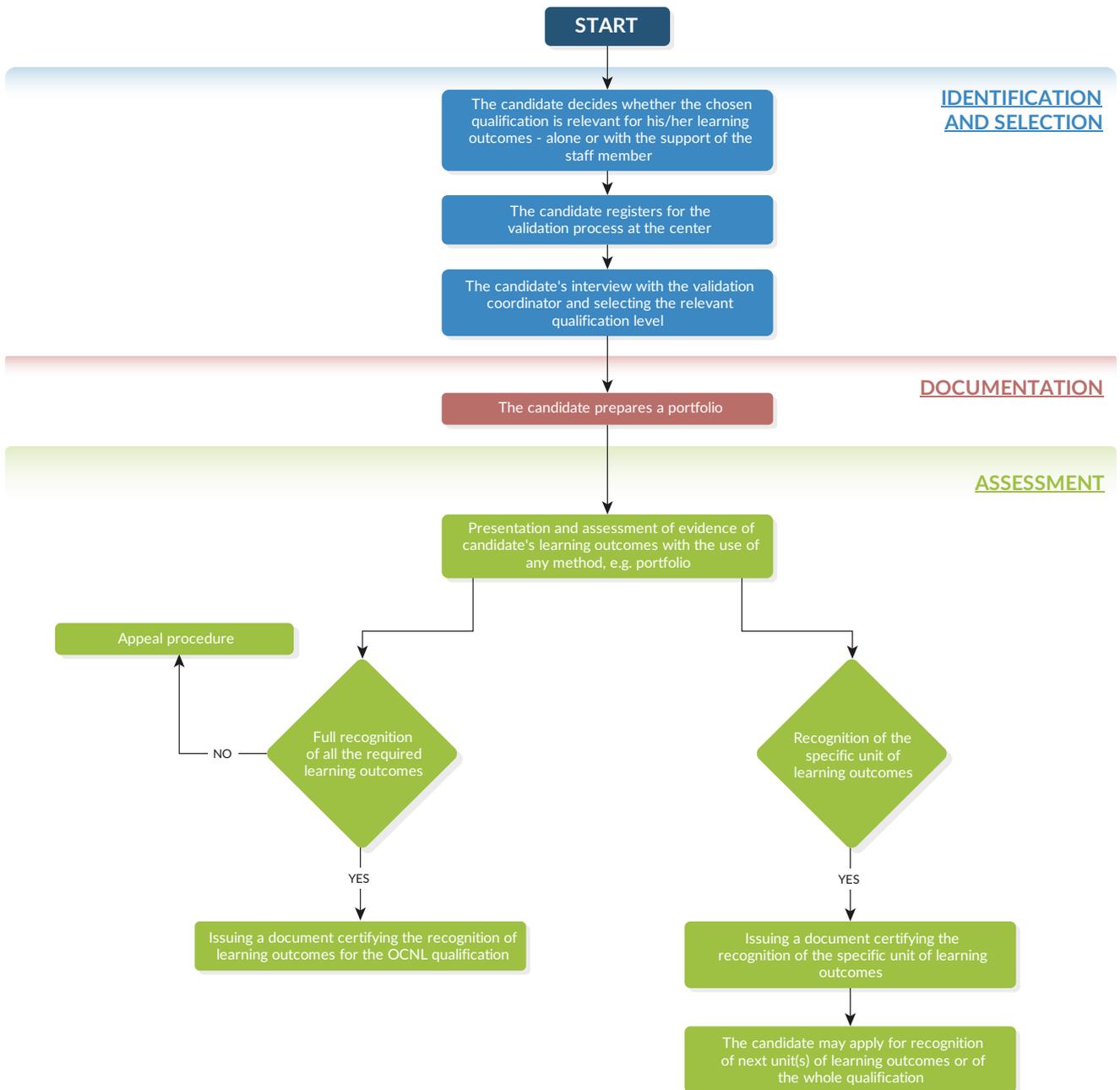
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START

IDENTIFICATION AND SELECTION

The candidate decides whether the chosen qualification is relevant for his/her learning outcomes - alone or with the support of the staff member

The candidate registers for the validation process at the center

The candidate's interview with the validation coordinator and selecting the relevant qualification level

DOCUMENTATION

The candidate prepares a portfolio

ASSESSMENT

Presentation and assessment of evidence of candidate's learning outcomes with the use of any method, e.g. portfolio

