Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF)

Interim Definition of Full Level 2 Qualifications

Guidance for Sector Skills Councils

July 2009
Revised Guidance on determining full Level 2 thresholds in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) for Sector Skills Councils/Sector Bodies/Standard Setting Bodies

Version

1. This is the current and definitive version of guidance produced by the LSC for determining full Level 2 in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). This guidance has been revised and amended following feedback from SSCs/SBs/SSBs through the process of identifying full Level 2 for the QCF, including the Fullness Working Group a sub-group to the SLAQ Board.

Background

2. In November 2008 the Secretary of State agreed an interim definition for Full Level 2 of 13 credits, subject to SSCs/SBs/SSBs being able to vary this threshold up or down. This interim definition will be effective until 31st August 2010. For the duration of the interim definition it is the responsibility of SSCs/SBs/SSBs to determine the content and appropriate threshold for their sectors, sub-sectors and occupations. LSC has been remitted to disseminate this definition, to support SSCs/SBs/SSBs in the identification of full Level 2 thresholds and to undertake monitoring and evaluation of the definition, in order to inform a final decision for 2010/11 onwards.

3. This revised guidance has been developed to assist SSCs/SBs/SSBs to take account of relevant information and consider appropriate evidence when articulating full Level 2 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 for the QCF along with recognising those full qualifications already developed and available in QCF. It is also intended that the guidance should support transparency, consistency and a minimum level of comparability across sectors as full Level 2 thresholds are defined.

Defining Thresholds

4. The identified threshold should be the amount of credit required to attest to the achievement of minimal occupational competence within an occupational area and/or provide a platform for progression to Level 3. In short, the credit value of the qualification must reflect the achievement of this minimal competence. 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.

5. In order for a qualification to be confirmed as full 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, (www.ofqual.gov.uk) of definition D, and the relevant sub-purpose categories as follows:

   D. Confirm occupational competence and/or ‘licence to practice’:
D1. Confirm competence in an occupational role to the standards required;
D2. Confirm the ability to meet a ‘licence to practice’ or other legal requirements made by the relevant sector, professional or industry body.

This purpose identifier is explicitly recommended in the context of funding eligibility for full level 2 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 D confirms that full Level 2 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 2 in Train to Gain is explicitly focussed on occupational areas, we would expect qualifications confirmed as full level to be built up from units with learning outcomes expressing identifiable knowledge and skills required to contribute to proving competence. As the qualifications are attesting to competence, we would not normally 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. (www.qca.org.uk)

6. 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; a separate threshold should be identified for each occupational role.

7. LSC will use Sector Qualification Strategy Action Plans (SQS APs) to inform funding decisions ensuring SSCs/SBs/SSBs have the opportunity to advise LSC on which vocational qualifications should be funded¹. In the context of full Level 2 LSC will be reviewing 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.

8. The Fullness Working Group was convened by LSC to represent SSCs/SSBs/SBs. This group has been established to take forward ongoing work and issues surrounding the identification and confirmation of full Level 2 and will shortly be considering Level 3.

9. When determining 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.

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

¹ Please note that funding rates for qualifications are determined by the input and therefore not all full Level 2 qualifications will be funded at the same rate. The funding rate will differentiate between qualifications by their mode of delivery, cost and input required.
b. Ensure the threshold enables an individual to meet minimal occupational competence (inc. license to practice where required) at level 2 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 SSCs/SSBs with similar footprints, and to align these where there are allied occupations.

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

f. Work closely key stakeholders including Employers, Awarding Organisations (AOs), Providers and other related SSCs with similar footprints and to align these where there are allied occupations.

Implementation of Thresholds

11. From August 09, as part of QCF implementation, LSC will begin to implement the full Level 2 QCF thresholds and apply these to qualifications developed for the relevant occupational area in the QCF as well as applying these to existing accredited QCF qualifications.

12. QCF qualifications identified as full level 2 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.

13. LSC is currently undertaking a review of all current QCF qualifications. The temporary articulation of full Level 2 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 removed. The impact of this will be that no new starts will be allowed on the provision until such a time that the LSC receives a confirmed occupational threshold from the appropriate body.

14. Qualifications meeting the threshold may also be considered for eligibility for funding through the Adult Responsive model. The LSC will communicate further information on full Level 2 in the context of the Adult Responsive model once the current work on level 2 has been completed.

15. 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

16. In August 09 LSC will be carrying out a formal 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 the full Level 2 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 2 which LSC will be 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. We will be working closely with the UK Commission and TASSC in the context of this review in order to minimise the burden on sector bodies.

