Background and Purpose

1 From 1 April 2010, the Skills Funding Agency will be responsible for confirming which qualifications are approved for public funding for post 19 learners in England. Where a qualification is vocational and recognised in the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF), the Skills Funding Agency will seek advice from Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), Standard Setting Bodies (SSBs) and Sector Bodies (SBs) and will make recommendations via the Agency’s funding approval processes. Decisions will rest with the Skills Funding Agency Strategic Approvals Panel (SAP).

2 The processes that the Agency has created to confirm public funding for qualifications is designed to manage down the time taken for qualifications to be available for delivery, to be transparent and non-bureaucratic, and provide greater clarity on which qualifications will be funded within the Agency’s delivery programmes. This is also to ensure that public funding is focused on qualifications that meet the skills needs of employers, learners and the wider economy.

3 To deliver these aims and to support the funding approvals process in particular, this paper sets out the qualification characteristics and criteria which the Agency expects SSCs/SSBs/SBs to consider when recommending recognised vocational qualifications for public funding in England.
Key qualification characteristics and criteria

4 As part of the funding approval process the Skills Funding Agency will be developing a set of technical funding parameters to support the SSCs/SSBs/SBs in making appropriate and relevant recommendations for fit-for-purpose and economically valuable vocational QCF qualifications. Each of the main delivery programmes, Adult Learner Responsive, Train to Gain, Programmes for the Unemployed and Offender Learning and Skills Service will have specific parameters of their own. However, these parameters will be set out consistently under the following three categories:

a **Purpose** – based on the purpose identifier, a required attribute of all QCF qualifications, purpose identifiers are important in the QCF. Unlike the National Qualification Framework (NQF), qualifications in the QCF are not regulated on the basis of ‘type’ (e.g. GCSE, NVQ). Purpose identifiers offer additional information to learners and employers as to what a qualification in the QCF has been primarily designed to do.

b **Challenge** - defined in terms of QCF level.

c **Volume of Learning** - based on QCF credit value, with qualifications divided into the three size bands of Award, Certificate and Diploma.

5 The guidance will set out the scope of each programme aims, aspirations and primary target learner group, and will specify the delivery context of the provision. This will support SSCs/SSBs/SBs in recommending the most appropriate vocational qualifications within each programme.

6 In recommending vocational QCF qualifications for public funding SSCs/SSBs/SCs should be aware of the stated intent of the Agency to move towards greater use of shared units and equivalent units across the QCF in order to drive forward and stimulate credit accumulation and transfer. The Skills Funding Agency will review this position in August 2010 and will seek to begin to actively support greater use of shared and equivalent units from August 2010.

7 It is important that provision exists to enable learners to enter and progress from a wide range of relevant levels and entry points and that progression routes are clearly set out. In addition SSCs/SSBs/SBs should also be aware of the need to balance pre and post 19 provision and seek to ensure that appropriate progression opportunities across the 18 to 19 age range are in place.

8 Where a single qualification is offered by a range of awarding organisations, the SSC/SSB/SB must ensure that all the awarding organisations offering that qualification are included in its advice and recommendation to the Agency.

9 It is fully expected that the technical parameters are followed by SSCs/SSBs/SBs when recommending qualifications to be considered for funding. However, we acknowledge that on occasions there will be legitimate exceptions to these. Exception cases will be raised by the sector bodies via
the Agency’s Sectors Team and will form part of a formal process. Decisions will be made by the Strategic Approvals Panel.

10 Skills Funding Agency will only accept advice from SSCs/SSBs/SBs via the Action Plan database. Sector bodies must ensure the database is updated regularly and accurately in order to enable timely responses.

Ineligible Provision

11 For all Skills Funding Agency programmes, policies setting out provision ineligible for public funding will apply. Provision which remains ineligible for funding currently is as follows:

Funding for other specific health and safety related learning aims delivered as stand-alone provision for employers.

