Using QCF units and qualifications to deliver a responsive offer that meets local needs
Section 1: Introduction

This document is a practical guide for providers wishing to exploit the flexibility of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) through the introduction, or further development, of a unit offer that is responsive and meets local needs. The guide looks at current policy developments, provides examples of how unit delivery is being used in different settings and offers a checklist to help you manage your next steps.

For a number of providers, the initial impetus for unit delivery has been triggered by changes to funding, particularly where unit funding has been made available for certain learner groups, notably the unemployed.

The sector is now more confident to explore flexible delivery models that encompass both units and whole qualifications. This development should be viewed in the context of the current economic climate and government policies that highlight the importance of an offer that is more flexible and responsive.

The guide is based on funding information current at the beginning of May 2013. Providers should check the Skills Funding Agency (SFA) updates (published every Wednesday) for further information on funding, in particular unit funding for 2013/14.

Developing a unit-based offer: the economic and policy context

There are several key drivers here:

- The current economic downturn and focus on recovery. Businesses are focusing on economic objectives and immediate skills needs and want short episodes of training to address these needs at the appropriate time rather than substantial programmes.

- The need for providers to respond quickly to identified skills gaps. To support this, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has introduced the Innovation Code to enable providers to offer provision that meets local needs even though there is currently no qualification available to accredit such learning.

- The development of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) who are putting together regional plans for local skills development.

- The government socio-economic agenda. Public-funded education can often include a wider range of skills that are seen as beneficial in the longer term for both work and life.

- A reduction in the amount of money available for long-term development.

- The further development of the online Personal Learning Record (PLR) where learners are able to track their achievement of QCF units and qualifications, and explore routes and combinations of units to further learning and achievement.

- The willingness of individuals to invest in smaller episodes of learning (for example, for career development).

- The need to structure learning in a way that requires less downtime from work.

- Changes to the list of units eligible for funding, broadening what is available for particular groups of learners (offenders and the unemployed).

- The flexibility to achieve qualifications over time.

- Providers exploring how to deliver economies of scale through more effective delivery of units common to a number of qualifications.

1 Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills (DfE/BIS, April 2013)
2 http://www.learningrecordservice.org.uk/products/learnerrecord/
Benefits for learners

In January 2013, BIS published an evaluation of the impact of learning undertaken in programmes of individual units rather than traditional complete qualifications. This research was based on a survey undertaken in August 2012 of 1,000 learners who undertook unit-based learning with Unit Delivery Trial providers in the academic year 2011/12, as well as on secondary analysis of the 2011/12 Individual Learner Record (ILR) database. The report showed that:

- unit-based learning can be a vehicle to broaden the appeal to a wider range of learners;
- unit-based learning offers a route into learning that, for some learners, was critical in (re-)engaging them with learning;
- achievement of initial units appears to help stimulate progression into further learning and eventual achievement of a ‘full’ qualification;
- achievement of units may help learners achieve positive employment outcomes;
- 70 per cent of unemployed learners felt unit-based learning would help to increase their chances of getting a job;
- learners who were continuously in work felt that unit-based learning increased their job satisfaction, gave better pay and promotion prospects, and better job security;
- unit-based learning can help reduce learner dependency on state benefits or tax credits.

Opportunities

Matching your offer of learning more closely to identified learning needs can result in your offer being applicable to a much wider audience. A unit offer alongside a qualification offer provides opportunities to:

- engage adults in small bite-sized learning;
- design small packages of learning or courses to suit the needs of employers, employees and job seekers;
- develop and accredit job-seeking and employability skills;
- complete units, accumulate credits and build qualifications;
- offer accredited taster sessions before a learner commits to a full qualification.

Figure 1 illustrates the potential audiences for QCF unit delivery, including those that may be eligible for government or other sources of funding. As can be seen, a wide range of learners can benefit from a well-developed approach to delivering units, either as part of a whole qualification or with the option of progressing to further learning at a later date.

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3 Unit delivery trials: assessment of learner benefits (BIS, January 2013)
Section 2: Developing a whole-organisation approach

This section will help you:
- identify where developing unit delivery can impact your organisation;
- identify key factors to consider when planning your unit and qualification offer;
- consider how key factors are interrelated when planning your offer.

When planning a unit-based offer, it is important to consider the potential impact of delivering smaller, more frequent, learning outcomes on your organisation. You may be able to build in smaller, more frequent, learning outcomes to consider the potential impact of delivering your unit and qualification offer, and shows how they are interconnected.

Evidence gathered from providers across the sector points to the importance of taking a whole-organisation approach when developing a unit and qualification offer that is responsive, high quality and viable. Figure 2 represents the key internal and external factors to consider as you plan your unit and qualification offer, and shows how they are interconnected.

