

QCF

Regulatory
arrangements

August 2008

Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework

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Archived Content

This document is designed to support the implementation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) across England, Wales and Northern Ireland from August 2008. It is presented by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual), the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills of the Welsh Assembly Government (DCELLS) and the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), the organisations with statutory responsibility for regulating external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It has been jointly developed and will be implemented by all three organisations across the three countries.

The role for the qualifications regulators in the development of the QCF is to set appropriate requirements through these regulations and to ensure that they are implemented and reviewed effectively. Other organisations, including the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), are responsible for support and development activity for the QCF.

This document sets out the regulatory arrangements that will apply to the organisations that operate within, and the qualifications that are accredited into, the QCF. The arrangements set the standard that all organisations and qualifications must meet in order to be recognised as part of the QCF. The qualifications regulators will therefore use these arrangements in protecting the interests of learners and promoting public confidence in the national qualifications system.

The regulatory arrangements are designed to reflect the qualifications regulators' policy commitment to a strategic, risk-based approach to safeguarding the interests of learners. To this end, the arrangements are deliberately focused to a much greater extent than previous regulations on the ability of the organisations that operate in the QCF to develop and assess units and qualifications, and to award credits and qualifications, to the appropriate standards. As a result, they set out a reduction in the general level of the scrutiny of individual units and qualifications required to ensure that quality and standards are maintained. That said, the qualifications regulators will still consider all aspects of the development and delivery of individual units and qualifications wherever they feel the need arises.

The regulations make no specific reference to the recognition of employers, providers or any other organisations to develop and/or assess and award because they will apply to and must be met by any organisation that wishes to submit units, develop rules of combination and/or award credits and qualifications in the QCF.

The regulations are based on the outcomes of extensive consultation and development work on qualifications and credit frameworks across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. In particular, they are based on the outcomes of the two-year programme of activity to test and trial the QCF. The tests and trials have thoroughly examined and independently evaluated the concept of developing a national framework to recognise achievement through the award of credit and qualifications. The units and qualifications developed during the tests and trials were subject to regulation from the qualifications regulators, which provided the opportunity to evaluate what the appropriate regulations for the QCF should be.

These regulations also build on the qualifications regulators' experience of regulating organisations to operate in the National Qualifications Framework. While these regulations do make new and different requirements of the organisations recognised by the regulators and their units and qualifications, they build, wherever possible, on the good practice of existing arrangements. The qualifications regulators will evaluate regulatory issues that arise in the development of the QCF. In doing so, they will consider the suitability of these arrangements and how well associated regulatory activity and the operation of the QCF are working. They will report publicly on their findings during the implementation of the QCF.

The qualifications regulators have published in a separate document details of the mechanism through which organisations demonstrate that they meet the requirements set out in these regulations and the timelines for their implementation. It is also important to note that the development of the QCF has taken place to date within the context of the UK Vocational Qualification Reform Programme and, as such, vocational qualifications are the immediate focus for the organisations and qualifications that will seek recognition in the QCF. The QCF is, however, designed to be capable of recognising all achievements at all levels.

These regulatory arrangements provide the means to support the development of the QCF from a set of test and trial arrangements to full implementation. They set out a basis for doing this that supports the aims of the QCF to provide learners with a greater range of choice, opportunities and increased flexibility. They also provide a secure foundation on which standards and comparability and public confidence in the QCF will be maintained.

The Qualifications and Credit Framework

The QCF is designed to provide learners, learning providers and employers with an inclusive and flexible regulated qualifications framework containing units and qualifications that recognise the widest possible range of quality assured learner achievements. The QCF will, for the first time, introduce a standard currency for learner achievement across the qualifications system through the award of credit.

The aim of the QCF

The aim of the QCF is to support the establishment, maintenance and continuing development of a qualifications system that is:

- inclusive – able to recognise the achievements of all learners at any level and in any area of learning
- responsive – enabling individuals and employers to establish routes to achievement that are appropriate to their needs, and recognised organisations to develop units and qualifications in response to demand
- accessible – building a system based on clear design features that are easy for all users to understand
- non-bureaucratic – based on mutual trust and confidence, supported by a robust and proportionate approach to regulation and quality assurance.

The design of the QCF

The QCF provides a structure within which:

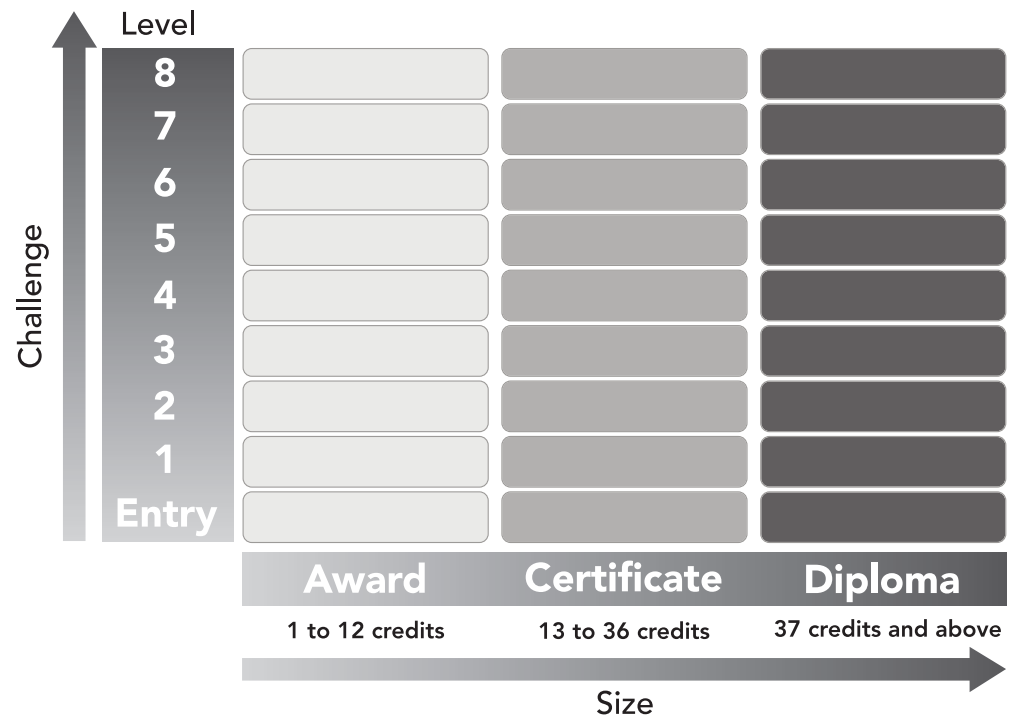
- unit-based qualifications can be located
- achievements are recognised through the award of credits and qualifications
- the level and size of achievements can be easily identified
- the mechanisms necessary to allow the accumulation and transfer of credits between qualifications and awarding organisations operate
- learners are given the maximum flexibility and range of opportunities to progress and receive recognition for their achievements.

All units and qualifications in the QCF have a credit value (one credit represents 10 hours, showing how much time and effort it takes to complete) and a level between Entry level and level 8 (showing the level of challenge or difficulty of it).

There are three sizes of qualification in the QCF:

- Award, between 1 and 12 credits
- Certificate, between 13 and 36 credits
- Diploma, 37 credits and above.

The structure of the QCF and the way in which qualifications are represented in it is represented in the diagram below.



The operation of the QCF

The QCF is a unit-based framework. Units are the building blocks of all qualifications. Organisations that have been recognised to develop and submit units will place units in the QCF unit databank. Once they are available in the databank, they may be used to build rules of combination by organisations recognised for this purpose.

Awarding organisations subsequently use agreed rules of combination to develop assessment arrangements for qualifications and submit qualifications for accreditation. When units are included in qualifications and the qualifications have been accredited, they can be made available to learners. Awarding organisations offer units and qualifications to centres and learners, and are responsible for carrying out assessments of units and making awards of credits and qualifications.

Regulation of the QCF

The regulatory arrangements for the QCF are jointly developed, presented and implemented by the qualifications regulators for England, Wales and Northern Ireland: Ofqual, DCELLS and CCEA. The statutory basis for the regulatory activity of the qualifications regulators is set out in Annex A.

Regulatory aims for the QCF

The overall purpose of regulating the QCF is to safeguard the interests of learners by securing the robust operation of the QCF and maintaining public confidence in its value and benefits. In order to do this the regulation of the QCF is designed to:

- **Meet the needs of learners**
The system must meet the needs of individual learners and offer choices of routes to achievement and opportunities for progression.
- **Maintain standards and comparability**
Standards and comparability must be established and maintained across the units and qualifications developed, and the credits and qualifications awarded to learners by all the organisations recognised by the qualifications regulators to operate within the QCF.
- **Promote public confidence**
There must be public confidence and trust in the organisations that operate within the QCF, the units and qualifications they develop, and the credits and qualifications awarded to learners. There must also be public confidence that all organisations recognised to operate in the QCF and the qualifications regulators will act effectively and appropriately if things go wrong that affect standards or the interests of learners.
- **Support equality and diversity**
The system must be fair and equal to ensure that wherever possible all learners with the relevant skills, knowledge and understanding can have their achievements recognised.
- **Ensure value for money**
Investment in the QCF and the cost, impact and benefits of regulatory measures and interventions should provide overall value for money for all stakeholders, including learners, centres, regulated organisations and government.

