Qualifications and Framework Reform

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Purpose

1 This paper provides an overview of two key reforms in qualifications; the UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme and the Foundation Learning Tier programme.

Background and introduction

UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme

2 UK Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme (UK VQRP) is focused on reforming vocational qualifications for adults (learners aged 19 and above). This is a UK wide reform involving a wide range of partners. As part of this work:
   a. A reform and rationalisation of sector qualifications and other learning provision is being undertaken, through Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) identifying the vocational qualifications needed by employers
   b. The development of a unit and credit based framework known as the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) is being developed and implemented.
   c. Establishment of planning, funding and delivery arrangements to support the objectives of the reform programme in England, further information can be found on the LSC website.

3 The new unit and credit based framework known as the QCF will be more flexible, inclusive and responsive to employer and learner needs allowing recognition of a wider range of achievement and allowing achievement in smaller chunks. In time this will replace the current National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In addition in comparison to the NQF the QCF will have a range of organisations acting as awarding organisations (including awarding

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bodies, employers and providers). The diagrams below illustrate how the QCF will work.

Diagram 1: Credit and Level

Diagram 2: End to End process for development and delivery units and qualifications in the QCF
Foundation Learning Tier

4  The Foundation Learning Tier is a programme of work to reform provision below level 2 for learners aged 14 and above, in order to raise participation and achievement to help them to progress through work and life. This is an England only reform programme that the LSC and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) have been remitted by the Minister to lead on. As part of this reform:

a  a revised set of credit-based units and qualifications will be accredited at entry level and level 1 of the QCF

b  Progression Pathways will be developed, which are frameworks for learning built from qualifications at entry level and level 1 within the QCF. Progression Pathways are specifically designed to promote progression as well as helping learners to achieve formal qualifications at entry level and level 1. Further information regarding Progression Pathways are outlined in the Prospectus for Progression Pathways (available on the LSC website).

Timescales

5  The anticipated timescales for the implementation of both of the reform programmes are:

2008 to 2010:

a.  By 2010 the QCF will become the regulatory framework for all adult vocational qualifications, entry level and level 1 qualifications (Foundation Learning Tier), Apprenticeships and Functional Skills. The current NQF will remain operational, only for legacy qualifications which have not yet been subject to review. The LSC will from 1 August 2009 start to ‘turn-off’ funding for predecessor NQF qualifications and lower priority qualifications for new learners.

b.  By 2010/11 Progression Pathways will be fully implemented and will replace existing provision such as Entry to Employment, Foundation Learning in Further Education and First Steps Learning. From 2009/10 the delivery of Progression Pathways will increase in scale and volume in preparation for full implementation.

2010 to 2013:

c.  establish the QCF as the single qualification system and infrastructure to support all qualifications for all learners aged 14 and up in the national system.
Next Steps

6 In June 2008, an outline business case for the QCF and the LSC QCF Business Change Strategy was submitted to Ministers. Following this submission the LSC were asked with QCA to produce a final business case for the QCF and to produce a feasibility and impact assessment for the preferred high level delivery model for the QCF, which were submitted to Ministers at the end of September 2008. A final decision on the detail of the roll out of the QCF is expected in November 2008. Subject to the Ministerial decision, we anticipate 2008 to 2010 to be a period of incremental development and implementation of the QCF, the focus of which will be primarily on integration and alignment of systems and processes. This will involve further modelling of how data systems, funding approaches, performance measures, government targets and priorities in particular can be fully aligned to deliver the full flexibility of a Qualification and Credit Framework.

7 Progression Pathways are being implemented on a developmental basis in 2008/09 with a small group of providers by the LSC and QCA. Findings from this will confirm the revision of the Prospectus for Progression Pathways in Spring 2009.