Figure 2: Key factors to consider when developing your whole-organisation approach

Actions
- Compare the framework in Figure 2 to your own process when planning your curriculum offer.
- Identify where a unit-based offer can build on your strengths and where you may have priority actions.
- Use the following sections in this guide to help evaluate and develop a viable, responsive and high quality unitised offer.

Section 3: Responsiveness

This section will help you to:
- determine different ways to identify training needs;
- identify key partners to ensure you are responsive.

Your ability to quickly offer one or more units to meet an identified need is a measure of your responsiveness.

The identification of a training need may come from:
- your own initial assessment of a learner or employer;
- local market intelligence (LMI) that you systematically gather and analyse;
- a skills plan from your LEP – in line with the government directive that “Chartered status for FE colleges will be dependent on taking account of the skills priorities of local LEPs” (Skills Funding Statement 2012-15, BIS, December 2012);
- engagement with an employer about their workforce;
- a partner organisation such as the Job Centre;
- ongoing information, advice and guidance (IAG) with a learner, such as additional skills identified for progression to further learning;
- other local and regional strategic plans, such as those of your local authority and community learning.

Providers that have successfully implemented a unit-based offer are able to complete the learning cycle (identify, plan, deliver and evaluate learning) more frequently and within a shorter timeframe.

Working closely with Jobcentre Plus, the Skills Centre identifies and responds very quickly to new local labour market opportunities. The Skills Centre manager says:

“We are very responsive and fast moving: it’s our USP [unique selling point].”

This is particularly valued by Jobcentre Plus and employers.

An event was arranged for 190 employers and learners to fill temporary Christmas retail vacancies. 60 learners were placed in confirmed work following additional CV and interview training, and the whole process was completed within two weeks.


Actions
- Consider how you develop an accurate understanding of the training needs for the communities you serve.
- Use the checklist in Annex 1 at the end of this guide to review your organisation’s responsiveness and help plan your next steps.
Section 4: Ensuring high quality

This section will help you to:
• understand the importance of advice and guidance in unit-based delivery;
• emphasise the importance of the Personal Learning Record system to staff providing advice and guidance;
• consider what information will need to be provided to learners;
• consider the impact of unit-based delivery on your quality systems.

A responsive offer that requires the delivery of frequent episodes of learning not only places demands on your organisation’s resources but also on your quality systems at each stage of delivery. Learners and employers expect a positive experience whatever the amount of learning undertaken. The introduction of unit-based delivery provides additional opportunities for providers to demonstrate their excellence in delivering learning.

Figure 3 below shows how using units to meet learners’ needs can evidence your effective practice against the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework for further education and skills 2012.

Providers who have implemented a unit-based offer have also identified that shorter programmes of learning enable them to gather feedback from learners and employers more regularly – often referred to respectively as the learner and employer voice. This has led to a better and more timely understanding of what is working well and any areas for improvement, and allows for a quicker response.

Providing information, advice and guidance

The introduction of a unit-based offer requires careful management to ensure that the benefits of a more personalised offer can be accessed by learners and employers. Both will need effective advice and guidance if they are to see valuable routes to the development of skills and, where appropriate, the achievement of qualifications.

Providers delivering short programmes recognise that, for many learners, achievement of a package of two or three small units may be the most appropriate.

The Personal Learning Record

There are two key developments that support those providing IAG on QCF units and qualifications. First, is that every learner should have a Unique Learner Number (ULN). Second, is that the ULN is linked to the Personal Learning Record (PLR) system. This system records the individual’s QCF credits and achievements.

The PLR provides the opportunity for learners to view and review all their QCF achievement data, online, and in one place. The PLR system enables the learner and their adviser to submit queries using the Routes to Achievement function. A learner may have many potential routes to achieving a qualification based on the units they have completed and the credits accumulated. These routes will need to be considered in relation to the learner’s aspirations, the provider’s offer and funding considerations. The PLR system enables the learner and their adviser to submit queries using the Routes to Achievement function.

Outcomes for learners
• Delivering skills that will prepare learners exceptionally well for the next stage in their education, training or employment
• Learners progress to higher-level qualifications and/or jobs that meet local and national needs

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment
• Set challenging tasks based on systematic and accurate assessment...
• Staff generate high levels of enthusiasm for participation in, and commitment to, learning
• Advice, guidance and support motivate learners to secure the best possible outcomes for success in learning and progression

Effective leadership and management
• You successfully plan, establish and manage the curriculum and learning programmes to meet the needs and interests of learners, employers and the local and national community

What information needs to be provided

Staff providing IAG should work with learners to plan their learning journey by using their PLR to review any QCF credits already achieved and to identify the further units and credits required to complete a qualification. Advisers are able to access the PLR with the permission of the learner. Advisers will need to understand the flexibilities that the QCF offers, especially the way in which credit can be accumulated towards qualifications and transferred between different providers and awarding organisations.