Approach to regulation of the QCF

The qualifications regulators' approach to regulation in the QCF consists of:

- establishing, through this document, regulatory arrangements that ensure that requirements for organisations recognised to develop and

submit units, develop rules of combination, and assess units and award credits and qualifications are clearly specified and set rigorous and appropriate quality standards

- recognising organisations and accrediting qualifications that meet the standards set out in these arrangements
- monitoring the performance of recognised organisations and the units and qualifications they develop and/or offer to ensure that the requirements and standards set out in the regulatory arrangements are being maintained
- keeping users informed about units and qualifications in the QCF, including publishing the definitive record of all recognised units and accredited qualifications, and reporting publicly on the QCF and the organisations that operate within it.

The qualifications regulators intend to focus their activity within the QCF on the qualification system and organisations that operate in it, rather than on individual units or qualifications. This approach is consistent with the specifications of the QCF and demonstrates the application of the regulators' commitment to adopting a more strategic approach to regulation that is based on risk.

This focus on organisational capability means that the qualifications regulators will not generally scrutinise individual units at the point when they are admitted to the unit databank, and will use a streamlined process to focus on only the key features of qualifications at the point of accreditation. However, where the regulators identify particular risks or concerns, they may choose to increase the level of scrutiny that they place on any aspect of the system.

If the qualifications regulators identify that a recognised organisation is not complying with these regulations, they will take action to ensure its compliance with the relevant regulations. They can apply a 'condition of accreditation' to an awarding organisation to instruct it to rectify non-compliance. They may choose to apply conditions at the recognition stage, at the point of accrediting a qualification, as a consequence of their monitoring activity, or if changes to a qualification become necessary in the interests of users.

The qualifications regulators can also impose sanctions where they are needed to encourage an awarding organisation's compliance with the regulations and protect the interests of users. The level of sanction imposed will depend on the nature of an awarding organisation's non-compliance, the risks posed to the quality of qualifications and the interests of users.

This document sets out the outcomes that are expected from the organisations that are recognised and the qualifications that are accredited within the QCF. Except where this is considered essential to the stability and operation of the QCF, it does not set out the processes by which those outcomes are achieved.

This approach provides flexibility for organisations to develop approaches to meet the required outcomes, without the majority of processes being prescribed.

These regulations also do not specify the mechanisms that the qualifications regulators will use to check compliance with the requirements. This is because the purpose of this document is to set the standards for organisations and their units and qualifications. The process by which organisations are recognised and qualifications accredited in the QCF is published separately.

The functions of the QCF for which organisations may be recognised, together with a description of the responsibilities they are recognised to carry out, are outlined in more detail in the 'Roles and responsibilities' section below.

Links with other regulatory documents

These arrangements cover all the requirements applying to organisations operating within the QCF, the units and rules of combination that they may develop and the credits and qualifications they may award. The arrangements do not therefore rely on any other regulatory criteria or codes of practice, although the qualifications regulators may also from time to time produce requirements, information and guidance for framework users intended to support the effective regulation of the QCF and the operation of the qualifications system. Currently the only such documents are the *Regulatory principles for e-assessment*, to which awarding organisations should refer if they intend to use this type of assessment, and *Operating rules for using the term NVQ in a QCF qualification title*, which organisations should use if they wish to title their qualifications in this way.

Roles and responsibilities

This section summarises the main roles and responsibilities of organisations operating within the QCF. Organisations in the QCF can choose to be recognised to:

- **Develop and submit units to form part of accredited qualifications**

Organisations that are recognised to develop and submit units enter them to the QCF unit databank to be included in accredited qualifications. They must ensure that these units are up to date, responsive to change and capable of combination within qualifications that meet both market demand and the strategic intentions of key stakeholders. They must have procedures in place to ensure that units are developed according to QCF specifications and have robust levels and credit values.

- **Develop rules of combination for accredited qualifications**

Organisations that are recognised to develop rules of combination develop them for inclusion in accredited qualifications. They are

responsible for developing rules of combination to QCF specifications that make effective use of the units available in the unit databank and have a clear purpose and rationale.

- **Operate as awarding organisations**

Those recognised as awarding organisations are responsible for developing assessment arrangements for units and qualifications, submitting qualifications based on agreed rules of combination for accreditation and assessing learner achievement reliably, validly and consistently. They are also responsible for awarding credits to learners for the achievement of units, making qualification awards within overarching arrangements for credit transfer and exemption, supporting a system of credit accumulation and transfer, and accurately recording learners' achievements in their learner records.

Organisations that demonstrate that they meet the required standards set out in this document are recognised to carry out one or more of the functions set out above, except that organisations will not be recognised solely to develop rules of combination.

The regulatory requirements that organisations must meet to operate in the QCF are contained in the following sections of this document. The regulations have been designed so that all organisations must meet those set out in Section 2, which looks at general requirements for all organisations recognised to operate in the QCF, and, depending on the functions for which they wish to become recognised, one or more of the following:

- Section 3, requirements for organisations developing and submitting units to form part of accredited qualifications
- Section 4, requirements for organisations developing rules of combination for accredited qualifications
- Section 5, requirements for awarding organisations.

1. The design specifications of the QCF

General

- 1.1 The qualifications regulators require all organisations operating within the QCF to comply with all those design specifications relevant to their responsibilities.

Units

- 1.2 Units form the building blocks of all qualifications in the QCF. All qualifications submitted for accreditation in the QCF must be built solely from units that are defined according to the design specifications set out in paragraphs 1.3 to 1.7.
- 1.3 All units must have a unit title that:
- is clear, concise and reflects the content (the information in the learning outcomes and assessment criteria) of the unit
 - is meaningful in its own right and does not make reference to any information outside the unit, including other units, qualifications or standards
 - does not include reference to the levels of the QCF or to any terms that may be taken to refer to a level of achievement.
- 1.4 All units must contain learning outcomes that:
- set out what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do as the result of a process of learning
 - are clear and coherent, and expressed in language that is understandable by the learners for whom the unit is intended or by a helper or adviser where the learners themselves are not able to understand the learning outcomes
 - are expressed in a manner that addresses individual learners in the third person and will make sense to a learner both before a unit is offered and after the learning outcomes have been achieved
 - are capable of assessment and, in conjunction with the assessment criteria related to that outcome, set a clear assessment standard for the unit.
- 1.5 All units must contain assessment criteria that:
- specify the standard a learner is expected to meet to demonstrate that the learning outcomes of that unit have been achieved
 - relate to an individual learning outcome in language consistent with it

- c are sufficiently detailed to support reliable, valid and consistent judgements that a learning outcome has been achieved, without creating an undue assessment burden for learners or assessors
 - d do not include any explicit references to the methods or instruments of assessment to be used.
- 1.6 All units must identify a single level for the unit that:
- a represents the complexity, autonomy and/or range of achievement expressed within the unit
 - b is determined by comparing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria against the QCF level descriptors (see Annex E)
 - c is a constant property of the unit, irrespective of the qualification in which it is located.
- 1.7 All units must identify a credit value for the unit which specifies the number of credits that will be awarded to a learner who has achieved the learning outcomes of the unit. This must be based on:
- a one credit for those learning outcomes achievable in 10 hours of learning
 - b learning time being defined as the time taken by learners at the level of the unit, on average, to complete the learning outcomes of the unit to the standard determined by the assessment criteria
 - c the credit value of the unit remaining constant regardless of the method of assessment used or the qualification(s) to which it contributes.
- 1.8 No design features may be added to this standard format. The unit format also includes additional information about the unit. The list of additional information that organisations must submit is:
- a the purpose and aim/s of the unit
 - b the expiry date of the unit
 - c details of the relationship between the unit and relevant national occupational standards or other professional standards or curricula (if appropriate)
 - d any requirements about the way in which a unit must be assessed (if appropriate)
 - e guidance for developing assessment arrangements for the unit (if needed)
 - f support for the unit from a sector skills council (SSC) or other appropriate body (where required)
 - g the location of the unit within the subject/sector classification system
 - h the name of the recognised organisation submitting the unit
 - i the date from which the unit is available for use by learners
 - j the number of guided learning hours (GLH) for the unit (if needed).

