



Case Study 13

Developing the Level 3 and Level 5 Awards in Water Efficiency

Introduction

The UK water sector is facing one of the most significant resource challenges in its history. Population growth, new housing delivery, and a changing climate are combining to place sustained pressure on water availability, at the same time as regulators, government and customers expect a step-change in the sector's approach to demand management. Water is a finite resource: the industry, its regulators and its customers share a common interest in using it wisely, and that shared interest sits at the heart of the sector's social contract with the public it serves.

Meeting the sector's water efficiency ambitions including the government's target to reduce Per Capita Consumption, company-level Water Resources Management Plan (WRMP) commitments, and the drive to avoid future 'Day Zero' style supply emergencies requires more than technology and

infrastructure. It requires a workforce, across wholesalers, retailers and their supply chain of specialist service providers, who understand not only how to deliver water efficiency interventions, but why they matter; the regulatory framework behind them, the behavioural science that makes them effective, and the engineering and innovation that makes them possible.

Against this backdrop we worked with Water Industry subject matter experts to design and develop two new qualifications in order to establish a recognised, portable standard of competence for everyone working in this increasingly critical and interdisciplinary field:

- Level 3 - Award in Introduction to Water Efficiency and
- Level 5 - Award in Managing Water Efficiency.

What were the drivers behind the programme?

The development of the qualifications was shaped by a number of converging pressures on the sector:

1. Resource scarcity and climate change. Specifically increasingly variable rainfall patterns, more frequent drought conditions, and long-term supply/demand deficits identified in regional and national water resources planning.
2. Population and housing growth leading to rising demand across both household and non-household customers and increasing pressure on existing supply infrastructure.
3. Tightening regulatory and policy expectations including national Per Capita Consumption reduction targets, the National Framework for Water Resources, Building Regulations Part G, and increasing scrutiny from Ofwat, the Environment Agency and Defra on company delivery of water efficiency commitments.
4. A changed and changing market structure. The separation of retail and wholesale functions in the non-household market has created new interfaces, responsibilities and opportunities for water efficiency delivery that did not previously exist.
5. Lessons from international experience. Events such as the Cape Town 'Day Zero' campaign have shown both the value and the fragility of large-scale behaviour change programmes, and the importance of embedding those lessons into UK Water Industry planning.
6. Rising customer and political expectations. We live in an age of growing public awareness of environmental and drought risk, and increasing expectation that companies (and their supply chains) demonstrate credible, well-evidenced action.

Underpinning all of this is the single, unavoidable fact that the programme was designed to keep front and centre for every learner: there is only a finite supply of water available, and every part of the system; engineering, regulation, behaviour and innovation; has to work together to protect it.



What was the aim of the Programme?

The qualifications were designed to achieve two closely related aims. The first was to give the Water Industry a recognised, consistent standard against which the competence of people working in water efficiency roles could be measured and developed. The second was to formally recognise and reward the professionalism of a workforce that has historically operated without a dedicated, sector-specific qualification of its own, despite being central to delivering some of the industry's most publicly visible commitments.

The programme was designed to:

1. Establish a shared, sector-recognised body of knowledge covering the engineering, regulatory, behavioural and strategic dimensions of water efficiency.
2. Provide a progression route, from foundational understanding at Level 3 to strategic and managerial capability at Level 5, that reflects the different levels of responsibility across the workforce.
3. Recognise and professionalise a role that sits at the intersection of engineering, behavioural science, regulation, sociology and innovation, and that is often filled by people who, while often starting with experience in some of the aspects of the roles, are without a formal route into the sector that addresses its full breadth.
4. Extend that recognition beyond water company employees to the wider ecosystem of specialist service providers who deliver water efficiency programmes on companies' behalf.
5. Build resilience into the sector's approach to demand management, ahead of further tightening PCC targets and growing drought risk.

Who was the qualification designed for?



A defining feature of the programme was the decision to design it for two distinct, but closely linked, audiences, reflecting the reality that water efficiency delivery is rarely carried out by water companies alone.