A learner may have many potential routes to achieving a qualification based on the units they have completed and the credits accumulated. These routes will need to be considered in relation to the learner’s aspirations, the provider’s offer and funding considerations. The PLR system enables the learner and their adviser to submit queries using the Routes to Achievement function.

Some colleges also refined their advice and guidance processes by:
• introducing IAG sessions at the end of each unit to discuss further learning and employment opportunities;
• explaining their unit-based offer to learners who have recently completed full qualifications.
Learner choice

Introducing unit-based delivery will provide much wider choice for a learner which, in turn, makes an additional demand on the amount and frequency of IAG that you provide. There are several decision areas that both providers and learners face when considering a QCF unit-based offer:

• Content – the skill and knowledge to be studied.
  This may be informed by the motivation for (or purpose of) the learning (for example, a return to learning, progression to further learning, employment, career progression, or independent living). A unit-based approach provides the opportunity to select units from different qualifications that best support each learner’s need.

• Level – deciding which is most appropriate for the learner and their reason for learning. Where units are packaged, different units may be offered to the same learner over a range of levels to better match their needs.

• Delivery methods.
  With smaller episodes of learning, different delivery methods, such as in the workplace or the use of technology, may be more suited to meeting the learner’s needs.

• Assessment methods.
  Where the same unit is offered across different awarding organisations, there may be a choice in the method of assessment available.

The Skills Funding Agency expects providers to use their professional judgement to combine units into coherent programmes aimed at progressing learners towards employment outcomes or qualification achievement. They suggest a number of factors to be considered when putting together unit-based programmes:

• Include units that respond to locally assessed skills needs and that support growth sectors.
• Deliver a mix of general employability units alongside vocational units.
• Deliver a level of challenge appropriate to the learner in order to facilitate progression.
• Where possible, use units that are shared across awarding organisations to facilitate credit accumulation and transfer.
• Use units that do not have large credit values so that each programme is a coherent package of smaller units.
• Use units that support the accumulation of credit towards a target qualification.
• The package of learning should be of sufficient size to allow the features above to be delivered (a minimum of three credits).

The introduction of bite-size QCF English and mathematics units based on the Adult Core Curriculum also provides opportunities to develop English and mathematics skills as part of a short programme of learning.

Section 5: Viability

A common message across the sector is the need to “do more for less”. Implementing a unit-based curriculum provides the opportunity to review the effective utilisation of teaching staff and the efficiency of the curriculum model, such as the delivery of units that are common to different sectors (for example, customer service).

Providers involved in developing a viable unit-based offer identified the following opportunities and challenges:

• As shown in Figure 1, a unit-based curriculum can result in the offer being more accessible to a wider audience.

• Providers are able to develop a more sustainable model in which funding per unit (where applicable) spreads the risk. This is especially apparent where payment is made upon successful completion.

• A unit-based offer can be part of the approach to managing risk when starting a learner especially where payment is made on achievement of credit. Having a closer match between the units offered and the identified training needs ensures that the learning is relevant and learners are more motivated to complete in manageable steps. However, this does require accurate and timely IAG, initial assessment and a personalised learning plan.

• There are specific funding opportunities targeted at unit-based offers, such as additional units for apprentices in micro businesses.

• Developing a unit-based delivery approach can also support qualification offers eligible for funding using a 24+ Advanced Learning Loans (available from August 2013). Although, 24+ Advanced Learning Loans can currently only be used to fund full qualifications at Levels 3 and 4, adopting a unit-based delivery approach can help providers demonstrate value for money as learners achieve credit throughout their full qualification. This can be especially helpful for a learner should they need to suspend or transfer their learning to another provider.

Actions

• Review existing arrangements for providing information, advice and guidance to ensure QCF unit-based courses are considered.

• Provide information about your unit-based offer to learners.

• Plan professional development for all staff, especially those providing advice and guidance.

• Encourage course managers to identify routes through your unit-based offer.

• Use the checklist in Annex 1 at the end of this guide to review the impact a unit-based offer may have on your quality and help plan your next steps.

This section will help you to:

• consider ways to develop a more coherent and cost-effective delivery model;

• consider the benefits of a unit-based approach to a wider group of learners.

Through a process of curriculum review, Basingstoke College of Technology has made a saving of over £420k in 2 years, of which £145k are savings from implementing a common unit delivery approach.

http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/24271

Henley College developed a common unit delivery approach in the Public Services department. The efficiency savings allowed them to develop three distinct pathways for learners resulting in a 30 per cent increase in achievement and success rates, and 6 per cent increase in retention.

http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/21050
Funding unit delivery

This section will help you to:

• identify unit funding eligibility and learner eligibility;
• recognise the opportunities that arise through the changes in the funding formula from 2013 and how these could impact on delivery methodology;
• recognise the role of employers, not only in skills development but also as a source of funding.