- 1.9 All units must be developed to be capable of assessment independently of any other unit.
- 1.10 Each unit must be capable of contributing towards at least one qualification. Units will not be 'active' and must not be made available to learners until they are included in the 'Mandatory', 'Optional' or 'Credit from other units' section of a rule of combination in an accredited qualification.
- 1.11 To be recognised in accredited qualifications in the QCF, units must be placed in the QCF unit databank. Only organisations recognised by the qualifications regulators to do so may place units in the databank (see Section 3).
- 1.12 The qualifications regulators will make available to all organisations recognised to develop units for the QCF a standard pro forma, based on the unit design features and additional information, within which all units must be developed. Organisations recognised to submit units to the unit databank are required to use this pro forma.
- 1.13 Once a unit is placed in the QCF unit databank only the expiry date for that unit may be amended. It may be withdrawn if it does not feature in any accredited qualifications.
- 1.14 Recognised organisations must identify to whom their units are available and have a rationale for this. When submitting units to the QCF unit databank, they must specify their availability to one of the following:
- a to all awarding organisations to award credit (shared units)
 - b restricted to specified awarding organisation/s to award credit (restricted units).

Qualifications

- 1.15 All qualifications presented to the qualifications regulators for accreditation must be built up from units in the databank. These units must be available for use by the organisation developing the rule of combination and the awarding organisation submitting the qualification for accreditation.
- 1.16 A qualification submission must not request an accreditation end date later than any of the expiry dates for units that form a part of the qualification.
- 1.17 When presenting a qualification for accreditation, an awarding organisation will be required to submit qualifications that conform to the following specified design requirements, as set out in detail under the subheadings below, for:

- a the title of the qualification
- b the rules of combination for the qualification
- c a description of any grading arrangements
- d any requirements about the manner in which specific units must be assessed.

Qualification titles

- 1.18 Each qualification title submitted for accreditation in the QCF must be presented in a standard format that identifies the level, size and a precise and concise description of the content of the qualification.
- 1.19 The level of a qualification must be determined by reviewing the rules of combination (see section below) for the qualification and identifying the level at which there is the greatest number of credits required. More than 50 per cent of credits must be at the same level as the qualification or above.
- 1.20 The size of a qualification must be signalled through the use of the terms 'Award', 'Certificate' and 'Diploma'. This must be determined by the credit value of the qualification (which is established by the rule of combination for the qualification as detailed in paragraph 1.24) as follows:

Title	Award	Certificate	Diploma
Credit value	1 to 12	13 to 36	37 and above

- 1.21 In order to indicate a specialist focus within the options for a qualification, it is possible, using rules of combination (see paragraph 1.26), to structure the credits that are required from particular units to identify specific pathways. Where this is the case, it results in an endorsement that reflects the specialist focus of the pathway and supplements the description of the content in the qualification title. This endorsement is represented as a bracketed addition to the title.
- 1.22 The acronym 'NVQ' may be added as a bracketed addition to the qualification title for certain occupational qualifications. Any qualifications submitted for accreditation that include this acronym must meet the requirements in *Operating rules for using the term NVQ in a QCF qualification title* developed by the qualifications regulators and published separately from this document.

Rules of combination

- 1.23 Rules of combination specify the credits that need to be achieved, through the completion of particular units, for a qualification to be awarded. All accredited qualifications within the QCF must have a set of rules of combination. These rules must be presented using the standard format, set out in the paragraph below.

- 1.24 The standard format for representing rules of combination within the QCF requires a rationale for the rule of combination to be defined and rules to be established for the accumulation of credits through particular units under the following headings:
- a qualification title: this must record the qualification title for the rule of combination, specified according to the requirements set out in paragraphs 1.18 to 1.22
 - b the credit value of the qualification: this must set out the number of credits required at all levels to achieve the qualification
 - c the credits to be achieved at the level of the qualification or above: this must set out the number of credits that must be achieved at the level of the qualification or above
 - d credits from mandatory units: this must set out any units that must be achieved for the qualification to be awarded
 - e credits from optional units: this must set out any units that a learner may choose from to complete in order to achieve a required number of units or credits towards the award of the qualification; optional units may be clustered into groups and particular combinations of units required or barred in order to structure the choice of units available to learners
 - f credits from other units: this must set out any opportunity to achieve credits from units in the databank by noting the total number of credits that may be achieved through these units and applying any (or none) of the following constraints:
 - i. the level or levels at which these credits must be achieved
 - ii. the subject/sector classification of the units through which credits may be achieved
 - iii. any time constraints on the award of credit that may be counted towards achievement of the qualification
 - g credits from equivalent units: this must set out any opportunities to count credits from a unit/s from other qualifications or from a unit/s submitted by other recognised organisations towards the qualification in place of mandatory or optional unit/s specified in the rule of combination; in order to be accepted as an equivalent, the unit/s must have the same credit value or greater than the mandatory or optional unit/s in question, and be at the same level or higher
 - h exemptions: this must set out any exemption from the requirement to achieve credit for mandatory, optional or other units that learners can claim, based on certificated achievement outside the QCF deemed to be of equivalent value to a QCF unit or units
 - i time limits on the process of credit accumulation or exemptions: where required, this must set out, for each QCF unit or exemption, any limits on the length of time after an award is gained by a learner that it may still count towards the qualification.

- 1.25 In establishing rules of combination, qualification developers will use one or more of the headings set out in paragraph 1.24, but there is no requirement to use all these features. Rules of combination may be based on the achievement of credits from a single unit (through the identification of one mandatory unit).
- 1.26 Where there is a need to define a pathway that results in an endorsement to the qualification title, requirements for each pathway must be set out separately under each of the headings for rules of combination set out in paragraph 1.24. When submitted together, they form the set of rules of combination for the qualification. All pathways do not have to be of an identical size, but must require learners to achieve a number of credits within the size ranges for Award, Certificate and Diploma set out on page 14. All pathways must also set requirements at the same level as detailed in paragraph 1.19.
- 1.27 The qualifications regulators will make available to all users of the QCF a standard format for rules of combination, based on the format set out in paragraph 1.24. Organisations recognised to develop rules of combination are required to submit them for use in developing qualifications using this format.

Grading

- 1.28 Qualifications in the QCF may be graded. Any grading arrangements developed for a qualification or for the components of a qualification must:
- a specify explicitly the criteria against which individual performance within the qualification or component is to be differentiated
 - b identify the grading scale to be used to signify performance differentiation within the qualification and/or components.
- 1.29 In specifying grading criteria and identifying a grading scale, the integrity of all the other specifications of the QCF must be maintained. In particular:
- a all grading scales must include a 'pass' grade based exclusively on the assessment criteria in the unit or units on which the component or qualification is based and for which credit must be awarded
 - b any additional grading criteria must build explicitly on the assessment criteria of a unit or units within the rules of combination for the qualification
 - c any additional grading criteria must be consistent with the overall level of the qualification or components to be graded and must be clearly distinguished from achievements at the next level of the QCF
 - d grading scales may not use the term 'credit' to describe any point on the grading scale.

- 1.30 All grading arrangements must be submitted for accreditation as part of the information about the qualification.

Requirements about the manner in which specific units in qualifications must be assessed

- 1.31 In some instances it may be that requirements about the way in which units of a qualification must be assessed need to be made. These requirements are detailed at unit level as part of the additional information for units that organisations must submit. At the point at which a qualification is submitted for accreditation, it must be made clear whether these unit-based assessment requirements will apply to the award of the qualification in question.

The award, accumulation and transfer of credits

- 1.32 All awarding organisations recognised within the QCF award credits and qualifications (see Section 5).
- 1.33 Credits must be awarded to learners for the successful achievement of the learning outcomes of a unit. The number of credits awarded must be the same as the credit value of the unit. It is not possible for some credits to be achieved for partial completion of a unit or learners to be awarded credit when all the learning outcomes are not achieved by virtue of any 'compensation' for stronger performance in other areas of learning.
- 1.34 Credit accumulation is the term used to describe the process of putting together a combination of credits to meet the achievement requirements of a qualification. The rules of combination for a qualification determine the requirements for achievement of credits through particular units. Awarding organisations must award qualifications to learners based on this process.
- 1.35 Credit transfer describes the process of using a credit or credits awarded in the context of a different qualification or awarded by a different awarding organisation towards the achievement requirements of another qualification. All awarding organisations must support credit transfer by agreeing to mutually recognise the credits awarded by all other awarding organisations recognised to operate within the framework. Credits must be transferred between qualifications and awarding organisations where appropriate, subject to the rules of combination for the receiving qualification.
- 1.36 A learner may be awarded credit, counting towards a qualification they are able to claim, by more than one organisation. When this happens, the learner may claim the qualification from any of the awarding organisations that has awarded them credit towards that qualification, as long as that organisation has had the qualification accredited.

- 1.37 Awarding organisations are required to support the operation of a system of credit accumulation and transfer, and record credit and qualification achievement made by learners in their learner record (see paragraphs 5.12 and 5.14). All awarding organisations must have arrangements in place to ensure that all credits that fall within the rules of combination for the qualification that a learner claims are recognised as counting towards the qualification, irrespective of the awarding organisation that made the award of credit to the learner.

