Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

Interim Definition of Full Level 3 Qualifications

Guidance for Sector Skills Councils, Sector Bodies and Standard Setting Bodies

August 2009

This document is of interest to Sector Skills Councils/ Sector Bodies and Standard Setting Bodies
The Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) will be the lead vehicle through which the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its successor organisation the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) will deliver a strong demand-led further education and skills system in this country.

**Further information**

For further information please contact the QCF Service Desk:

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Website: http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/
Qualifications and Credit Framework

This guidance has been revised and updated and replaces previous versions.

Guidance

Determining full Level 3 threshold in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for Sector Skills Councils/Sector Bodies/Standard Setting Bodies

1. The Secretary of State has agreed an interim definition for full Level 3 set as a credit threshold range of a minimum threshold of 25 credits and a maximum threshold of 70 credits for QCF provision. The interim definition will be implemented for the period to 31 August 2010. LSC will monitor, manage and evaluate this definition during this period. Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs) and Sector Bodies (SBs) will be able to vary the thresholds as appropriate, providing that the resulting qualification confers a basis for occupational competence and ‘licence to practice’ and/or progression to higher education and higher level skills in a sector, sub-sector or occupation.

2. This guidance has been developed to assist SSCs/SBs/SSBs take account of relevant information and consider appropriate evidence when articulating full Level 3 thresholds by sub-sector and/or occupational areas. The guidance is intended to help SSCs/SBs/SSBs take forward the ongoing development and approval of new qualifications along with confirmation of existing QCF qualifications as full, where they meet the threshold.

Defining Thresholds

3. The threshold should be developed to represent the amount of credit required to support the development of a qualification which would enable an individual to meet an acceptable level of occupational competence in a level 3 occupation/role and/or provide a platform for progression. The LSC will only fund the learning input required to meet this threshold. The threshold is NOT a minimum threshold above which all qualifications could be considered for funding.

4. In order for a qualification to be deemed as full level 3 by LSC it must meet the credit threshold and have a primary purpose (as part of the Ofqual Identifying purposes for qualifications in the Qualifications and Credit Framework; February 2009) as follows:

   B. Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area;
   D. Confirm occupational competence and/or ‘licence to practice’; and
   E. Updating and continuing professional development (CPD);

Purpose identifier D is explicitly recommended in the context of funding eligibility for full level 3 QCF qualifications within Train to Gain. It is, however,
also acknowledged that there might be secondary sub-purpose fields, for instance within purpose E.

The use of the purpose confirms that full Level 3 qualifications in the QCF are focussed upon the learning outcomes and assessment criteria necessary to judge whether an individual has met the necessary occupational standard. The units within the qualification may encompass skill, knowledge and understanding – as all of these elements can be used to prove competence. As full level 3 in Train to Gain is explicitly focussed on occupational areas, we would expect qualifications confirmed as full to be built up from units with learning outcomes expressing identifiable knowledge and skills required to contribute to proving competence and/or, where applicable, progression to higher level skills. As the qualifications are attesting to competence, we would not expect qualifications to focus only on knowledge. Guidance for writing credit based units of assessment in the Qualifications and Credit Framework, including specific reference to competence, is contained in version 3 of the QCA Support Pack for the QCF.


5. It is the responsibility of the SSC/SSB/SB to identify the different occupational roles within their footprint and assign a corresponding threshold. LSC does not expect to see any ranges in thresholds as a separate threshold should be identified for each occupational role.

6. LSC will use Sector Qualification Strategy Action Plans (SQS APs) to inform funding decisions ensuring SSCs/SSBs/SSBs have the opportunity to advise LSC on which key vocational qualifications should be funded. In the context of full Level 3, LSC will be reviewing the current funding priorities to take account of the new interim definitions to ensure public funding is supporting the right provision. Further work will also be undertaken to establish and manage affordability. Any changes will be communicated as soon as they become available.

7. A Fullness Working Group has been convened by LSC to represent SSCs/SSBs/SSBs with regard to work on the interim definitions. This group has been established to take forward ongoing work and issues surrounding the identification and confirmation of full Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications.

8. When defining credit thresholds for sub-sector and/or occupational areas the LSC requests the completion of a template (Annex A) which requires the breakdown of your sub-sector and/or occupational areas, the credit threshold and your rationale which supports the threshold.