There are various funding streams that provide opportunities to take advantage of the flexibilities of the QCF to deliver units. These are outlined in Figure 4 below.

Providers should be aware that final information on unit-based funding for 2013/14 has not yet been published. Information contained below is based on the funding announced for small qualifications.

When considering how to take advantage of the flexibility of the QCF, providers should consider:

- Skills Funding Agency funding, taking into account:
  - which QCF units are eligible for such funding and which groups of learners (for example offender learning (OLASS) and the unemployed);
  - the new streamlined funding system;
  - additional units for apprenticeships in micro businesses;
  - engaging employers and full cost recovery.

There can be increased awarding organisation costs due to more frequent registration and certification.

Actions

- Consider how funding of credit achieved may influence a unit–based approach.
- Identify where a unit-based approach would enable you to offer learning that is better matched in content, size and level to identified needs.
- Consider where there may be efficiency savings through units that are common to more than one qualification.
- Use the checklist in Annex 1 at the end of this guide to review how you develop a viable offer and help plan your next steps.

- A unit-based offer can lead to increased collaboration between providers where specialist units are required.
- A unit-based offer that engages learners and encourages them to build towards further learning is increasingly more important as young adults are required to remain engaged with education through policies such as the raising of the participation age (RPA) where all young people in England must continue in education or training until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013 (and until their 18th birthday from 2015).
- A unit-based offer can place more demands on your systems and processes, such as learners needing access to IAG more frequently as they complete a unit so that they can plan their next steps.
- Where the learning is focused on immediate business needs, employer contributions are both more manageable and more likely.

• Other or privately funded
• Skills Funding Agency funding, taking into account:
  - which QCF units are eligible for such funding and which groups of learners (for example offender learning (OLASS) and the unemployed);
  - the new streamlined funding system;
  - additional units for apprenticeships in micro businesses;
  - engaging employers and full cost recovery.

http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/FundingSimplification/
by the Skills Funding Agency through the Learning Aim Reference Application (LARA) as approved for funding, provided that the unit:

- is between Entry Level 1 and Level 4; and
- is in line with purposes to:
  - prepare for further learning or training and/or develop knowledge and/or skills in a subject area;
  - prepare for employment;
  - confirm competence in an occupational role to the required standard; or
  - recognise personal growth and engagement with learning (only for units at Entry level and Level 1).

The Skills Funding Agency will not fund a unit when:

- it is linked to a ‘licence to practice’ or normally supported by employers;

However, from January 2013, there is funding for standalone qualifications in health and safety at work, food hygiene, first aid at work and fork lift truck as part of a broader package to help those on Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) or Employment and Support Allowance (Work Related Activity Group) (ESA (WRAG)) to find sustainable employment;

- it is in the sector subject area (SSA) of performing arts, crafts, creative arts and design, history, philosophy and theology, social sciences, languages, or literature and culture.

### How is income calculated?

The income a small qualification attracts can be calculated by using the Skills Funding Agency’s funding formula.

The change to the funding formula for 2013/14 onward rewards credit achievement through a learning aims matrix. This places the emphasis on outcomes rather than inputs – moving from counting the guided learning hours put into delivery towards linking QCF credit achievement in cash terms. This may have a significant impact on how providers choose to deliver QCF units and qualifications. It frees providers to explore how they deliver in terms of face-to-face tuition, the extent of blended learning etc. (see the section on delivery models) There will still be an emphasis on the quality of outcomes and progression and the implications for learners entering employment (see the section on achievement and job outcome funding below).

### Rates Matrix 2013/14

The Skills Funding Agency published A New Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills (SFA, March 2013) which details the changes to the funding of small qualifications. They announced their intention to only fund small award size qualifications with a credit value of 3, 6, 9 and 12 from 1 January 2014 (with exceptions including some 1 and 2 credit English and mathematics qualifications).

### In response to feedback from the sector, these interim arrangements have been extended to the whole of the 2013/14 funding year. From 1 August 2013 until 31 July 2014, the following funding arrangements will apply.

The Skills Funding Agency expects most learners who undertake small qualifications to undertake award qualifications with a credit value of three and above. Exceptions are:

- QCF English and mathematics;
- standalone qualifications in the areas of first aid at work, food hygiene and health and safety;
- within the offer for those who are unemployed; and
- where the qualification may be offered to learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The Skills Funding Agency understands the value of small award size qualifications. However, they are concerned about whether these are of sufficient size to ensure meaningful learning and achievement and support significant progression and job outcomes. So, alongside the extension of the interim arrangements, they will review the position of small qualifications approved for public funding as part of their broader qualifications review work taking into account the emerging outcomes of the Whitehead Review of Adult Vocational Qualifications announced in Rigour and Responsiveness in Skills (DfE/BIS, April 2013).