Qualification types in the QCF

- 1.38 In the QCF, a qualification type is defined through a specific and additional set of regulatory requirements that apply over and above the common requirements for all recognised organisations and accredited qualifications. This document sets out only the common requirements for all recognised organisations and accredited qualifications. It does not include any specific, additional regulatory requirements relating to particular types of qualification. Where such types are established, these additional requirements will be published separately by the qualifications regulators.

requirements for all organisations recognised to operate in the QCF

Management and governance

- 2.1 The organisation must notify and keep the qualifications regulators informed of any changes in:
- a its ownership and arrangements for governance of any regulated functions
 - b the names of individuals responsible for maintaining the quality of the relevant regulated functions, including a single named point of accountability for them
 - c the management structures used to control the delivery of relevant regulated functions.
- 2.2 These arrangements must ensure the organisation has procedures in place to appropriately manage any conflicts of interest between functions that affect the operation of the regulated functions it performs and prevent any restrictive practices.
- 2.3 If more than one organisation contributes to a regulated function, the cooperating organisations must:
- a identify the lead organisation responsible for quality assurance, which must be a recognised organisation
 - b hold written statements of the responsibilities of each organisation, including specific reference to their responsibilities for quality assurance
 - c be able to provide evidence that all of them will comply with the relevant regulatory arrangements.

Resources

- 2.4 For the life of the units and qualifications it develops and/or offers, the organisation's financial strategy and arrangements must provide for sufficient funds to support current and future demands for its services.
- 2.5 For the life of the units and qualifications it develops and/or offers, an organisation's human resources strategy and arrangements must provide for sufficient staff and/or associates to support current and future demands for its services.
- 2.6 For the life of the units and qualifications it develops and/or offers, an organisation's technical strategy and equipment must provide for:

- a sufficient resources to meet the requirements for operating in the QCF and support current and future demands for its services
- b arrangements that will enable it to maintain business continuity in the event of unforeseen circumstances affecting its regulated functions.

Self-evaluation and continuous improvement

- 2.7 The organisation must have procedures in place to monitor its compliance with regulations.
- 2.8 The organisation's review and evaluation arrangements must provide opportunities for users to contribute, and should be used to support continuous improvement.
- 2.9 The organisation must provide details of the outcomes of its review and evaluation activities to the qualifications regulators as required.
- 2.10 The organisation must allow the qualifications regulators access to premises, meetings, documents and data relating to the regulated functions it performs.

Diversity and equality

- 2.11 In the performance of the regulated functions it undertakes, the recognised organisation must comply with the requirements of equalities legislation in force from time to time, and in particular have systems in place to ensure that it does not discriminate on the grounds of race, disability and gender.
- 2.12 In the performance of the regulated functions it undertakes, the recognised organisation must have systems in place to give consideration to how it can ensure equality for all learners. Where it is reasonable and practical to do so, it should take steps to address identified inequalities or barriers that may arise: between people of different religions and beliefs, racial groups, ages, marital / civil partnership status and sexual orientations; between men and women generally; between disabled and non-disabled people; between persons of different political opinion; between those with dependants and those without; or on any other ground or status.
- 2.13 For the regulated functions it performs, the organisation must have processes in place to consult with relevant learners and/or their representatives to ensure that there are no barriers to entry to units and qualifications it develops and/or offers for disabled people, for women or men, or people from different racial groups, other than those directly related to the integrity of units or qualifications. The nature of any barriers must be stated and the inclusion of the requirements that create the barrier justified only and explicitly in terms of the integrity of unit or the qualification. Any details of how the effect of any barriers will be

mitigated, including for awarding organisations by using access arrangements, including reasonable adjustments, must also be recorded.

- 2.14 The recognised organisation must have procedures in place to collect sufficient data to allow it to monitor and evaluate its compliance with the requirements set out in paragraphs 2.11 to 2.13. It must share information from this activity with the qualifications regulators on request.

Archived Content

3. Requirements for organisations developing and submitting units to form part of accredited qualifications

Expertise

- 3.1 The organisation must have procedures in place that ensure:
- a that, for the units it decides to produce, it has access to individuals who have expertise in the relevant subject or sector area(s) and in the design and development of units
 - b it has access to expertise in assessment and awarding to inform unit design
 - c its staff and associates have access to training and guidance on the design and development of units
 - d this expertise is used appropriately in the development of units.

Development

- 3.2 When developing units, the organisation must have procedures in place to:
- a interrogate the unit databank to ensure that an existing unit, available to the unit developer, does not meet identified needs
 - b use provision planning tools wherever these exist, or use market research, labour market intelligence or evidence of learner demand, individual or social benefit where appropriate
 - c involve awarding organisations, where it is not itself an awarding organisation
 - d ensure accuracy and consistency in the determination of levels and credit values
 - e ensure that all units developed meet the requirements set out in the design features in Section 1
 - f review and sign off the quality of units prior to submission to the unit databank
 - g submit signed off units to the databank in the format required by the qualifications regulators.

Ongoing review

- 3.3 The organisation must have procedures in place to:
- a review the continued need for a unit
 - b ensure continued accuracy and consistency in levels and credit values of its units, in particular considering units in comparison with other units in the unit databank

- c ensure the continued compliance of the unit with the requirements set out in the design features in Section 1
 - d use evidence from the delivery, assessment and awarding of the unit, at appropriate times, as part of the review process.
- 3.4 The organisation must supply information about its units, and the processes used in their development and review, to the qualifications regulators in order to support their activities to ensure consistency across units.
- 3.5 The qualifications regulators will monitor the quality of units placed in the databank and may, after notifying relevant recognised organisations, require units to be reviewed or withdrawn from accredited qualifications and the databank if they fail to meet the regulatory requirements of the QCF.

4. Requirements for organisations developing rules of combination for accredited qualifications

Expertise

- 4.1 The organisation must have procedures in place that ensure:
- that, for the rules of combination it decides to produce, it has access to individuals who have expertise in the relevant subject or sector area(s) and the design and development of rules of combination
 - its staff and associates have access to training and guidance on the design and development of rules of combination
 - that this expertise is used appropriately in the development of rules of combination.

Development

- 4.2 The organisation must have procedures in place to determine the need for a set of rules of combination for a qualification, using provision planning tools wherever these exist, or using market research, labour market intelligence or evidence of learner demand, individual or social benefit where appropriate. This is the rationale for a rule of combination for a qualification and must be specified. The organisation must also explain how the combination of units defined supports this rationale and how this rule of combination will support learner progression.
- 4.3 When developing rules of combination, the organisation must have procedures in place to:
- interrogate the unit databank effectively to establish the units required for a rule of combination and ensure new units are developed if required
 - ensure that all rules of combination developed meet the requirements set out in the design features in Section 1
 - use meaningful and coherent combinations of units that reflect the rationale for a qualification
 - generate maximum opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer and exemption consistent with the rationale for a qualification
 - involve awarding organisations, where it is not itself an awarding organisation
 - review and sign off the quality of the rationale for, and the rule of combination for, a qualification
 - set out the rationale for, and requirements of, rules of combination in the format required by the qualifications regulators and make them available to those that need to use them.

Ongoing review

- 4.4 The organisation must have procedures in place to:
- a review the continued need for a rule of combination
 - b ensure the continued compliance of the rule of combination with the requirements set out in the design features in Section 1
 - c ensure the specified combinations of units and opportunities for credit accumulation and transfer and exemption continue to be consistent with the rationale for the qualification
 - d use evidence from the delivery of rules of combination as part of qualifications, at the appropriate times, as part of the review process.

Archived Content

5. Requirements for awarding organisations

Management and governance

- 5.1 The awarding organisation's corporate governance arrangements must ensure a clear distinction between the awarding organisation function and any other functions it performs.

Expertise

- 5.2 The organisation must have procedures in place that ensure:
- a that, for the units and qualifications that it decides to offer, it has access to individuals with expertise in assessment and awarding
 - b its staff and associates have access to relevant training and guidance in assessment
 - c that this expertise is used appropriately in the assessment and awarding of its units and qualifications.

Design and development of assessment

- 5.3 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place to develop assessment methods for individual units, or groups of units, that:
- a are consistent with the requirements for units set out in the design features in Section 1
 - b enable units to be assessed individually
 - c assess validly the skills, knowledge and/or understanding of all the learning outcomes against the stated assessment criteria
 - d require the production of sufficient evidence from learners to enable reliable and consistent judgements to be made about the achievement of all the learning outcomes against the stated assessment criteria
 - e are manageable and cost-effective, and/or permit manageable and cost-effective assessment arrangements to be developed by centres
 - f where appropriate, are consistent with any additional requirements for assessment set out in the unit format
 - g minimise any subsequent need to make access arrangements, including reasonable adjustments.