Appeal procedure

Full recognition of all the required learning outcomes

NO

Recognition of the specific unit of learning outcomes

YES

YES

Issuing a document certifying the recognition of learning outcomes for the OCNL qualification

Issuing a document certifying the recognition of the specific unit of learning outcomes

The candidate may apply for recognition of next unit(s) of learning outcomes or of the whole qualification

1. Country, institution name

- England
- Open College Network London (OCNL)

2. Institution website

https://www.ocnlondon.org.uk/

3. Qualifications

This good practice is on qualifications in digital skills:
OCNLR **Level 1 Certificate in Digital Skills**

Regulated Qualifications Framework Level 1
European Qualifications Framework Level 2

and a smaller qualification that is one of its parts:
OCNLR Level 1 Award in Digital Skills (EQF Level 1)

Regulated Qualifications Framework Level 1
European Qualifications Framework Level 2

4. Short description of the validation process

The qualifications described here are intended to confirm that the person who possesses them has sufficient digital skills to use them effectively in his or her professional life. The target group are learners, e.g. at school or as part of OCNL training activities, as well as adults who have not previously confirmed their digital competence.

The purpose of developing these qualifications is to enable the recognition of practical digital skills and basic knowledge in this field. This is increasingly needed in the labour market in various sectors. The description of a qualification, known as the qualification specification, contains not only a list of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, but also additional information, including guidelines for assessment. Each learning outcome is linked to a set of assessment criteria that defines the requirements for its achievement.

It is worth noting at the outset that in the English system, as in other British systems, qualifications are the property of the institution which submitted them. Most often, this institution also awards qualifications (due to the fact that it owns these qualifications, the institution's name often appears directly in their titles, e.g. OCNLR Level 1 Certificate in Digital Skills). The OCNL develops qualifications, awards them and oversees their updating and possible modification.

Each entity that wants to award qualifications must obtain accreditation from the qualifications regulator – Ofqual . The validation of learning outcomes is performed in institutions that can provide training and validation, known as providers. Schools, training companies, business entities, business associations or colleges are examples of institutions that can be providers. They enter into agreements with awarding institutions, in this case OCNL, which is the basis on which learners and validation candidates attain qualifications from OCNL. Providers must demonstrate that they meet established quality standards for teaching and validation (primarily the separation of these processes) and that they adhere to the assessment criteria contained in the qualification.

The structure of qualifications is based on the requirements set by Ofqual for qualifications in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Qualifications are grouped into units of learning outcomes with specific assessment criteria. Each unit constitutes a separate whole, and these, assembled in the manner

specified in the requirements, form qualifications. The assessment criteria, level and workload (number of learning hours) needed to attain it are defined for each unit. The smallest volume value of a unit is one credit, which requires 10 learning hours from a learner.

A given unit of learning outcomes entered into the register can be part of several different qualifications. This makes the "rules of combination" an integral part of qualifications. The rules of combination define the structure of a given qualification, including which units of learning outcomes for the qualification are mandatory and which are optional.

Validation does not include separate stages of identifying and documenting learning outcomes. An assessor from the providing centre checks whether the candidate has the learning outcomes included in the qualification specification. Different methods are used during the assessment, which are presented in section 6. Certification consists of awarding credits for achieved units of learning outcomes. Candidates who have fulfilled the required conditions receive confirmation of having attained qualifications or specific units of learning outcomes.

5. Detailed description of the validation process

Comment

5.1 Informing and identification of learning outcomes

OCNL informational material is available online and for each qualification contains:

- the learning outcomes and assessment criteria,
- the expected workload in terms of credits,
- information on the assessment methods,
- information on the cost of the process,
- and additional information, such as the date of the last qualification audit.

In accordance with the rules of combination, 6 credits (corresponds to 60 learning hours) must be achieved from the optional units in order to obtain a badge. However, in order to obtain a certificate, as many as 15 credits have to be achieved: 3 credits from the mandatory unit and 12 credits from the optional units.

The mandatory unit is on digital safety and security, and is required for all digital skills qualifications, regardless of the level. This unit consists of learning outcomes for protecting oneself and others online, taking precautions to ensure data security, following legal and organisational procedures, and guidelines for working online. Between 2 to 5 credits can be earned for each optional unit. These are units for developing digital content in audio or video format, creating websites, digital design, using mobile applications, knowledge of the basics of programming and many more.