### Funding Matrix 2013/14

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding band</th>
<th>A - Base (minimum)</th>
<th>B - Low</th>
<th>C - Medium</th>
<th>D - High</th>
<th>E or G - Exceptional</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Provision (1)</td>
<td>£150</td>
<td>£150</td>
<td>£250</td>
<td>£1,500</td>
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<td>Small Provision (2)</td>
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<td>Certificate (12-24 credits)</td>
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<td>£720</td>
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<td>£4,500</td>
<td>£1,800</td>
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<td>Certificate (25-36 credits)</td>
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<td>Diploma (37-48 credits)</td>
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<td>Diploma (49-72 credits)</td>
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<td>Diploma (73-122 credits)</td>
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<td>£4,500</td>
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</table>

1. http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/SFA/A_New_Streamlined_Funding_System_for_Adult_Skills_FINAL.pdf
2. Funding Rates 2013/14 Version 2 (SFA, March 2013) note 10, page 77
6. 6 Funding Rules 2013/14 Version 2 (SFA, March 2013) note 10, page 77
7. 7 http://readingroom.lsc.gov.uk/SFA/A_New_Streamlined_Funding_System_for_Adult_Skills_FINAL.pdf
8. All data are subject to correction through LARA.
The funding formula for 2013/14 is:
Qualification funding = Rate £ (x disadvantage uplift x area costs uplift) + ALS
The Rate is taken from the Learning Aims Rates Matrix.
Disadvantage uplift will now apply to all learners. To simplify the approach to disadvantage funding, it will now be calculated using only the learner’s home postcode. This is a feature of the provider’s learners.

The area costs uplift reflects the higher costs of delivering provision in different parts of the country, particularly London and the South East. It will be consistently applied based on delivery location. This is a feature of the provider’s location.

Additional Learning Support (ALS). In future, to simplify the different arrangements that currently apply in classroom and workplace learning, there will be a single approach to funding ALS across all provision, depending on provider type. Providers should refer to A New Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills\(^9\) for further details.

Learners do not earn any funding until they become ‘starts’ by attending for a minimum period of time (threshold days). This will vary with the planned number of days of learning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned number of days in learning</th>
<th>Threshold days</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;=14 and &lt;168</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;=168</td>
<td>42</td>
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</table>

Calculating the income from a small qualification
Example: calculating the income of a QCF award
Qualification: Entry Level Award in English Skills – Reading Using Reading Strategies (Entry 3) (QCF) 600/7289/1).
This qualification contains a single unit worth two credits.
The table provided by the Skills Funding Agency for funding small award size qualifications\(^10\) indicates a funding rate of £100 for qualification before any disadvantage uplift or area cost is added.

Qualification rollover process for 2013/14 and unit funding rates
The Skills Funding Agency maintains the 2013/14 Simplified Funding Rates Catalogue that lists all the qualifications that they will fund for 2013/14 along with their funding rates. The catalogue allows providers to view the qualifications approved for public funding well in advance of the start of the new delivery year.

A new online application will be implemented from early August 2013 and will replace the current Learning Aims Reference Application (LARA) for 2013/14 onwards. This new application (Learning Aims Rates Service – LARS) will reflect all provision offered in England, as well as funding and validity information for those publicly funded.

The Skills Funding Agency has decided that, as funding information for qualifications approved for 2013/14 is now accessible through the Simplified Funding Rates Catalogue and the new online application for 2013/14 will be going live from early August 2013, validity and funding information will not be rolled over in the current LARA to reflect funding for 2013/14.

A list of units confirmed as available for the 2013/14 offer was published in May 2013 and added to the Funding Rates Catalogue.

Innovation Code
The Innovation Code offers providers greater opportunity to respond flexibly to the needs of local learners, communities and employers. It enables providers to draw down funding to deliver provision without having to wait until it is developed into QCF qualifications. Providers are encouraged to work with an awarding organisation to help identify the content, level and size of the new provision, and payment is made against bands of credit size.

Achievement and job outcome funding
The level of achievement funding for 2013/14 has been set at 20 per cent of the learning aim/frame rate.

Job outcome funding will be integrated into the core funding methodology in 2013/14. For eligible learners (unemployed learners on active benefits and, currently, those on wider benefits) where skills training will help them enter work, providers will be paid half of the achievement funding if the learner leaves and enters work without achieving their learning aim (i.e. 10 per cent). These learner definitions will change with the advent of Universal Credit in 2013 onward.

The definition of a job outcome in the case of learners on active benefits will be that the learner makes a declaration to the provider that they have left unemployment benefits to enter work.

In the case of those on wider benefits, the declaration will be that they have entered work. The definition of an eligible job will be that the learner must remain in employment of 16 hours or more per week for more than four continuous weeks.