Grading

- 5.4 Where the awarding organisation chooses to offer grades within a qualification, it must have procedures in place to ensure that:
- a the grading arrangements for that qualification conform to the grading requirements set out in the design features in Section 1

- b judgements about the grading of qualifications and their components are made using the procedures outlined below for delivery of assessment.

Delivery of assessment

- 5.5 The awarding organisation must have defined roles and responsibilities for staff involved in the delivery of assessment that ensure that the assessment process is managed and conducted effectively. Where responsibilities are delegated to organisations other than the awarding organisation, there must be clear accountability to the awarding organisation for assessment decisions.
- 5.6 The awarding organisation must have in place the necessary systems and procedures and resources to ensure:
- a assessment instruments and tasks are produced to the required quality standards
 - b assessment evidence produced by learners is authentic
 - c accuracy and consistency of standards in the assessment of units, across units and over time
 - d people involved in the assessment process have the appropriate expertise and are adequately informed and supported to fulfil their responsibilities
 - e suitable training is offered to people involved in the assessment process
 - f performance management systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of people involved in assessment
 - g for each qualification, it (or its centres) retains sufficient evidence of learners' work or assessment decisions to monitor them over time
 - h achievement is recognised through the recognition of prior learning (RPL) where this is appropriate
 - i any claims for exemption identified by learners are considered and a record of any valid claims is kept.
- 5.7 In accordance with the requirements set out in paragraph 2.13, awarding organisations must also have in place the necessary systems and procedures to allow the provision of access arrangements, including reasonable adjustments. These should reflect the needs of individual learners and must also ensure that assessment continues to enable valid, reliable and consistent judgements to be made about the achievement of all learning outcomes against the stated assessment criteria.
- 5.8 The awarding organisation must also arrange for special consideration to be given to learners that experience temporary illness, injury or indisposition at the time of an assessment. This should allow them to demonstrate the achievement they are capable of for the units that are subject to special consideration.

- 5.9 The awarding organisation must ensure that people involved in the assessment process are not responsible for the conduct of assessment or the quality assurance of assessment decisions at a centre in which they have a personal interest, or, where this happens, they must ensure that the assessment process is subject to scrutiny by those without a personal interest.
- 5.10 The awarding organisation must ensure that it has arrangements in place for standardisation and quality assurance of assessment outcomes across centres and awards.

Centre recognition

- 5.11 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place to recognise, and monitor on an ongoing basis, centres¹ to offer assessment leading to awards within the QCF. These procedures must ensure that each centre:
- a has arrangements in place to identify a single named point of accountability for the quality assurance and management for the assessment of units and qualifications
 - b can hold and transmit securely details of assessment outcomes to the awarding organisation
 - c has the staff, resources and systems necessary to support the assessment of units and the award, accumulation and transfer of credits and, where necessary, the recording of exemptions
 - d unless a learner chooses not to have one, has arrangements in place to obtain on behalf of its learners a unique learner number (ULN) and a learner record
 - e where learner consent is given, uses access to the record of the learner's previous achievements in their learner record to ensure that opportunities for credit transfer and exemption are maximised
 - f has administrative systems in place to track the progress of learners towards their target awards
 - g where appropriate, has in place arrangements that allow for recognition of prior learning (RPL)
 - h documents the respective roles and responsibilities of each partner where a centre is a partnership arrangement between organisations
 - i agrees to provide the awarding organisation and the qualifications regulators with access to premises, people and records, and to cooperate with the awarding organisation's monitoring activities.

¹ An awarding organisation may choose to fulfil these functions itself.

Award of credits

- 5.12 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place to ensure that:
- information from learners' assessments is used accurately to award credit to learners
 - the credits achieved by learners are awarded securely, accurately and quickly
 - decisions are reviewed and results adjusted in cases where errors are identified
 - where a learner has or will obtain a ULN, credit awards are accurately recorded, amended and, if necessary, withdrawn in a timely manner in their learner record, and records of all learner achievement are made available to support credit accumulation and transfer.
- 5.13 Credit certificates must be issued wherever these are demanded by learners. When these are issued, the awarding organisation must have procedures in place to ensure that:
- the design of certificates meets the requirements outlined in Annex C
 - certificates are issued without unnecessary delay
 - there are safeguards against fraudulent or mistaken claims for certificates
 - replacement certificates are labelled as such, and are only issued after steps have been taken to authenticate the claims.

Award of qualifications

- 5.14 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place for the award of qualifications to ensure that:
- it can accurately and quickly identify the point at which a learner has completed the rules of combination for a qualification based on credits it has awarded, credits awarded by other awarding organisations and any appropriate exemptions that have been claimed and recorded
 - if the qualification is graded, information from learners' assessments is used accurately to determine grades for learners
 - decisions are reviewed and results adjusted in cases where errors are identified
 - all qualifications achieved by learners are awarded securely, accurately and quickly
 - where a learner has or will obtain a ULN, qualification awards are accurately recorded, amended and, if necessary, withdrawn in a timely manner in their learner record, and records of all learner achievement are made available to support credit accumulation and transfer.
- 5.15 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place for issuing qualification certificates that ensure:

- a the design of certificates meets the requirements outlined in Annex D
- b certificates are issued without unnecessary delay
- c there are safeguards against fraudulent or mistaken claims for certificates
- d replacement certificates are labelled as such, and are only issued after steps have been taken to authenticate the claims.

Ongoing review

5.16 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place to:

- a review whether its approaches to assessment design and development result in assessment methods consistent with the requirements set out in paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 and, where the qualification is graded, as set out in paragraph 5.4
- b review whether its procedures for delivery of assessment and centre recognition are consistent with the requirements set out in paragraphs 5.5 to 5.11
- c review whether its procedures for awarding credits and qualifications are consistent with the requirements set out in paragraphs 5.12 to 5.15
- d for the awards that it makes, ensure standards are comparable year on year across centres, units and qualifications at the same level with the same title and where identical units are assessed using different assessment methods.

Fees

5.17 The awarding organisation must provide the qualifications regulators with information about its fees in confidence and on request.

Data requirements

5.18 The awarding organisation must collect and retain information about its centres, and on candidate registrations or entries and achievements of units and qualifications. It must supply such information to the qualifications regulators on request.

Awards outside England, Wales and Northern Ireland

5.19 Certificates for accredited qualifications can be awarded to candidates outside England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and can carry the relevant qualifications regulators' logo(s), provided that:

- a the qualifications are offered to the exact specification accredited for use in England, Wales and Northern Ireland
- b the awarding organisation informs its clients that the qualifications regulators' logo(s) on the certificate indicate that the qualification is accredited only for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Use of languages

- 5.20 Apart from foreign language specifications, the awarding organisation must provide:
- a in England, qualification specifications and assessment materials that are expressed in English
 - b in Wales, qualification specifications that are expressed in Welsh or English, or in Welsh and English; specifications must state explicitly in which language(s) assessment is available
 - c in Northern Ireland, qualification specifications that are expressed in English, and assessment materials that are expressed either in English, or in English and Irish (Gaeilge).
- 5.21 Awarding organisations may also allow assessment in a language other than English, Welsh or Irish (Gaeilge), provided that:
- a the awarding organisation ensures that the assessment is comparable to that offered in English, Welsh or Irish (Gaeilge)
 - b in qualifications designed for the workplace, lack of proficiency in English, Welsh or Irish (Gaeilge) does not prevent the candidate from properly carrying out the role that is supported by the qualification.
- 5.22 Where more than one language is used, the awarding organisation must put mechanisms in place to ensure that assessments carried out, and awards made to learners, in different languages are comparable.
- 5.23 In accordance with the arrangements set out in paragraph 5.7, awarding organisations may allow assessment in British Sign Language.

Appeals

- 5.24 The awarding organisation must have published procedures that centres or learners can access to enquire about, or appeal to the awarding organisation against, assessment or other decisions.
- 5.25 The enquiry procedure must provide for centres to seek a check on:
- a assessment decisions affecting learners' results
 - b other decisions affecting centres and learners, where appropriate.
- 5.26 The appeals procedure must:
- a make provision for some independence in the decision-making process
 - b focus, in the case of appeals against assessment decisions, on whether the awarding organisation used procedures that were consistent with these regulations and applied the procedures properly and fairly in arriving at judgements
 - c include provision to keep the appellants informed
 - d avoid deterring appellants on financial grounds
 - e explain how unresolved appeals can be put to independent review.