The centre does not offer the candidate extensive guidance from a tutor or counsellor on identifying learning outcomes. However, after familiarising themselves with the offer and after registring, the candidate can seek advice from a tutor at a specific centre on the selection of a suitable qualification and training offer.

The candidate can discuss the assessment requirements with a staff person, i.e. the coordinator of the validation process in the centre, and then decide whether the chosen qualification is appropriate for his/her acquired learning outcomes. The candidate can then change his/her decision about the choice of qualification and obtain advice again, but this may involve additional fees.

5.2 Documentation of learning outcomes

In the case of the qualifications discussed here, the centre does not offer the support of a counsellor to document learning outcomes either.

5.3 Assessment of learning outcomes

The assessment of learning outcomes is the responsibility of the providing centre, which is also responsible for validation. OCNL encourages individual centres to develop validation methods tailored to the needs of candidates. It is worth noting, however, that despite possible differences in methods, coherence among the centres is ensured by the learning outcomes and assessment criteria described in the qualification specification.

OCNL is developing detailed assessment guidelines for digital literacy providing centres to ensure that the process is valid, reliable, fit-for-purpose and inclusive in relation to the qualification. This guidance is included in a handbook, which is helpful (although not mandatory) especially when a centre is conducting the validation of a qualification for the first time. The guidelines are linked to the units of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. They also include guidance for candidates as well as checklists and assessment sheets for assessors, useful for checking whether the evidence of the digital skills presented by the candidate is reliable, relevant and sufficient.

The assessment stage, which involves confirming the evidence presented, is identical for all levels of qualifications, regardless of whether the candidate is applying for a badge (see: section 5.4), certificate or diploma. This ensures transparency and the comparability of validation results. It also enables the transfer of credits in the UK system. Moreover, the ability to transfer credits is made possible by the very design of the qualification, which is made up of smaller units or units of learning outcomes. a smaller qualification (award) may consist of units of learning outcomes that are also included in a larger qualification (certificate). In this case, an achieved unit of learning outcomes within a smaller qualification will be recognised as part of the larger qualification without the need for re-validation.

5.4 Certification of learning outcomes

Certification comes in two forms. The first is the confirmation of learning outcomes for a specific unit and the award of a number of credits for that unit, reflecting the workload.

The second form is the issuance of a document certifying the achievement of the whole qualification, i.e. a group of units of learning outcomes. This document is awarded to those who have fulfilled all the requirements and have successfully completed validation.

In the future, OCNL plans to introduce the Open Badges (https://openbadges.org/) system as part of certification. The candidate will be able to provide an employer with an online database of their work and information about his/her attained badges, certificates or diplomas. The employer, by clicking on the link on the screen, will be able to view the candidate's units of learning outcomes and qualifications, and will also obtain information on the assessment criteria and workload.

6. Validation methods

The reference point for selecting the methods used in validation is the qualification specification. The methods should allow any candidate to undergo validation, regardless of the way and context of learning. The assessment criteria should be able to be observed and measured and be relevant to the qualification specification.

As validation for digital skills qualifications does not provide support in identifying and documenting learning outcomes, only the methods used in the assessment stage are discussed here. As noted earlier, OCNL does not impose assessment methods on validation institutions. However, it must ensure that the methods chosen are appropriate to the requirements of the qualification specification and provide reliable results. In practice, this means that, although different methods can be used, only some of them will provide reliable and credible results.

OCNL qualifications are based on what is called an assessment matrix, which defines the range of methods –

recommended and optional – for a given qualification. The candidate must confirm all learning outcomes and assessment criteria in a unit in order to receive credits. They cannot be awarded for the partial achievement of a unit.

Digital skills qualifications also do not explicitly specify required assessment methods or types of evidence to be presented by the candidate. This gives providing centres maximum flexibility in choosing methods for individual candidates and thus allows for better outcomes for the candidates.

The specifications of digital literacy qualifications strongly emphasise the value of assessing a candidate's ability to apply the knowledge acquired in practice. It is assumed that the candidate should be required to demonstrate the results of his/her work and then test their performance, rather than testing whether the candidate can describe how something works in theory. For this very reason, the most common method – among many others – is to analyse the evidence presented by the candidate in the form of a portfolio. It is recommended that projects or works be presented, but there are no limitations on the form of presenting evidence. The collected and presented evidence may sometimes need to be supplemented, in which case the candidate is invited to an interview or to attach a description.

