QCF Service Layer: Service Level Agreement

19 February 2009

This agreement is made between The Learning and Skills Council and Awarding Organisations.

The agreement covers the delivery of the QCF Transitional Service which focuses on the capture of QCF data from Awarding Organisations and the provision of information to Awarding Organisations to support the process of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT).

This agreement remains valid for 12 months from 24 April 2009 until 23 April 2010. The agreement will be monitored quarterly and formally reviewed annually. Minor changes may be recorded on the form at the end of this agreement, providing they are mutually endorsed by the parties and managed through the QCF Transitional Service Change Management process.

Signatories:

..............................................................
Name: 
Position: 
Organisation: 
Date: ............

..............................................................
Name: 
Position: 
Organisation: 
Date ............
SERVICE DESCRIPTION

1.1 This agreement sets out the Service Levels that will be delivered by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in support of Awarding Organisations, Learning Providers and Information, Advice & Guidance Providers in order to operate the transitional service layer of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). The transitional service is intended to run from April 2009 to September 2010 at which point the final strategic solution will be in place.

1.2 The service layer of the QCF business operating model was set out in the QCF final business case that was presented to the United Kingdom Vocational Qualifications Reform Board (UKVQRPB) and signed off by ministers in October 2008 and in the feasibility and impact assessment report produced by the LSC. The transitional service layer is principally responsible for bringing together credit, unit and qualifications achievement data for the purposes of supporting Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT).

2 SCOPE OF AGREEMENT

2.1 The scope of the agreement is that which is determined within the areas stated in the QCF Business Service Catalogue attached to this Service Level Agreement (SLA).

3 SERVICE LEVEL OBJECTIVES

3.1 Ensure that the service levels of the QCF service are of a consistently high quality to meet the requirements of the Awarding Organisations who wish to use the service to support them in their decision as to whether to award claims for qualifications that require CAT.

3.2 Ensure that the service can be used to support information advice and guidance (IAG) offered through relevant bodies and providers across the three countries.

3.3 Consult with Ofqual and other regulators to ensure that any potential links between service levels detailed within this document are compatible with the “Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework”.

4 SERVICE AVAILABILITY

4.1 The specified operational hours will correspond to the business day: Monday to Friday 8am – 6pm (excluding English public holidays and statutory closure days).

4.2 It is expected that the service will be available for use outside of the specified operational hours however; LSC makes no commitment to the levels of service available outside the specified operational hours.

4.3 During the operational period the services will be available for 99% of the time. Service availability does not relate to performance, so if an application or service is performing outside of requirements then this does not count as unavailability. Only when an application or service is declared unavailable (through an appropriate incident) does the unavailability event begin.

Availability is calculated as: \[
\frac{\text{Up time} - \text{down time for priority 1 incidents}}{\text{Total time}}
\]

Total time is calculated based upon the hours of operation.
5 MAINTENANCE

5.1 LSC shall maintain the Service layer in accordance with the Maintenance Schedule that will be agreed with its supplier.
5.2 The Maintenance Schedule shall take account of the operational timetable for planned releases of upgrades and enhancements and planned maintenance schedules.
5.3 The Maintenance Schedule shall specify a process for categorising service issues depending on the seriousness of the issue. This in turn will determine the timescale in which an issue should be remedied.
5.4 The LSC shall carry out any necessary maintenance where it reasonably suspects that the Service Layer has or may have developed a fault. Any such maintenance shall be carried out in such a manner and at such times so as to avoid (or where this is not possible, to minimise) disruption to the Service Layer.

5.5 Planned Maintenance

5.5.1 Planned maintenance refers to system changes that can be notified at least five days in advance.
5.5.2 LSC shall ensure that planned maintenance, including future further releases is undertaken outside the specified operational hours.
5.5.3 LSC will post information regarding scheduled downtimes on the service web pages at least five working days in advance.
5.5.4 When LSC wishes to carry out planned maintenance to the Service Layer, it shall ensure that the timing of the planned maintenance is in accordance with the requirements of the Maintenance Schedule.