- 5.27 Where the outcome of an appeal brings into question the accuracy of other results, the awarding organisation must take steps to protect the interests of all learners, the integrity of units and/or qualifications and the integrity of the QCF. In such cases, the awarding organisation must cooperate with any follow-up investigations required by the qualifications regulators and, if necessary, agree appropriate remedial action with them.
- 5.28 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place for monitoring, evaluating and reporting annually on its enquiry service and appeals arrangements, including the number and nature of enquiries and appeals and their outcomes

Dealing with malpractice

- 5.29 The awarding organisation must publish procedures for centres on dealing with malpractice on the part of learners, centre staff and any others involved in providing the qualification.
- 5.30 The procedures must require centres to report to the awarding organisation any suspected malpractice, and must make clear that failure to cooperate can lead to awards not being made and certificates not being issued, and future entries and/or registrations not being accepted.
- 5.31 The awarding organisation must conduct a full investigation of instances of alleged or suspected malpractice, and must take such action, with respect to the learners and centres concerned, as is necessary to maintain the integrity of the qualification. The actions taken should be commensurate with the gravity of the malpractice.
- 5.32 The awarding organisation must report cases of malpractice to the qualifications regulators whenever it finds evidence that results or certificates may be invalid. The awarding organisation must cooperate with any follow-up investigations of malpractice required by the qualifications regulators. The awarding organisation must agree with the qualifications regulators on appropriate remedial action if there is evidence that results or certificates may be invalid.

Customer service

- 5.33 The awarding organisation must publish a customer service statement that specifies:
- a the quality of service that customers can expect in relation to units and qualifications, and associated performance measures and feedback arrangements
 - b relevant points of contact and communication mechanisms

- c its policy on communicating bilingually with centres, where the awarding organisation offers assessment opportunities through the medium of Welsh or Irish (Gaeilge)
- d the fee structure that will apply to its units and qualifications.

Submitting qualifications for accreditation

5.34 The awarding organisation must have procedures in place to ensure that when qualifications are submitted for accreditation:

- a they meet the design requirements set out in Section 1, are built from units and rules of combination submitted by organisations recognised by the qualifications regulators to perform these functions, and that meet the requirements for assessment and awarding set out in this chapter
- b the quality of qualification to be offered has been reviewed and signed off prior to submission for accreditation
- c they provide the information specified by the qualifications regulators for accreditation in the format required.

6. Qualification requirements

Accreditation

- 6.1 In order to be accredited, a qualification must:
- a meet the design features set out in Section 1
 - b include units developed by organisations that meet, and continue to meet, the requirements for developing and submitting units set out in Section 3, and combined together through a rule of combination developed by organisations that meet, and continue to meet, the requirements for these organisations set out in Section 4
 - c have assessment arrangements designed by a recognised awarding organisation that meet, and continue to meet, the requirements set out in Section 5
 - d be submitted by a named recognised awarding organisation that has arrangements in place for the delivery and administration of assessment and awarding that meet, and continue to meet, the requirements set out in Section 5.
- 6.2 Qualification proposals submitted for accreditation must also:
- a detail a rationale covering the need for the qualification which builds on the rationale for the set of rules of combination (see paragraph 4.2) on which it is based
 - b be 'approved of' by an SSC where the qualification falls within an SSC footprint, or, if the proposal does not fall within an SSC footprint, detail the support of appropriate representative or regulatory organisations and/or evidence of learner demand, individual or social benefit²
 - c identify the purpose of the qualification from a list provided by the qualifications regulators
 - d identify the sector/subject area within which the qualification is to be classified
 - e identify the start and end dates for accreditation and end date for certification of the qualification
 - f identify the age ranges of the learners to whom the qualification is to be offered

² The qualifications regulators will seek and have regard to the advice of appropriate organisations in reaching their accreditation decisions. However, the qualifications regulators will always reserve the right to accredit a qualification that is not supported or 'approved of' by one of these organisations where there is sufficient evidence to justify such a decision.

- g identify whether the qualification is offered in England, Wales, Northern Ireland or a combination of these countries
 - h not require learners that have achieved a qualification to take up or maintain membership of any organisation, unless required to do so by statute; this requirement only applies to the award of accredited qualifications and does not preclude a membership requirement for continued use of a designation or to hold a licence to practise.
- 6.3 It is the responsibility of the awarding organisation to produce all other details about the qualification, including the full qualification specification, and to provide centres offering qualifications in the QCF with the information, advice and support necessary to ensure consistent and equitable delivery of accredited qualifications. This information is not generally required to be submitted for accreditation. On request, the qualifications regulators must be given access to all the information developed by an awarding organisation in relation to the qualification. This may be required to demonstrate that the awarding organisation and its qualifications continue to meet all the appropriate regulatory requirements.
- 6.4 The awarding organisation must also agree to negotiate appropriate arrangements with the qualifications regulators for withdrawal of qualifications to ensure the interests of learners are protected.

Annex A: Statutory provisions

1. Responsibilities for regulating the QCF in England, Wales and Northern Ireland lie with three qualifications regulators.
 - a In England, the qualifications regulator for all external qualifications³ is the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual)⁴. Ofqual and DCELLS work with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to ensure that NVQs and Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs) remain aligned.
 - b In Wales, the qualifications regulator is the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) / Yr Adran Plant Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau (APADGOS), which regulates all external qualifications except for the formal accreditation of individual NVQs, which is the sole responsibility of Ofqual.⁵
 - c In Northern Ireland, the qualifications regulator is the Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), which regulates external qualifications other than NVQs, which are the responsibility of Ofqual.⁶

Where this guide refers to 'the qualifications regulators', the term includes DCELLS, CCEA and Ofqual (as appropriate).

2. For the purposes of statutory regulation,⁷ a qualification in the QCF must be an 'external qualification'. This is a qualification that is:
 - a academic or vocational in nature, but not a qualification awarded by a university under its degree-awarding powers
 - b authenticated or awarded by an outside body (that is, a body or person other than the institution or employer that provides the course of education or training leading to the qualifications).

3 Section 24 of the Education Act 1997, as amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2002 and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (Transfer of Functions to the National Assembly for Wales and Abolition) Order 2005.

4 Ofqual is legally a part of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), but operates as its independent regulatory arm, exercising the legal powers for the regulation of qualifications given to QCA in the Education Act 1997.

5 Section 30 of the Education Act 1997, as amended by the Education (Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales) (Conferment of Functions) Orders 1997 and 2001, and amended by the Learning and Skills Act 2000 and the Education Act 2002 and the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (Transfer of Functions to the National Assembly for Wales and Abolition) Order 2005.

6 As amended by the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006.

7 Section 24(6) and (7) of the Education Act 1997.

Thus, the regulatory arrangements do not extend to:

- c qualifications awarded by universities under their degree-awarding powers
- d qualifications that are not authenticated or awarded by an outside body (as defined above)
- e courses of education or training that do not lead to a formal external qualification (for example, any courses or training that are not formally assessed).

3. The qualifications regulators' functions in respect of external qualifications are:

- a developing and publishing criteria for the accreditation of qualifications
- b accrediting qualifications
- c keeping under review all aspects of qualifications
- d publishing and disseminating information relating to accredited qualifications.

In addition, the qualifications regulators have more general functions and powers including:

- e accrediting any qualification on such terms (including as to payment) as they may determine
- f doing anything which is calculated to facilitate, or is incidental or conducive to, the carrying out of any of their functions
- g carrying out ancillary activities as the Secretary of State may direct.

4. These functions are distinct from the qualifications regulators' responsibilities to advise the respective ministers on the exercise of their powers to determine, for example, which courses of study leading to an external qualification may be provided for pupils of compulsory school age by or on behalf of a maintained school or funded for learners post-16 and post-19.

Annex B: Glossary

Term	Definition
access arrangements	Arrangements that are approved in advance of an examination or assessment to allow achievement to be demonstrated by candidates with a disability, special learning needs (including where the candidate's first language is not English, Welsh or Irish) or to avoid unlawful discrimination
accreditation	The process through which the qualifications regulators confirm that a qualification conforms to the requirements of the QCF regulatory arrangements
active units	Units that have been included in an accredited qualification and as a result can be made available by awarding organisations to learners to achieve credit for
additional information (about units)	Information added to the designated design specifications of the unit, some of which is required and some which may be specified, to support the processes of searching for, selecting, assessing and reviewing units from the databank
appeal	The process through which an awarding organisation may be challenged on the outcome of an enquiry about results or, where appropriate, other procedural decisions affecting a centre or an individual learner
assessment	The process of making judgements about the extent to which a learner's work meets the assessment criteria of a unit, or any additional assessment requirements of a qualification
assessment criteria	Descriptions of the requirements a learner is expected to meet to demonstrate that a learning outcome has been achieved
assessment standard	The standard that a learner is expected to reach in order to achieve credit for a unit, expressed through a combination of the learning outcomes and assessment criteria of that unit
assessor	A person who assesses a learner's work
award of credits or qualifications	A certificate (electronic or paper-based) issued to an individual that recognises their achievement
Award	A qualification with credit value between 1 and 12