9. When defining thresholds the LSC expects SSCs/SSBs/SSBs to:
   a. Align thresholds with National Occupational Standards (NOS), which are up to date and approved/endorsed by employers.

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1 Please note that funding rates for qualifications are determined by the input and therefore not all full Level 3 qualifications will be funded at the same rate. The funding rate will differentiate between qualifications based on the input required to deliver them.
b. Ensure the threshold enables an individual to meet acceptable occupational competence (inc. license to practice where required) at level 3 allowing sustainable employment and where appropriate provides a platform for progression where relevant within the sector / occupational area.

c. Set thresholds in accordance with the relevant SQS and Action Plan.

d. Consider whether the threshold is comparable with thresholds set by other SSGs/SBs/SSBs with similar footprints, and ensure alignment where there are allied occupations.

e. Not set thresholds based on anticipated or expected funding policy.

f. Work closely with key stakeholders including Employers, Awarding Organisations (AOs), Providers and other related SSGs/SSBs/SBs where appropriate in the identification and confirmation of full Level 3 thresholds by sub-sector and/or occupational areas.

**Timetable for submission of Threshold Templates**

10. The timetable for submission of the Level 3 templates was discussed at the last meeting of the SSGs/SBs/SSB Fullness working group. It was felt that because organisations are now more familiar with the process having submitted their Level 2 templates there would be fewer (if any) required iterations between first and second submissions.

11. It was therefore agreed that the deadline for submission of templates is the 25th of September. If SSGs/SBs/SSBs feel that they are ready to submit before this time they can do so and if they pass LSC scrutiny then they will be signed off as soon as possible after receipt and Level 3 qualifications that meet the criteria can begin to be prioritised for the purposes of funding.

12. After the 25th of September LSC will either accept templates (and associated thresholds), where they meet the requirements, or contact SSGs/SBs/SSBs where changes are required. There will then be a final submission deadline of October 16th when all templates must be submitted.

**Implementation of Thresholds**

13. QCF qualifications identified as full level 3 will not be eligible for funding for Employer Responsive (Train to Gain) until the thresholds have been submitted and confirmed for the relevant occupational area.

14. LSC is currently undertaking a review of all current QCF qualifications. The temporary articulation of full Level 3 qualifications which accompanied the test and trial phase of the QCF from 2006 to 2008 and any subsequent indications of fullness prior to the submittal of thresholds are now no longer valid and the flag for fullness on existing QCF qualifications will be reviewed in light of the thresholds submitted. For those qualifications that do not meet the required threshold, flags will be removed with the implication that no new starts will be allowed on that provision.
15. The thresholds will be used for prioritising Qualifications for funding within the TtG programme, qualifications will continue to be considered separately for Adult Responsive model.

16. Once thresholds are confirmed the LSC will not consider amendments to these thresholds before August 2010 unless a formal business case is submitted to LSC with a clear rationale explaining why a threshold may require refinement. We would expect such business cases to be driven by a range of external factors, such as final revisions to NOS, changes on legislation across the sector or sub sector, changes in policy etc.

**Evaluation and Review**

17. In September 09 LSC will be carrying out a formal readiness review of all sector bodies in the context of the LSC’s work to align planning, funding and performance with the Qualifications and Credit Framework, specifically focussing on assessing each organisation with regard to the development and submission of thresholds and the transition of funded provision from NQF to QCF to meet the deadline of 1st August 2010 and the focussing of public funding by the Skills Funding Agency on QCF units and qualifications. This review will inform the evaluation reports for interim full Level 3 which LSC is regularly submitting to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills as well as being disseminated more widely to key partners across the UK Vocational Qualification reform programme, including UKCES and TASSC.

**Supporting Frequently Asked Questions**

1. **As the definition is based on a threshold with a range, does the LSC require a range for each occupational area?**
   No, the LSC expects a single threshold to be set.

2. **Will the LSC allow a threshold to be set outside of the minimum or maximum range?**
   The LSC expects the threshold to be set according to the competency needs in the area. There may be some instances where it is appropriate this is outside of the range and the supporting rationale should document the justification.

3. **How will the LSC know which qualification maps to which occupational threshold?**
On the Action Plan database there is a field for sub-sector / occupation, you must ensure the appropriate occupation is entered here to enable the LSC to match to the relevant threshold.