Water Company personnel i.e. wholesalers and retailers

This includes operational and customer-facing staff, retail account managers, policy and programme staff, and those responsible for meeting company WRMP and PCC commitments across both household and non-household customer bases.

Water Efficiency service providers

Many wholesale companies rely on specialist third-party organisations to deliver audits, retrofits, behaviour-change campaigns and non-household water efficiency programmes on their behalf. These organisations often bring strong technical or delivery skills, but historically have had limited structured exposure to the regulatory drivers, strategic

context and company-level obligations that shape why the work is commissioned in the first place. The qualification was deliberately designed to close that gap, giving supply chain service providers a shared frame of reference with the companies they support.

The two levels were mapped to different points in this audience:

1. Level 3 - Introduction to Water Efficiency: aimed at those entering the field or working in operational, customer-facing or delivery roles, building foundational understanding of conservation, legislation, consumption metrics, products and the basics of strategy development.
2. Level 5 - Managing Water Efficiency: aimed at those managing, designing or leading water efficiency initiatives, across companies and service providers alike, but requiring a deeper, more critical and more strategic grasp of stakeholder management, market structure, resource planning and behaviour change.

What did the development of this interdisciplinary programme involve?

The content and learning outcomes for both qualifications were developed in close collaboration with industry stakeholders, drawing together perspectives from wholesale and retail teams, service providers, and subject matter experts across engineering, regulation and behavioural science. The intention throughout was to reflect the genuinely interdisciplinary nature of water efficiency delivery, rather than treating it as a purely technical or purely regulatory subject.

At Level 3, the workbook builds a foundational understanding across five learning outcomes: the importance of water conservation and its environmental, economic and sustainability dimensions; the legislative and regulatory landscape; typical household water usage and the significance of Per Capita Consumption (PCC); water efficiency products and their associated savings; and the basic elements of a water efficiency strategy, culminating in learners producing their own outline plan of action.

At Level 5, the scope broadens significantly across eleven learning outcomes, reflecting the strategic and managerial focus of the qualification. In addition to the foundational themes carried through from Level 3, learners are required

to critically compare behaviour-change strategies and the role of tariffs and financial incentives; evaluate stakeholder influence and interest and design tailored engagement approaches; analyse the Day Zero campaign and extract transferable lessons; understand the retail/wholesale market split and its implications for efficiency delivery; explain how water company Water Resource Management Plans and the National Framework for Water Resources function; and produce a one-page water efficiency strategy summary, alongside practical calculation of whole-house potable water consumption under Building Regulations Part G.

Both workbooks were built around applied, scenario-based questioning rather than rote recall, requiring learners to demonstrate depth of understanding in their own words, work collaboratively with colleagues, and apply their learning to realistic operational and strategic problems. For example, developing a water efficiency plan for a public building, or assessing stakeholder engagement strategies for a live initiative.



Professionalising the Water Efficiency workforce

A central ambition of this programme was recognition. Water efficiency practitioners, whether employed directly by a water company or working for a specialist service provider, have long carried significant responsibility for helping the sector meet some of its most visible public commitments, often without access to a qualification that reflected the breadth and complexity of their role.

By developing a structured, awarding-body-recognised qualification pathway from Level 3 through to Level 5, the programme gives individuals a credential that formally validates their knowledge and experience, supports career progression within and between organisations, and signals to employers, regulators and customers alike that water efficiency delivery is a

genuine profession grounded in engineering, regulation, behavioural science, sociology and innovation, rather than a peripheral add-on to other roles.

For service providers in particular, this recognition also strengthens the working relationship with the water companies they support: a shared qualification framework means both parties are drawing on the same understanding of regulatory drivers, strategic priorities and best practice, improving the coherence and credibility of jointly delivered programmes.

Looking ahead

With the Level 3 and Level 5 workbooks developed and ready for roll-out, the qualifications are positioned to support the Water Industry's response to a landscape that continues to shift. Regulatory expectations, political priorities and customer attitudes are all evolving, and demand pressures are only set to increase. What remains constant is the underlying challenge the programme was built to address: water is a finite resource, and building a skilled, recognised and interdisciplinary workforce that spans water companies and their service provider partners alike is essential to protecting it for the future.



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