5.6 Unplanned Maintenance

5.6.1 Unplanned maintenance refers to high priority systems issues where at least 24 hours notice of system unavailability can be given, but the fix must take place within five days (hence it cannot be planned maintenance).
5.6.2 LSC will endeavour to complete unplanned maintenance outside the specified operational hours, however this cannot be guaranteed.
5.6.3 LSC will post information regarding unplanned maintenance and the expected downtimes on the service web pages. A holding page to notify users that the service is unavailable will be posted whilst maintenance is taking place.

5.7 Emergency Maintenance

5.7.1 Emergency maintenance refers to the highest priority systems issues where the fix must take place within 24 hours.
5.7.2 LSC will endeavour to complete emergency maintenance outside the specified operational hours, however the nature of such issues means that system availability is highly likely to be affected.
5.7.3 LSC will post information regarding unscheduled downtimes on the service web pages. For emergency maintenance this may be no more than a holding web page to notify users that the service is currently unavailable. LSC will endeavour to provide awarding organisations with some notice that the service will be unavailable but this cannot be guaranteed.
5.7.4 When service is resumed after emergency maintenance, LSC will post information regarding the reasons for the unscheduled downtime on the service web pages.
6 SERVICE HOURS AND RESPONSE TIMES

6.1 Support for QCF transitional Service will be provided between 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday (excluding English public holidays and statutory closure days).

6.2 Special conditions for exceptions and procedures for requesting service extensions should be made by contacting the QCF Service Desk. The procedure for requesting permanent changes to service hours is done by contacting the QCF Service Manager.

6.3 Response times will depend upon the priority of the issue raised. We do not offer an operational service outside of the service hours stated above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority Level</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Response Time</th>
<th>Fix Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priority 1</td>
<td>Critical business application is unavailable to the majority of users (&gt;75%)</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>one working day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority 2</td>
<td>One or more users are unable to carry out critical business processes</td>
<td>90 minutes</td>
<td>two working days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority 3</td>
<td>More than one user is unable to perform a routine function within the system. No critical business processes affected. System is still usable.</td>
<td>120 minutes</td>
<td>five working days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority 4</td>
<td>One user is unable to perform a routine function within the system. No critical business processes affected. System is still usable. Minor or cosmetic problem with functionality. User is asking for information or guidance.</td>
<td>120 minutes</td>
<td>fifteen working days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Requests</td>
<td>Requests for services in addition to those included in the service level agreement</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>by negotiation with the Service Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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7 CONTACT POINTS AND ESCALATION

The main contact point is the QCF Service Desk:

Tel: TBA
Email: TBA

The first point of escalation is the Service Manager:

Paul Stonier
Tel: TBA
Email: TBA

Correspondence Address:
QCF Service Support
Learning and Skills Council
Cheyesmore House
Quinton Road
Coventry
CV1 2WT
8 SERVICE PERFORMANCE

The expected performance for the service layer is:

- File Transfer – up to 1 minute to acknowledge successful transfer of an achievement data file
- Batch Upload – up to 10 minutes to validate and upload to the database
- Search / validate – up to 10 seconds response

9 FUNCTIONALITY

The functionality offered for all services during the QCF Transitional Service is the minimum required.

10 CHANGE MANAGEMENT

A change to service can be driven by new customer requirements or necessary system changes. The QCF Transition Service will manage any changes using its change management process.

Revisions will be signed off by the Service Manager and the customer.

11 SERVICE CONTINUITY

QCF Transitional Service continuity plans and disaster recovery policy are in accordance with the LSC standards.

12 SECURITY

The QCF Transitional Service has adopted the LSC’s Information Security Policy which covers the protection of all forms of LSC information to ensure its confidentiality, integrity, availability as well as its storage and usage in compliance with relevant legislation. This policy applies to all colleagues working for the LSC and provides a framework within which roles and responsibilities are defined.

This policy applies to all information held by the LSC including:

1. All data and information (stored on electronic media) held by, or on behalf of the LSC.
2. Printed hard copies of such data and information.
3. Hand-written records retained as evidence of an action or event.
4. Applications and software used by developed by or for the LSC.
5. All the LSC’s IT hardware, including file servers, personnel computers (workstations) and portable computers including blackberries and mobile telephones. All terminal devices (for example modems), communications lines and associated equipment on LSC premises or connected to LSC systems.
13 DATA ACCEPTANCE POLICY

13.1 The Service layer will enable awarding organisations to provide their achievement data in the following formats:
- Bulk or individual upload through a web based portal (using csv or xml file formats);
- Bulk or individual upload through a web services Applications Programme Interface (API) offering will be offered as part of subsequent enhancements to the system.