4. **What is the LSCs line on the funding of restricted/shared units?**
   Currently, whilst Ofqual are carrying out an evaluation of the regulations of the QCF, we will respect and fund the mixed economy which is the QCF – that is shared and restricted units. However, as part of the shadow business cycle for 2010/11 delivery, LSC/SFA will consider its position on whether to prioritise the funding of shared units over restricted units as a means of maximising the benefits of credit accumulation and transfer for all learners.

5. **Why do you need the fullness thresholds now?**
   There are already a number of qualifications in the QCF that we need to ensure are fit for purpose and suitable for public funding. Information provided in the templates will also be used to analyse the costs and affordability of delivering against PSA targets under the QCF framework. It will also be used in provider dialogue for the purposes of prioritising qualifications within TtG.

6. **Can a full level 3 consist of multiple qualifications?**
   No – the QCF allows you to combine units reflecting these different knowledge and skills into a full level 3.

7. **Why are there two deadlines for QCF transition; August 2010 and December 2010?**
   The deadline for publicly funded provision is August 2010 to align with the academic year. All other (non-funded) provision should be developed into QCF by Dec 2010.

8. **How long will the full Level 3 thresholds be valid for?**
   The interim period for which this definition will apply is from now until August 2010. Following evaluation and feedback Ministers will then be asked to make a decision on the future definition of full level 3 qualifications.
9. **What flexibilities are there to revise the thresholds?**
Once the thresholds have been submitted as final and the LSC have accepted them they will be in place for the duration of the interim period. See paragraph 15 above.

10. **How is the QCF going to be funded?**
LSC is currently undertaking a programme of work to align funding to the QCF to allow learners to take advantage of the flexibilities that the new framework can offer. To that end this involves being able to fund both units and qualifications in a fair and efficient manner that provides adequate incentives to the sector to deliver the QCF benefits. In the interim the LSC will continue to fund qualifications based on an input/activity basis, it is therefore helpful if you can provide GLH information when submitting qualifications and units to Ofqual.
LSC stresses that the setting of the thresholds should be based on what constitutes minimal occupational competence within an occupational role and it should not be linked to anticipated or expected funding policy.

11. **How do the thresholds relate to QCF Apprenticeships / are they aligned?**
Following the outcomes of the consultation on the Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England, the LSC, working with the National Apprenticeship Service, will begin a programme of work to ensure that, from August 2010, Apprenticeship can be built from provision in the QCF. An early stage of this work will be to look to align the interim full level 2 definition with the emerging QCF model of Apprenticeships.

12. **An AO has developed a qualification which does not meet the threshold we have set will you consider funding it?**
No - the LSC will only accept advice from SSC/SB/SSBs on which qualifications we should fund. If a qualification is developed which does not meet the threshold the LSC will not consider funding it.
13. The learning required for a qualification exceeds the threshold set; will LSC fund the additional learning?

No, within the Train to Gain programme LSC will only fund at the level of the threshold.

14. Can we be confident the LSC will continue to fund repeat Level 3 qualifications in Train to Gain?

Currently only qualifications identified in a Sector Compact can be delivered as repeats at Level 3. Unfortunately the LSC cannot offer any certainty around this policy area. This remains flexibility in Train to Gain and therefore is subject to change at any time.

15. If a qualification meets the threshold and relevant primary purpose can I be certain it will receive funding?

The qualification will be eligible for funding however this will depend on availability and prioritisation of funding. LSC will work with all SSCs/SBs /SSBs to identify priorities within your areas.
Annex A – Thresholds Template
Level 3 Fullness Thresholds for <<Insert SSC/SSB>> Version <<xx>>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational / Sub-sector areas</th>
<th>Thresholds</th>
<th>Rationales</th>
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<td>- Who have you consulted?</td>
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<td>- Have you used evidence from previous qualifications / trends etc?</td>
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<td>- Any quality indicators / standards that informed this?</td>
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<td>- What are the employability outcomes?</td>
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<td>- Will this enable progression to L3?</td>
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<td>- Other</td>
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These thresholds have been defined to:
Represent competency in an occupational / sub-sector area which provides an individual with a level of skills and knowledge to enable sustainable employment in the area.

Template Completed by: <<Insert Contact Name>>, <<number>>, <<email>>
As you complete this form for your various areas please send updates to Anna.Sutton@lsc.gov.uk to enable the LSC to review these and begin funding allocation processes for any QCF qualifications which meet the thresholds as defined above.