Some examples of the types of learning aims this may include are:
- manual handling
- health and safety at work or in the workplace
- safety passport schemes
- risk assessment or management
- conflict management
- environmental awareness/management
- control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH)
- conflict resolution
- personal safety
- funding for the updating of qualifications to comply with health and safety regulations—for example CORGI registration renewal within the NVQ
- funding for specific stand-alone forklift truck training and acquisition of heavy goods vehicles (HGV) and public service vehicle (PSV) licenses.

12 Currently qualifications with a primary purpose of Continuing Professional Development will also become ineligible. For the purposes of the LSC/Skills Funding Agency funding, Continuing Professional Development is defined as enhanced occupational competency over and above that needed to be competent in a job role. This would therefore require additional learning over and above the Train to Gain Threshold set. Within Adult Learner Responsive the emphasis should be on further learning and training and progression to higher level skills. If the learning is deemed to be essential to the role this must be integrated within the competency qualification.

13 At any point following funding approval, should the Agency identify that approval was granted based on inaccurate information, the Agency will reserve the right to remove funding. The Agency will undertake an impact assessment and confirm a period of notification to the appropriate sector organisations and to providers with regard to when funding for new starts on the qualification will cease.
Timescales

14 For vocational provision in the QCF our primary focus to date has been on Train to Gain and Adult Learner Responsive provision. The Technical Funding Parameters for Adult Learner Responsive can be found in Annex A.

15 The Technical Funding Parameters for Train to Gain will be published during mid April with the complementary documents on Programmes for the Unemployed and Offender Learning and Skills Service planned for mid to late April / May. In the main guidance for Offender Learning and Skills Service and Programmes for the Unemployed will not differ fundamentally from the guidance for Train to Gain and Adult Learner Responsive but will simply seek to add more context.

16 Following the publication of the Technical Funding Parameters, only qualifications meeting these criteria should be recommended for funding.

17 All Technical Funding Parameter documents will be made available publicly on [http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support/list](http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support/list). Revisions will be issued as needed.

Further support

18 For advice and queries, SSCs/SSBs/SBs should contact their Skills Funding Agency Sector Policy Manager.

19 Awarding organisations should contact the relevant SSC/SSB/SB directly with queries regarding recommendations that they have made or are making for public funding. However awarding organisations may also contact the Skills Funding Agency Qualifications and Credit Implementation Team via the QCF Service Desk at [qcfservicedesk@lsc.gov.uk](mailto:qcfservicedesk@lsc.gov.uk)

20 General information on vocational qualification reform is available online at: [http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support/](http://qfr.lsc.gov.uk/ukvqrp/support/).

Paper creator QCF Team
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Annex A

Technical Parameters for funding vocational qualifications in Adult Learner Responsive

1 This document sets out the details of what will be funded within the Adult Learner Responsive offer, commencing with the policy intent of the programme, the scope of the offer and identifying the technical funding parameters which SSCs/SSBs/SCs and awarding organisations should work within.

Policy Intent

2 Adult Learner Responsive provision covers learners on eligible provision who are aged 19 or over on the 31 August of the funding year in which they start a specific episode of learning. Adult Learner Responsive provision is what was previously branded Further Education (FE) adult provision, which was defined as including vocational, social, physical and recreational training, where the means of delivery could be full or part-time. It is the vocational component of the offer that SSCs/SSBs/SCs are being asked to advise upon. The Adult Learner Responsive model may include employer-based target bearing qualifications included within the Employer Responsive Model where these can be delivered and assessed in a realistic working environment.

Scope of the offer

3 Adult Learner Responsive provision supports a wide range of activity from supporting adults engaged in learning for the first time to gain basic skills to help them get on in life, through to adults needing to retrain as a result of losing their job and adults seeking to progress to higher level skills or to higher education.