awarding	The process by which learners results are terminated on the basis of the evidence produced through their assessment
awarding organisation	A body recognised by the qualifications regulators against the requirements set out in these regulatory arrangements to award credits and qualifications
barred combinations (of units)	Units that cannot be counted together as part of a rule of combination for a qualification
centre	An organisation accountable to an awarding organisation for assessment arrangements leading to the award of credit or qualifications
centre recognition	A process through which a centre wishing to offer an award or awards is confirmed as being able to maintain the required quality and consistency of assessment, and comply with other requirements of the awarding organisation
certificate (1) for a unit or qualification	A record of attainment of credit or a qualification issued by an awarding organisation
Certificate (2)	A qualification with a credit value between 13 and 36
comparability of assessment	The extent to which assessment outcomes are equivalent between centres, awarding organisations, units and qualifications, and over time
component	A subset of a qualification to which a particular set of assessment methods and/or awarding arrangements is applied
condition of accreditation	Requirements, relating to non-compliance with the regulatory arrangements, that awarding organisations must meet which, although important, are not deemed sufficiently serious to delay or reverse an accreditation decision
credit	An award made to a learner in recognition of the achievement of the designated learning outcomes of a unit
credit accumulation	The process of putting together a combination of credits to meet the achievement requirements of a qualification
credit from 'other' units	Opportunities for a learner to count credit towards a qualification from optional units that are not listed individually but instead are defined by noting the number of credits that can be counted towards the qualification and one or more of the following constraints: the level or levels at which these credits must be achieved; the subject/sector classification of the units through which credits may be achieved; any time constraints on the award of credit that may be counted towards achievement of the qualification

credit transfer	The process of using a credit or credits awarded in the context of one qualification towards the achievement requirements of another qualification
credit value	The number of credits that may be awarded to a learner for the successful achievement of the learning outcomes of a unit
Diploma	A qualification with a credit value of 37 or above
endorsed sub-title (for a qualification)	A bracketed addition to a qualification title that reflects a particular specialism that a learner demonstrates by completing the requirements of a particular pathway
equivalent unit/s	A unit / units from a different qualification or submitted by another recognised organisation that is/are deemed to be of equivalent value and so can count towards a qualification in place of designated mandatory or optional unit/s from it
exemption	The facility for a learner to claim exemption from some of the achievement requirements of a QCF qualification, using evidence of certificated, non-QCF achievement deemed to be of equivalent value
expiry date of a unit	The date a unit will cease to be part of the unit databank and after which the unit will become archived and so can no longer feature in accredited qualifications
grade	A point on a scale of performance used to differentiate achievement within a qualification
guided learning hours	The number of hours of teacher-supervised or directed study time required to teach a qualification or unit of a qualification
learner record	An authoritative record of all credit and qualification achievements made by an individual learner in the QCF
learning outcome	A statement of what a learner can be expected to know, understand or do as a result of a process of learning
learning time	The amount of time a learner at the level of the unit is expected to take, on average, to complete the learning outcomes of the unit to the standard determined by the assessment criteria
level	An indication of the relative demand, complexity and/or depth of achievement, and/or the autonomy of the learner in demonstrating that achievement
level descriptors for the QCF	A set of statements that enable achievements to be located at a particular level in the framework

malpractice	The deliberate or wilful contravention or ignoring of the regulatory requirements of the QCF by an organisation recognised to operate within the framework
mandatory units	Units in a set of rules of combination that must be achieved for the qualification to be awarded
national occupational standards (NOS)	Describe what a person needs to do, know and understand in a job to carry out the role in a consistent and competent way
monitoring	The review of, and reporting on, an organisation's compliance with the regulatory arrangements by the qualifications regulators
optional unit	A unit named in a set of rules of combination that a learner may choose to complete to achieve the required number of units/credits for award of the qualification
pathway	A route to the achievement of a qualification that requires a combination of credits to be achieved from particular units and is identified by an endorsement to a qualification title
provision planning tools	Strategies, such as sector qualification strategies and associated action plans or the Foundation Learning Tier Qualifications Strategy, developed by an SSC or other appropriate body, that set out requirements for units and qualifications in a particular area
purpose and aim(s) of a unit	Provides additional information about a unit to users in the form of a succinct statement that clearly summarises the content of the unit
qualification	An award made to a learner for the achievement of the specified combination of credits, or credits and exemptions, required for that award
qualification level	An indication of the relative demand, complexity and/or depth of achievement, and/or the autonomy of the learner, represented by a qualification
qualification purpose	A means of identifying qualifications with a set of shared characteristics
qualification specification	A detailed statement defining the purpose, content, structure and assessment arrangements for a qualification
qualification title	A short description of the level, size and content of the qualification
qualification type	A group of qualifications defined through the application of an additional set of regulatory requirements that are particular to that group of qualifications

qualifications regulators	Government-designated statutory organisations required to establish national standards for credits and qualifications and secure consistent compliance with them
reasonable adjustments	Defined in the Disability Discrimination Act as reasonable steps to ensure disabled people are not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with non-disabled people, 'substantial' being more than minor or trivial
recognised organisation	A body recognised by the qualifications regulators, against the requirements set out in these regulatory arrangements, to perform one or more of the following functions: developing units, developing rules of combination, assessing and awarding credits and qualifications
recognition of prior learning (RPL)	A method of assessment that considers whether a learner can demonstrate that they can meet the assessment requirements for a unit through knowledge, understanding or skills they already possess and do not need to develop through a course of learning
reliability of assessment	The extent to which assessment results are an accurate measurement of a learner's achievements against the requirements of a unit – reliable assessment repeatedly produces the same outcome without inherent bias or variability in the assessment instrument
required combinations of units	Units that must be counted together as part of a rule of combination for a qualification
requirements about the way in which units are assessed	Set requirements about the way in which particular units must be assessed. This section of the additional information about units is only completed if a particular approach to assessment is needed for one or more qualifications. These requirements are detailed at unit level and must not refer to specific qualifications. They are then applied, as appropriate, for particular qualifications.
restricted unit	A unit that a recognised organisation places in the unit databank and restricts the use of to a list of recognised organisations to access for use in the development of its rules of combination and to award credit for. An organisation may choose to restrict the use of the unit to its own organisation
rules of combination	A description of the credit accumulation requirements for the achievement of a named qualification
sector skills council	A body responsible for formulating and reviewing occupational standards for a specific sector across

	the UK, and for supporting the development of units and qualifications based on these standards. Each SSC is an employer-led, independent organisation and is licensed by government
sector qualifications strategy	A specification of the current and future needs of a sector, with a timeline and action plan
shared unit	A unit that a recognised organisation places in the unit databank and makes available to all other recognised organisations to access for use in the development of its rules of combination and to award credit for
special consideration	A process that allows candidates that suffer from temporary illness, injury or indisposition at the time of an assessment to demonstrate the achievement they are capable of for the units that are subject to special consideration
subject/sector classification system	A series of categories based on industry sectors and academic subjects used to classify qualifications
standardisation of assessment	A process to ensure that assessment leading to the award of credits and qualifications is applied consistently by individuals, centres and awarding organisations
unique learner number (ULN)	The unique number that is used to identify an individual learner
unit	A coherent and explicit set of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, with a title, credit value and level
unit databank	A repository within which all units used in qualifications are stored, classified and made available to users
validity of assessment	The fitness for purpose of an assessment tool or scheme – valid assessment gives an accurate measurement of what it is supposed to measure

Annex C: Design requirements for credit certificates

The following are the minimum requirements that the qualifications regulators would expect an awarding organisation to include on a credit certificate.

1. The full name of the awarding organisation.
2. Partnerships between awarding organisations may be shown, provided these have been agreed by the qualifications regulators during the accreditation process.
3. The learner's name as registered.
4. The unit title/s – prominently shown and in the form agreed by the qualifications regulators at accreditation.
5. The national number/s (assigned when included in an accredited qualification) for the unit/s.
6. A unique identifier or code for each certificate to enable audit activity, or an assurance that the certificate may be used for audit purposes. A candidate number may be used for this purpose, providing the awarding organisation is able to distinguish between multiple certificates awarded to the same candidate.
7. A clear distinction between information on grading and the award of credit.
8. The date (day/month/year) on which the awarding organisation confirms the learner's achievement of the credit/s by issue of a certificate.
9. The signature of the single point of accountability at the awarding organisation, with printed name and title.
10. Certificate details to be issued in English or English and Welsh where appropriate.
11. A statement that indicates that the learner has been awarded credit/s.
12. The credit value and level of each unit.
13. Use of the three qualifications regulators' logos and/or a QCF brand identity as specified and in the form provided by Ofqual.

Annex D: Design requirements for qualification certificates

The following are the minimum requirements that the qualifications regulators would expect an awarding organisation to include on an accredited qualification certificate.