13.2 LSC reserves the right to require an awarding organisation to move to another form of data transmission if circumstances should warrant it.

14 ACHIEVEMENT DATA REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

14.1 For the facilitation of award using CAT and to assist in a learner’s IAG process the achievement data must be as up to date and as relevant as possible. To facilitate this awarding organisations are required to submit unit and qualification achievement data no later than 10 business days after the date that the award was made.

14.2 In the event that operational hours are lost because the service is unavailable for a significant amount of time during the 10 day period, an awarding organisation will be granted relief against the SLA in paragraph 14.1.

14.3 Operational time losses can only be the result of unscheduled downtime, unplanned maintenance or emergency maintenance.

14.4 Relief on the submission of the timescales for awarding organisations will be calculated as a function of the operational hours for which the service is unavailable as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational hours lost</th>
<th>Relief</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 hours</td>
<td>No relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – 15 hours</td>
<td>1 day</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 – 25 hours</td>
<td>2 days</td>
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<td>etc.</td>
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15 LSC RESPONSE TIMES FOR VALIDATING AND PROCESSING DATA FILES

15.1 Awarding Organisations will receive notification immediately after a successful upload of a data file. Processing of the data files will commence upon submission and be completed by the start of the next business day.

16 DATA QUALITY

16.1 Paragraph 5.12d of the QCF regulations requires that all awarding organisations submit achievement data for those learners with a Unique Learner Number (ULN) to a learner record to support CAT. Awarding organisations are therefore expected to submit a copy of their achievement data to the QCF Service Layer. This should be uploaded in line with the conditions outlined in paragraph 14.1 of this document.

16.2 LSC shall implement basic data validation in the Service Layer at the point of upload/entry. It is not possible to verify the accuracy of achievement data at this point and therefore these validations will be necessarily limited in scope and will only identify the most obvious errors such as the validity of the ULN and the unit or qualification codes.

16.3 The accuracy of the achievement data remains the responsibility of the awarding organisation. The LSC would only accept responsibility for errors when they arise as a result of errors made by the LSC.
result of a spurious manipulation of the data within the Service layer. It is therefore the responsibility of the awarding organisation to reassure them that the submitted achievement data relating to their organisation is accurate and correct. Additionally it is also the responsibility of the awarding organisation to reassure itself that any data provided by the Service Layer for the purposes of providing evidence to assist in an award of a qualification that requires credit transfer is also accurate and correct.

17 MONITORING AND REPORTING

17.1 LSC will be responsible for monitoring the services delivered in the Service Layer of the QCF Transitional Service against the relevant service level agreements.

17.2 LSC shall monitor Awarding Organisations performance with the services provided associated with the timely submission of data. Ofqual and other regulators will have access to reports on timeliness and data quality.

18 GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation layer</td>
<td>The portion of the QCF service for which Ofqual has responsibility.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achievement data</td>
<td>Information about Units and Qualifications achieved by Learners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAT</td>
<td>Credit Accumulation and Transfer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Maintenance</td>
<td>Maintenance to the systems that deliver the service that must take place immediately i.e. same day. Includes fixing high priority faults, installing security patches etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance Schedule</td>
<td>An agreement between LSC (as the owner of the Service Layer) and its supplier(s) setting out how the Service Layer will be maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational hours</td>
<td>The proportion of the day that the service is available and subject to this SLA.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned Maintenance</td>
<td>Routine maintenance to the systems that deliver the service. Includes fixing low priority faults, system upgrades, backups etc. Planned maintenance will take place with at least five days notice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Layer</td>
<td>The portion of the QCF service for which LSC has responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned Maintenance</td>
<td>Maintenance to the systems that deliver the service that must take place at short notice. Include fixing high priority faults, installing security patches etc. Unplanned maintenance will take place with at least one but less than five days notice.</td>
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19 AMENDMENTS

The following amendments have been made to the service level agreement since it was implemented on xx April 2009.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of Change</th>
<th>Change Approved by</th>
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