The requirements for evidence may be adapted to the needs of individuals or groups, and the evidence itself should be flexible, varied and relevant. It may be presented in any form, including audio-visual files, journals, memoirs, response sheets, draft documents, observation records, checklists and others. When completing and then checking documents and works, it is crucial to ensure that they meet certain requirements. Evidence should be provided that is:

- authentic – it is the result of the learner's own activities,
- sufficient – it should enable the assessor to make a consistent and reliable assessment,
- adequate – it is appropriate to the level of the qualification.

As providers use different software to support learning and assessment, the OCNL does not require the use of specific tools for online assessment. Collecting evidence for assessment can be time-consuming, which is why teachers, assessors and moderators have reported the need for a tool that would reduce the number of procedures and amount of office work relating to this, as well as lessen the stress of the assessment process itself. In response, OCNL produced a free Open College Network London ePortfolio Tool (OPT) and made it available to providers.

OPT enables evidence to be stored in digital form in text, sound, graphics or video format. The tool is easy to use and requires no training. It was developed in two versions: general – for OCNL centres, and special – adapted to the requirements of higher education institutions, for which OCNL prepares qualifications.

7. Human resources

Comment

The competence requirements of the persons conducting validation are embedded in the quality assurance system of a given centre. Ofqual requires each provider to employ staff who have both knowledge of the qualification's subject matter and assessor competences, i.e. assessment skills. Specific providers define these conditions of employment themselves, but OCNL has the right to request evidence that the provider's staff actually have the required competences. It is not always easy to guarantee a balance of expertise and assessing competence, which is why the OCNL offers support in the form of training for assessors and provides guidance on the choice of validation methods and tools. It is worth noting that some assessors have specialist assessment qualifications , but this is not required.

The persons conducting the assessment are appointed by the providing centre. The centre must demonstrate that the assessors involved in the validation process understand the principles of assessment and have experience in applying methods based on these principles. Assessors should constantly update their competences relating to their work and provide evidence of their professional development and training.

8. Organizational and material conditions

OCNL provides support in the form of training sessions for assessors through a specially developed online platform, and offers a series of direct training sessions throughout the year. In the case of some providing centres, the training of all assessors employed there is a condition for the validation of a specific qualification by that centre.

8. Organizational and material conditions

No specific organisational conditions are required for the process of validating learning outcomes in digital skills. Many activities relating to the validation of digital skills can be done using conventional methods (e.g. on paper) or on mobile devices. Any hardware and equipment specifications would introduce unnecessary access restrictions. The only requirement is for the centre to provide access to secure devices that can be used by the candidate to provide evidence of his/her competences. It is also important to allow evidence to be provided through mobile devices. However, assessors must be able to authenticate the evidence, i.e. confirm that it has been produced by the candidate him/herself. To this end, they can observe the candidate during the performance of individual tasks and record his/her subsequent activities.

The issue of the evidence that a candidate may present is discretionary, to the extent that this evidence enables the possession of specific learning outcomes to be confirmed. The assessment tasks link the prepared evidence with observations of the candidate's activities. If during the observation the candidate produces new evidence, it should be noted by the assessors and then used by the candidate to apply for a subsequent or higher qualification. The candidate may record and publish the results of his/her activities on the Internet or print and store them in a folder with the remaining "paper" evidence. Providing centres record and store the evidence in both digital and traditional form, using various types of software.

Qualifications are described in a guide available on the OCNL website. Institutions that would like to offer training and validation for OCNL's digital skills qualifications can thus check whether they meet the staffing and technical requirements.

9. Quality assurance

10.1 Internal quality assurance

In the model adopted by OCNL, validation is performed by assessors. OCNL is not directly involved in the process of confirming and awarding qualifications. Instead, it is assumed that such a model of operating requires an effective internal evaluation system. This is conducted by the employees of a given providing centre, who are called internal moderators; they control the quality of assessors' work.

Internal moderators are appointed by the centres. The persons performing this function ensure that the assessment processes are conducted in a fair and consistent manner. The separation of assessor and moderator functions is a guarantee of the integrity of this process. The tasks of the moderators are:

- to ensure consistency of the process by sampling assessments and comparing judgements reached by different assessors;
- to present evidence of the assessment process' effectiveness to the OCNL external moderator.