1. The full name of the awarding organisation.
2. Partnerships between awarding organisations may be shown, provided these have been agreed by the qualifications regulators during the accreditation process.
3. The learner's name as registered.
4. The accredited qualification title – prominently shown and in the form agreed by the qualifications regulators at accreditation.
5. The national accreditation number for the qualification.
6. A unique identifier or code for each certificate to enable audit activity, or an assurance that the certificate may be used for audit purposes. A candidate number may be used for this purpose, providing the awarding organisation is able to distinguish between multiple certificates awarded to the same candidate.
7. If the qualification is graded, then the grade must be shown on the certificate.
8. Date (day/month/year) on which awarding organisation confirms the learner's achievement of the qualification by issue of a certificate.
9. Signature of the single point of accountability at the awarding organisation, with printed name and title.
10. Certificate details to be issued in English or English and Welsh as appropriate.
11. If the qualification certificate is being used also to record unit achievement, then the credit certificate minimum requirements also apply.
12. Use of the three qualifications regulators' logos and/or a QCF brand identity as specified and in the form provided by Ofqual.

Annex E: QCF level descriptors

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Entry level	Entry 1 recognises progress along a continuum that ranges from the most elementary of achievements to beginning to make use of skills, knowledge or understanding that relate to the immediate environment.			
	Achievement at Entry 2 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities with guidance.	Use knowledge or understanding to carry out simple, familiar activities Know the steps needed to complete simple activities	Carry out simple, familiar tasks and activities Follow instructions or use rehearsed steps to complete tasks and activities	With appropriate guidance begin to take some responsibility for the outcomes of simple activities Actively participate in simple and familiar activities
	Achievement at Entry 3 reflects the ability to make use of skills, knowledge and understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts, with appropriate guidance where needed.	Use knowledge or understanding to carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts Know and understand the steps needed to complete structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts	Carry out structured tasks and activities in familiar contexts Be aware of the consequences of actions for self and others	With appropriate guidance take responsibility for the outcomes of structured activities Actively participate in activities in familiar contexts
Level 1	Achievement at level 1 reflects the ability to use relevant knowledge, skills and procedures to complete routine tasks. It includes responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance.	Use knowledge of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined, routine tasks Be aware of information relevant to the area of study or work	Complete well-defined routine tasks Use relevant skills and procedures Select and use relevant information Identify whether actions have been effective	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures subject to direction or guidance as needed

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 2	Achievement at level 2 reflects the ability to select and use relevant knowledge, ideas, skills and procedures to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems. It includes taking responsibility for completing tasks and procedures and exercising autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance.	Use understanding of facts, procedures and ideas to complete well-defined tasks and address straightforward problems Interpret relevant information and ideas Be aware of the types of information that are relevant to the area of study or work	Complete well-defined, generally routine tasks and address straightforward problems Select and use relevant skills and procedures Identify, gather and use relevant information to inform actions Identify how effective actions have been	Take responsibility for completing tasks and procedures Exercise autonomy and judgement subject to overall direction or guidance
Level 3	Achievement at level 3 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, have a measure of complexity. It includes taking responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within limited parameters. It also reflects awareness of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use factual, procedural and theoretical understanding to complete tasks and address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine Interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas Be aware of the nature of the area of study or work Have awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work	Address problems that, while well defined, may be complex and non-routine Identify, select and use appropriate skills, methods and procedures Use appropriate investigation to inform actions Review how effective methods and actions have been	Take responsibility for initiating and completing tasks and procedures, including, where relevant, responsibility for supervising or guiding others Exercise autonomy and judgement within limited parameters

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 4	Achievement at level 4 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine. It includes taking responsibility for overall courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within fairly broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives or approaches within an area of study or work.	Use practical, theoretical or technical understanding to address problems that are well defined but complex and non-routine Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information and ideas Be aware of the nature and approximate scope of the area of study or work Have an informed awareness of different perspectives or approaches within the area of study or work	Address problems that are complex and non-routine while normally fairly well defined Identify, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills Initiate and use appropriate investigation to inform actions Review the effectiveness and appropriateness of methods, actions and results	Take responsibility for courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad but generally well-defined parameters
Level 5	Achievement at level 5 reflects the ability to identify and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address broadly-defined, complex problems. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action as well as exercising autonomy and judgement within broad parameters. It also reflects understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them.	Use practical, theoretical or technological understanding to find ways forward in broadly-defined, complex contexts Analyse, interpret and evaluate relevant information, concepts and ideas Be aware of the nature and scope of the area of study or work Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the reasoning behind them	Address broadly-defined, complex problems Determine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills Use relevant research or development to inform actions Evaluate actions, methods and results	Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action, including, where relevant, responsibility for the work of others Exercise autonomy and judgement within broad parameters

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
<p>Level 6</p>	<p>Achievement at level 6 reflects the ability to refine and use relevant understanding, methods and skills to address complex problems that have limited definition. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are able to underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them.</p>	<p>Refine and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors</p> <p>Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and ideas</p> <p>Understand the context in which the area of study or work is located</p> <p>Be aware of current developments in the area of study or work</p> <p>Understand different perspectives, approaches or schools of thought and the theories that underpin them</p>	<p>Address problems that have limited definition and involve many interacting factors</p> <p>Determine, refine, adapt and use appropriate methods and skills</p> <p>Use and, where appropriate, design relevant research and development to inform actions</p> <p>Evaluate actions, methods and results and their implications</p>	<p>Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that are capable of underpinning substantial changes or developments</p> <p>Initiate and lead tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others</p> <p>Exercise broad autonomy and judgement</p>

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
<p>Level 7</p>	<p>Achievement at level 7 reflects the ability to reformulate and use relevant understanding, methodologies and approaches to address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors. It includes taking responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial change or development, as well as exercising broad autonomy and judgement. It also reflects an understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives, and how they affect their area of study or work.</p>	<p>Reformulate and use practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts where there are many interacting factors</p> <p>Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce modified conceptions</p> <p>Understand the wider contexts in which the area of study or work is located</p> <p>Understand current developments in the area of study or work</p> <p>Understand different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the area of study or work</p>	<p>Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many interacting factors</p> <p>Determine and use appropriate methodologies and approaches</p> <p>Design and undertake research, development or strategic activities to inform the area of work or study, or produce organisational or professional change</p> <p>Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications</p>	<p>Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that initiate or underpin substantial changes or developments</p> <p>Exercise broad autonomy and judgement across a significant area of work or study</p> <p>Initiate and lead complex tasks and processes, taking responsibility, where relevant, for the work and roles of others</p>

Level	Summary	Knowledge and understanding	Application and action	Autonomy and accountability
Level 8	<p>Achievement at level 8 reflects the ability to develop original understanding and extend an area of knowledge or professional practice. It reflects the ability to address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors through initiating, designing and undertaking research, development or strategic activities. It involves the exercise of broad autonomy, judgement and leadership in sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge or for creating substantial professional or organisational change. It also reflects a critical understanding of relevant theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work.</p>	<p>Develop original practical, conceptual or technological understanding to create ways forward in contexts that lack definition and where there are many complex, interacting factors</p> <p>Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate complex information, concepts and theories to produce new knowledge and theories</p> <p>Understand and reconceptualise the wider contexts in which the field of knowledge or work is located</p> <p>Extend a field of knowledge or work by contributing original knowledge and thinking</p> <p>Exercise critical understanding of different theoretical and methodological perspectives and how they affect the field of knowledge or work</p>	<p>Conceptualise and address problematic situations that involve many complex, interacting factors</p> <p>Formulate and use appropriate methodologies and approaches</p> <p>Initiate, design and undertake research, development or strategic activities that extend the field of work or knowledge or result in significant organisational or professional change</p> <p>Critically evaluate actions, methods and results and their short- and long-term implications for the field of work or knowledge and its wider context</p>	<p>Take responsibility for planning and developing courses of action that have a significant impact on a field of work or knowledge, or result in substantial organisational or professional change</p> <p>Exercise broad autonomy, judgement and leadership as a leading practitioner or scholar sharing responsibility for the development of a field of work or knowledge, or for substantial organisational or professional change</p> <p>Take responsibility for the advancement of professional practice</p>

About this publication

What's it about?

This document sets out the regulatory arrangements that will apply to the organisations that operate within, and the qualifications that are accredited into, the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The arrangements set the standard that all organisations and qualifications must meet in order to be recognised as part of the QCF.

What's it for?

It establishes appropriate, transparent and consistent arrangements for the regulation of units and qualifications in the QCF in order to safeguard the interests of learners and maintain standards and public confidence in the national qualifications system. It also establishes regulations that reflect the requirements of a unit- and credit-based qualifications system.

It replaces

The regulatory arrangements for the QCF tests and trials were based on *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (2004)* (QCA/04/1293) and the requirements for units and qualifications set out in *Working specification for the QCF tests and trials* (QCA/07/3412). This document replaces those documents as the regulatory basis for the QCF. *The statutory regulations* continue to apply for other qualifications.

This document has been updated and replaces the consultation version released in December 2007 (QCA/07/3434).

Related material

Operating rules for using the term 'NVQ' in a QCF qualification title (Ofqual/08/3760)

What's next?

The regulators will review the operation of the regulatory arrangements in practice through a planned evaluation.

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