When a learner leaves a course to take up paid work they will continue to be excluded from the qualification success rate (QSR) calculation.

Learner eligibility
The Skills Funding Agency is committed to support adults in receipt of benefits where skills training will help them into work.

Categories entitled to full funding from 2013/14 are:
- adults on JSA or ESA (WRAG) for skills training
  in order to help them into work or to remove barriers to getting work;
- adults in receipt of Universal Credit who are unemployed; and
- adults on wider benefits who are unemployed and not mandated to skills training but who want to enter employment and need skills training.

24+ Advanced Learner Loans
For 2013/14 onwards, there will be no government funding for learners aged 24+ undertaking learning at Level 3 and 4\(^11\). Eligible learners will be able to access 24+ Advanced Learner Loans for many Level 3 and 4 qualifications\(^12\), or make alternative arrangements, such as through their employer, to pay the full cost. 24+ Advanced Learning Loans cannot be used for unit-based learning.

Learners are able to access up to four loans and can therefore progress in size and level of learning – utilising the flexibility of the QCF to build on units already achieved (where the rules of combination allow). Providers are required to take stock of any eligible units a learner may have at the start of their qualification, and reduce their course fees accordingly.

\(^9\) http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/FundingSimplification/

\(^10\) http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/news/pressrelease/FundingSmallAwardSizeQualifications.htm

\(^11\) Other than for trade union representatives studying Trade Union Congress learning aims, and ex-military personnel funded for their first Level 3.

\(^12\) Courses eligible for loans funding are: A-levels/AS/A2 (no more than four); Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Access to HE Diplomas; QCF Level 3 and 4 certificates and diplomas; Advanced and Higher Apprenticeship Frameworks. As confirmed in the Skills Funding Statement released in December 2012, for the 2013/14 academic year onwards, loans funding above Level 4 for learners aged 24+ will only be available for Higher Apprenticeships at Levels 5 and 6.
Performance measures

The Skills Funding Agency recognises that learners who are in receipt of JSA or ESA (WRAG) are actively seeking employment and may not achieve their learning aim. As this would normally affect QSR and minimum levels of performance (MLP), units of learning are currently excluded from the calculation of the QSR.

Providers should regularly check the updates from the Skills Funding Agency for the latest position with regard to unit achievement and success rates.

Actions

• Identify your planned offer and determine the extent to which it meets QCF unit eligibility and learner eligibility for funding.
• Consider the funding formula for 2013 onward and identify any implications for unit and qualification delivery.
• Review the extent to which you have engaged employers to determine the match of skills needs to funding opportunities, including awareness of a shift in government thinking to support direct employer investment.

Section 6: Putting it together

This section will help you to consider:

• how to develop delivery models that support unit delivery;
• how you might put together packages of units;
• methods of assessment that meet learner needs;
• ways to engage with employers.

Delivery models

The flexibilities of the QCF provide opportunities for providers to:

• explore short episodes of learning;
• repeat delivery of some units at different points in the year;
• put groups of learners together to develop personalised approaches to curriculum;
• contextualise generic QCF units;
• develop tailored packages of learning;
• review assessment methodology.

Short episodes of learning

The unit based curriculum enables providers to deliver QCF units in short episodes rather than over a longer period of time. The advantage for learners is that they achieve credit quickly and this promotes commitment to further learning.

Stockton Riverside College found that this was a successful approach with NEET learners. The pathways have been delivered in blocks of QCF units so that learners can achieve an award within a two-week period. Delivery of QCF award qualifications in two-week blocks provides motivational incentives to succeed and progress.

http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/21056

Repeating delivery of particular units throughout the year

The opportunity to deliver short episodes of learning means that a provider can consider delivering particular units at different times during the year. These units can be carefully selected to lead to qualification pathways and enable learners to join a programme at several points in the year and progress to qualifications.

Gloucester College has used this approach to attract more learners. The flexibility of multiple entry points has enabled the college to pick up learners who have dropped out of other provision and who do not want to wait for the start of the next academic year to continue their studies.

http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/18558
Joining groups of learners together
The degree of flexibility offered by rules of combination mean that, in some circumstances, qualifications can be achieved through units offered at different levels, or that units from one qualification can be shared with other qualifications.

Providers may wish to consider offering the opportunity for learners to achieve units at different levels to match individual needs. For example, a learner undertaking a unit at Entry Level 3 could study alongside a learner taking a similar unit at a higher level even if they are both on an Entry Level 3 programme. In many cases, such units will have the same learning outcomes but the assessment criteria will reflect the different levels. Both sets of learners could progress to a Level 1 qualification if the rules of combination allow.

Shared units leading to pathways
Where there are units shared between qualifications, providers can plan different pathways for different learner groups. The efficiencies gained by joining groups together to deliver shared units support the expansion of personalised curriculum pathways.