As part of its commitment to quality, OCNL offers support and training for internal moderators. As internal moderator record-keeping is key to quality assurance, the OCNL has developed templates for reporting. The documents prepared by the internal moderators are important in the case of appeals or other necessary explanations.

Internal moderators also try to identify problems that candidates may have in achieving their learning outcomes. If such problems were caused by an assessor's mistake (e.g. mismatch of assessment methods), the diagnosis of the problem by the moderator allows the candidate to be re-assessed or to provide additional evidence.

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10.2 External quality assurance

Due to the number of qualifications offered, OCNL appoints centre moderators who ensure the quality of processes in a given centre but are independent from it. Their role is to control whether the quality assurance processes in individual centres are conducted with integrity and whether the samples of assessments presented by the internal moderators are sufficient to reliably evaluate the work of the assessors. The main aim of the centre moderators is to evaluate the integrity of the assessment process, and not a candidate's performance.

Centre moderation is mostly conducted by moderators from OCNL. Before starting their work with a provider, the centre moderator contacts its internal moderator. In some cases, however, the centre moderator may be a specialist from a particular sector or course category. Centre moderators may oversee all OCNL qualifications that are offered by a given provider.

OCNL has developed a manual and offers training for centre moderators. It also launched an online forum where moderators can share their experiences. OCNL staff, in turn, can observe the work of centre moderators, evaluate their results and obtain feedback from specific institutions on the effectiveness of their work.

10.3 Monitoring

OCNL staff monitor the providers. One of the conditions for an organisation to qualify as a provider is to allow OCNL employees to have access to their internal procedures for the awarding process of a qualification. On this basis, an annual risk assessment is conducted for the given provider. The vast majority of providers are classified as being at low, marginal or moderate risk, i.e. their activities do not raise major concerns. Only a few institutions are given a high risk status and are then closely monitored by OCNL. This involves regular visits by OCNL staff and periodic reports on the processes being conducted in the centre.

An additional type of monitoring is the collection of information on the broadly defined activities of a given provider. OCNL requires that all providers offering qualifications in the field of digital skills conduct activities supporting the achievement of qualifications. Due to the fact that digital qualifications are new in their offer, OCNL staff maintain regular contacts with providers in order to consult their validation methods on an ongoing basis. Such interactions contribute to changes leading to the improved quality and availability of qualifications.

Providers are obliged to provide OCNL with information on the implementation of the qualification awarding process. As already mentioned, digital skills qualifications are relatively new to the system and therefore data on them are not yet available. However, it is known that the qualifications are mainly of interest to students developing digital competences as part of an extended vocational training programme. Other interested persons include those for whom digital competences are complementary to other professional areas. At the end of the first year of awarding these qualifications, OCNL will monitor them. The outcome may lead to significant changes in terms of extending or narrowing the units of learning outcomes or adding or subtracting individual units.

10.4 Appeals procedure

All institutions offering OCNL qualifications must develop internal procedures for appeals on decisions about the validation outcome. OCNL develops guidelines on this for learning and validation centres. These may require some centres to change their policies in these areas, particularly if their existing procedures are contrary to OCNL requirements or if they have proved ineffective.

The appeals procedure should be conducted in the centre where the validation took place. The first stage of the appeals process is the responsibility of the manager of the initial assessor who conducted the assessment. If the appeal is not resolved at this stage, the case may be referred for further consideration. The next authority is the senior manager of the provider concerned, usually supported by an Appeals Board or

group with a similar scope of responsibility. If the problem is not resolved at this stage, it is possible to appeal to OCNL. In the third and final stage of the appeals process, OCNL staff examine all aspects of the processes that have taken place in the centre, from the initial assessment to the final one, and decide whether they have taken place correctly. In order to ensure the integrity of this process, a member of the OCNL board may be involved.

10. Financing

OCNL charges fees for the qualifications offered, which vary according to the type of qualification. The fees are paid by the applicant to the providing centres, which then forward them to OCNL.

For qualifications recognised by Ofqual and entered in the register (i.e. OCNL qualifications), a number of possibilities exist to receive funding for their achievement. The exact funding rules for continuing education and adult learning leading to a qualification are determined by the UK Government.