Level 3 Thresholds

17. The process and timescales for confirming full level 3 QCF interim definitions will follow on once the process for level 2 has been completed. In addition we will be discussing dissemination of the full level 3 interim definition with representatives from higher education in the context of level 3 qualifications being used as a progression route to higher level skills.

Supporting Frequently Asked Questions

1. 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.

2. What is the LSCs line on the funding of restricted/shared units?
   Shared units are those that can be used in a number of qualifications by all Awarding Organisations. It is shared units that can maximise credit transfer. Shared units also help learners and employers by simplifying the offer so there are not numerous qualifications and units with similar titles doing essentially the same thing.

   The qualifications regulators, Ofqual, generally expect units within the QCF to be shared unless compelling reasons are put forward by Awarding Organisations for why a unit should be restricted. The regulators wish to produce a framework that is easily understood by users, both learners and employers and maximises the opportunities for learners to be able to transfer credit. The use of shared units will assist with transparency and ensure that learners are able to realise the full benefit of transferring credit. As part of the shadow business cycle arrangements 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 maximizing the benefits of credit accumulation and transfer for all learners.

3. Why do you need the fullness thresholds now?
   There are already a number of qualifications in the QCF which we will not consider funding these qualifications until we have received a final version of the template
from you. Information provided in the templates will 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.

4. **Can a full level 2 consist of multiple qualifications?**
   No – you should focus on ensuring appropriate Rules of Combination and packaging of units. The QCF allows you to combine units reflecting different knowledge and skills needs into a full level 2.

5. **Why are there two deadlines for QCF transition; 31st July 2010 and December 2010?**
   The deadline for publicly funded provision is 31st July 2010 to align with the academic year. The deadline of December 2010 is for 100% of all qualifications on the QCF for all vocational qualifications. We would expect the July deadline to apply to qualifications which are intended to be eligible for public funding in England.

6. **How long will the full Level 2 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 2 qualifications.

7. **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.

8. **The sector does not have a level 2 need in an occupational area do we have to set a threshold?**
   If there is no level 2 requirement in a sector / occupational area this should be indicated on the template, however we would expect a threshold to be set that would allow people to progress to gain the appropriate minimum level of competence at L3.

9. **How is the QCF going to be funded?**
   As part of the remit to implement the QCF in England, 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 input/ activity basis, it is therefore helpful if you can provide GLH information when submitting units and qualifications 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.

10. **The Ministerial statement talked about 13 credits being the threshold where did this come from?**
    In identifying a definition for full Level 2 in the QCF, the aim has been to ensure the development of high quality units and qualifications which add real economic value by certificating the sets of skills that best increase employability and support competence across an occupational sector. However, given the interim nature of the definition, it has also been important to maintain reasonable stability and consistency in the setting of targets and the allocation of public funding. So it was important that the threshold set for the interim definition of full level 2 in the QCF maintained the number of learners currently on target bearing provision at level 2. On that basis, and
through modelling undertaken by the LSC, a threshold of 13 credits secures stability of learner enrolments.

The process of modelling encompassed looking at both existing QCF learning aims at level 2 and at current NQF full level 2 learning aims and applying a range of actors examining the relationship between guided learning hours and learning time. Aligning the interim definition to 13 credits does not rule out seeking to introduce a greater breadth of achievement for full level 2, but does ensure that a starting point of occupational competence is established and that a broad platform for employability can also be built.

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 Awarding Organisation or Training Provider has developed a qualification which does not meet the threshold we have set, will you consider funding it?
The threshold applies to qualifications which the SSC/SB/SSB wish to confirm as full Level 2 and therefore be eligible for public funding under the existing conditions for full Level 2, in line with learner eligibility. The LSC is moving towards the position of seeking advice from sector organisations on the funding eligibility of qualifications. Unless the sector organisation has confirmed the full level 2 threshold and advised the LSC that it wishes the qualification to be eligible for funding, we will not consider the qualification for funding as full level 2.

13. The learning required for a qualification exceeds the threshold set; will LSC fund the additional learning?
It is not the intention to fund above the threshold the SSC/SSB/SB set.

14. Can we be confident the LSC will continue to fund repeat Level 2 qualifications in Train to Gain?
Unfortunately the LSC cannot offer any certainty around this policy area. This remains a flexibility in Train to Gain and therefore is subject to change at any time.

15. If a qualification meets the threshold and has a primary purpose of D 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 2 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.
Further information
For further information please contact the appropriate Learning and Skills Council office. Contact details for each office can be found on the LSC website: www.lsc.gov.uk

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