This has been successfully developed at both Chesterfield and Henley Colleges. The flexibility of the model enables learners to access units at the appropriate level from different pathways at any point after they have completed the core units. This personalised approach has improved retention and achievement outcomes.

http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/331709

Contextualisation of QCF units
QCF units identify the learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria but few stipulate context.

Newcastle City Learning (NCL) works collaboratively with Jobcentre Plus (see below) and recognised that, to meet rapidly-changing employment outcome requirements for programmes for the unemployed, it needed to explore ways in which QCF units could be delivered. The ability to contextualise QCF units means that generic qualifications can be delivered quickly through small changes to the materials and examples.

Putting together packages of units
Providers are now exploring innovative ways to put together packages of units that target the skills needs of learners.

Newcastle City Learning (NCL) recognised that there are large numbers of Jobcentre Plus clients who may not be employment-ready and so, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, Nest Steps and others, a two-week skills health check programme has been developed that provides a mix of skills for life, ICT and employability skills.

Learners on this programme are then encouraged to progress (in the case of NCL) on to the follow-up programme ‘Stepping Stones to Employment’ and/or a sector-based work academy. Stepping Stones to Employment spans 16 weeks and provides an opportunity for learners to develop skills and confidence and to gain QCF units that will equip them for employment.

The main outcomes of the programme are generic employability units and qualifications.

Working with Jobcentre Plus has provided the opportunity to add other qualifications, for example, a food safety certificate.

http://www.excellencegateway.org.uk/node/21092

Learners may be considering starting up their own business. Providers are now developing packages that combine:
• a unit in preparing to start your business (this unit may be delivered across the provision but contextualised to suit the relevant sector); and
• a unit in the particular sector that the learner wishes to enter.

Alternatively, providers may be putting on employability programmes that require:
• one or more employability units as identified in a learner’s initial assessment;
• a unit that introduces the learner to a particular sector where there are identified work opportunities;
• QCF units in English and or mathematics at the appropriate level that support progression to higher-level functional skills or to GCSE English or mathematics.

Assessment methodology
The flexibilities of the QCF extend to assessment methodologies.

Newcastle City Learning identified that, although several awarding organisations may offer a particular qualification, few offer the flexibility of assessment methodology to meet the needs of a clientele that may lack confidence or who have poor prior educational experiences.

Chesterfield College found that, through a careful choice of units, it was able to allow the learner to choose the most appropriate assessment methodology to suit their needs.

Engaging employers
There is a growing expectation that employers should take the lead in identifying skills needs for existing and future workforce development. Developing a unit-based delivery approach enables providers to explore a wider variety of collaborative and funding opportunities.

Full-cost recovery
Employers may be reluctant to release staff for whole qualifications and may have specific skill needs that do not require learners to undertake a whole qualification. Providers have the opportunity to utilise the QCF to provide focused unit delivery at full cost.

One employer is purchasing delivery of the unit ‘Maintaining electrical equipment/systems (A/600/5923)’ as it meets their skills development needs.

The unit focus is on employing the appropriate techniques for proving dead and safe isolation which provides competence against current legislative requirements.

The unit requires three sources of evidence, two by observation of a variety of tasks to meet the criteria.
Employer ownership and skills pilots

Employers are able to bid for funding, working collaboratively with others (including further education providers) to provide innovative skills and workforce development. Outcomes could include new curriculum models and qualifications where there is a clear rationale driven by employers.

Skills pilots are designed to test the intended direction of travel whereby public expenditure for work-based training moves from government funding of training providers based on qualifications to direct employer investment based on outcomes. The skills pilots are expected to result in greater employer and college collaboration.

Micro business additional unit offer

Employers with ten or fewer staff can add an additional two units to an apprenticeship programme to take into account the diverse roles undertaken in such enterprises. The normal funding rules will apply to these additional units.

Actions

- Identify small unit-based programmes of learning that can be adapted to suit the needs of different learners
- Review the extent to which you have engaged employers to determine the match of skills needs to funding opportunities, including awareness of a shift in government thinking to support direct employer investment.

Section 7: Sources of useful information

Evaluations of unit delivery

Unit Delivery and Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Evaluation 2011/12. Final Report (NIACE, April 2012)

http://www.niace.org.uk/sites/default/files/project-docs/sfa_cat_project_final_report_v0_5.pdf

Unit delivery trials: assessment of learner benefits (BIS, January 2013)


Innovation Code

The Innovation Code: ensuring local decisions for skills meet the needs of learners and employers, Version 2 (SFA, November 2012)

http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/innovation_code_guide_v2.pdf

The Innovation Code: Frequently asked questions, Version 2 (SFA, February 2013)

http://readingroom.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/sfa/Innovation_Code_FAQs_v2.pdf

Unit delivery guidance

Unit Delivery in 2012/13: Information and Guidance (SFA, July 2012)


Guidance for 2013/14 is yet to be published.