Under current regulations, it is not possible for a candidate to apply for public funding on their own. This can only be done through a provider. An applicant may receive funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) provided that (a) the qualification is registered and (b) the provider is recognised by ESFA. It is worth mentioning that currently all providers offering validation for OCNL qualifications are recognised by ESFA. The funding rules are designed to promote sustainable development. This means that it is unlikely funding for the next qualification from the same level will be granted by ESFA. Public funding covers all costs of obtaining a qualification, including registration and certification.

A candidate may bear all or part of the cost of attaining the qualification. According to OCNL, all applicants for funding for digital qualifications have received 100% public support.

11. Context of good practice

The work of the OCNL is regulated by Ofqual – the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. This is a non-ministerial department that is not directly controlled politically. It is controlled by a senior civil servant appointed for this purpose.

Ofqual has a regulatory and control function. Its aim is to monitor and detect possible problems in the education system, including in examinations. The role of the office is to maintain certain standards and a high level of confidence in qualifications.

Ofqual publishes and updates a register of all qualifications in the Regulated Qualifications Framework in England. The register is available on the website: https://register.ofqual.gov.uk.

Until May 2016, Ofqual also regulated professional qualifications in Northern Ireland.

The abbreviation in the name of qualifications (OCNLR) refers to the organisation's previous name, Open College Network London Region, which is no longer used.

12. Comments

Comment

Digital literacy qualifications together with an innovative approach to validation have been introduced by ONCL, which is a smaller organisation awarding qualifications . Large organisations offer much more traditional IT qualifications. This reflects the characteristics of the digital sector itself, where smaller and younger organisations are more responsive to changing technologies than larger organisations, which have fewer contacts with users and less direct feedback.

The newly introduced qualifications were immediately met with a strong response from practitioners, who proposed further modifications and improvements. They suggested innovative approaches to some aspects

and indicated the need to supplement the qualifications with additional learning outcomes to meet changing market requirements (e.g. in creating non-standard applications). OCNL periodically reviews the qualifications it offers.

The idea of developing qualifications that are divided into smaller parts was intended to make them more accessible and interesting to a broad audience. Small successes can be an incentive for further improving one's skills. It can also contribute to discovering new talents in this area, which is extremely important for the socio-economic development of each country.

Comments

OCNLR

OCNLR

Open College Network London. More in the chapter: "Context of good practice".

Smaller qualification

smaller qualification

In England, qualifications are divided into: small (awards - an average of 10 to 120 hours needed for a learner to achieve the expected learning outcomes); medium (certificates - from 130 to 360 hours); large (diplomas - over 360 hours). In many institutions involved in awarding qualifications, small qualifications are not offered. However, the OCNL, due to its efforts to promote education and facilitate access to qualifications for adult learners, offers a range of qualifications, including small ones, in order to encourage the validation of learning outcomes. In addition, qualifications in the OCNL are designed in such a way that a small qualification (e.g. the Award in Digital Skills) will lead to a higher level qualification (e.g. Certificate in Digital Skills).

Ofqual

Ofqual

Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation. More in the chapter: "Context of good practice".

Open Badges

Open Badges

The Open Badges system is based on badges, which are an indicator of the achievements, skills or interests of the user. Applied in scouting, scuba diving training and field games, among others, they are successfully used to set goals, motivate, represent achievements and communicate success in many contexts. The badges are digital versions of paper-based certification, indicating a broad range of achievements, among them, "micro-credentials". These are smaller units of competences, which can be distinguished and confirmed.

Specialist assessment qualifications

specialist assessment qualifications

Changes in legislation mean that teachers in English schools and colleges are no longer required to have a professional teaching qualification. This also applies to assessors. Therefore, it is not possible for OCNL (or any other centre operating under similar rules) to require an assessor to have a specialist assessment qualification.

Smaller organisation awarding qualifications

smaller organisation awarding qualifications

The large organisations that award qualifications in the UK include AQA, City&Guilds, OCR and Pearson. They offer over 75% of all qualifications in England. The remaining 25% are offered by about 150 smaller organisations of this type. The smaller organisations differ significantly in the number of qualifications offered. Some of them, like OCNL, offer several dozen or several hundred different qualifications, which can be achieved in several dozen or even several hundred institutions providing education and validation. There are also awarding organisations that offer only one or two qualifications in a highly specialised professional area.