4 The Adult Learner Responsive offer falls under the following core groupings:
   - Foundation Learning (excluding Skills for Life)
   - Skills for Life
   - Full (target bearing) Level 2
   - Full (target bearing) Level 3
   - Level 4
   - Developmental Learning

5 From the 2010/11 academic year the Foundation Learning Tier will be replaced by the Foundation Learning Curriculum, offering a framework to help adults progress ultimately to Level 2. The Foundation Learning Curriculum, which includes formal First Step learning, will be built on a clear analysis of individuals’ needs to ensure they receive the mix of skills that is right for them to promote confidence in learning, minimal occupational competence, employability and independent living. It will be constructed to help learners and providers to identify personalised learning programmes to
address their learning and skills gaps by drawing from the following three skill sets:

- Functional skills in English, Mathematics and ICT (not yet in the QCF)
- Vocational training
- Personal and social development skills

6 It is expected that SSCs/SSBs/SBs will advise the Skills Funding Agency on the most suitable and fit for purpose vocational provision which should be considered within this offer.

7 For adults aged 19 or over 

Skills for Life qualifications are available to help individuals develop the skills used in everyday life such as reading, writing or maths.

8 As there is no vocational offer within Skills for Life there is no role for SSCs/SSBs/SBs to advise SFA of qualifications within this offer.

9 The SIS gave a clear steer that full Level 2 and Level 3 qualifications will continue to be supported and the vast majority of these qualifications will be linked to a specific sector.

Technical Funding Parameters

10 The technical parameters to be followed by SSCs/SSBs/SBs when recommending vocational qualifications in the QCF to be considered for funding in Adult Learner Responsive are set out below. It is acknowledged that on occasion there will be legitimate exceptions to these. Where this is the case a clear written rationale must be provided for consideration by the Skills Funding Agency. A process and supporting guidance is currently being worked up and will be shared with SSCs/SSBs/SBs in due course.

Volume of Learning and Challenge

11 Target bearing qualifications at Levels 2 and 3:

a Target bearing qualifications at Level 2 should be Certificates or Diplomas. Where the same Level 2 qualification exists at Certificate and Diploma size, if an SSC/SSB/SB requests that both be confirmed as target bearing (full), this will be accepted in Adult Learner Responsive provision (but not in Train to Gain). This will allow some of the flexibilities of the QCF to begin to be delivered, and it is done on the understanding that, firstly, a learner who completes the Certificate would only subsequently be funded for the necessary additional components to complete the Diploma; and, secondly, where a learner registers for the Diploma but does not complete it, assuming they have achieved the credit value of the Certificate, they will gain that qualification.

b Target bearing qualifications at Level 3 should be Diplomas. Certificates will be considered where a certificate is the agreed competency qualification in Train to Gain.
Qualifications which confirm occupational competence (i.e. have purpose ‘D’) must have a credit value equal to or greater than the agreed Train to Gain credit threshold.

12 Entry, Level 1 or Level 4 qualifications within Adult Learner Responsive provision will not have any size restrictions, although Diplomas would not generally be expected in Foundation Learning. This will be reviewed in August 2010.

Qualification Purpose

13 Vocational target-bearing (full) qualifications at Levels 2 and 3:
- Should in general have a primary purpose of ‘B’ (Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area) and ‘C’ (Prepare for employment).
- Qualifications with a purpose of ‘D’ (Confirm occupational competence) can be included where assessment can be carried out in a realistic working environment.

14 Vocational qualifications offered as part of Foundation learning should in the main be at Level 1 (although it is acknowledged there may be some vocational qualifications at Entry Level) and should in general have a primary purpose of either:
- A4 (Recognise development of employability skills and/or knowledge)
- B (Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area)
- C1 (Prepare for employment in a broad occupational area)
- ‘D’ (D1) (Confirm competence in an occupational role to the standards required) may be appropriate.
- In some cases there will be vocational qualifications at Entry Level and these may be aligned to purpose A (A4) but the Agency acknowledges that in some cases purposes B (B1) and C may also be considered.

15 Level 4 qualifications may be aligned to:
- ‘B’ (Prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area)
- ‘D’ (Confirm occupational competence) where this can be delivered in a realistic working environment.