Additional units for micro businesses

Engaging micro businesses: A guide for learning providers delivering skills provision for unemployed adults (NIACE, 2012)


Funding documents

Skills Funding Statement 2012-2015 (BIS/SFA, December 2012)


Funding rules 2013/14, Version 2 (SFA, March 2013)


Simplified Funding Rates Catalogue

http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/providers/FundingSimplification

Register of Regulated Qualifications

http://register.ofqual.gov.uk/

Personal Learning Record

http://www.learningrecordsservice.org.uk/products/learnerrecord/
Annex 1: Self-assessment checklist for unit-based delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsiveness</th>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have a process to evaluate employer and regionally-identified training needs quickly and professionally.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We are using the Innovation Code to deliver provision for which there is currently no accredited qualification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have a template to cost new provision.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have used the Local Enterprise Partnership Skills Plan to inform our curriculum offer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have mapped “pathways” to achieve the same qualification through different combinations of units and qualifications.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have reviewed the Skills Funding Agency unit offer for the unemployed and additional units for apprentices at micro-businesses.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have a systematic approach to identifying employer needs – such as the Training Quality Standard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We use analysis of the needs of our current customer base to inform the content, level, delivery and price of our offer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have regular meetings with key partners including Jobcentre Plus to ensure that we meet their needs.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The learning journey for a learner undertaking a single unit is of equal quality to that of a learner taking a large qualification.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have mapped where we can demonstrate excellence in the Common Inspection Framework with our unit delivery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We can handle more frequent learner feedback and systematically analyse this to inform strategic decisions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have a monitoring system for reporting on starts and outcomes that can handle unit-level data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>At the end of each unit, learners are supported to consider options for progression to further learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have reviewed our quality assurance framework to take account of our unit offer.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Viability</th>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have financially modelled the impact of a unit-based offer.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>We have identified efficient delivery methods for units common to more than one qualification.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have identified where it is appropriate to teach across different groups of learners.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We have financially modelled the impact of the simplified funding changes in 2013/14.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We know how to find the latest information from the Skills Funding Agency regarding funding QCF units and qualifications.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We use our costing template to identify the factors that make new unit delivery financially viable.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We are aware of any awarding organisation fees for registering and certificating learners at unit level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We work with delivery partners to explore joint delivery where it is uneconomical to deliver units to small groups of learners.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influencing factors</th>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have access to a range of awarding organisations so that we can offer different assessment methods.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Content, duration, location, learning styles and assessment methods all form part of our information, advice and guidance (IAG) and initial assessment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We encourage all learners to use their Personal Learning Record to explore their next steps.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We offer access to our unit offer in the workplace, near the workplace, and away from the workplace.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching and learning</th>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning sessions with similar skills and knowledge are mapped to different units (across qualifications and levels).</td>
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<tr>
<td>We use higher-level units to offer stretch and challenge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We use lower-level units to secure learning where required.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We use technology to increase access to learning (removing barriers of timing and travel).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Our induction includes information on building pathways comprised of different units.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Staff skills</th>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff understand credit accumulation and transfer.</td>
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<tr>
<td>IAG staff can identify which units will best help a learner progress in the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching staff can plan and deliver engaging learning across groups of learners with common interests, including where there may need to be variation of content and level.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject specialists are used to their full capacity and do not teach outside their areas.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All learners are assessed on entry.</td>
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<tr>
<td>All learners have a learning plan/contract/agreement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>All proposed learning is driven by an agreed, planned destination.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The relevance of prior learning is discussed with each learner.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Credit accumulation and transfer is offered for relevant prior achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>We offer learners a range of summative assessment methods to suit their needs (linked to an awarding organisation offer).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Action Y/N</th>
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Information advice and guidance

We have identified what IAG we need to provide to learners so that they understand the benefits of QCF units and are able to make appropriate decisions.

We have identified what IAG we need to provide to employers so that they understand the benefits of QCF units and are able to make appropriate decisions.

Staff are able to support learners in accessing their personal learning record.

Staff can review with learners what credits they have already achieved and how these could support qualification achievement.

Technology

We have considered how technology could provide access to a wider audience who would benefit from studying units.

We have a management information system (MIS) that can report the detail of unit starts and completions “live”.

We use intelligence from a customer relationship management system to record and to inform our unit offer.

We have explored using computer and mobile technology with our current and future learners.

Common unit delivery

We have identified how many of the units we currently deliver are common to more than one qualification, how many learners are affected and our associated delivery costs.

We have identified a learning environment(s) where we could deliver to larger groups.

We use some of the cost savings from larger groups to allow more specialist units to be offered.

We monitor progression closely to quickly identify where additional learning opportunities are needed.

We use specialist staff to deliver to larger groups.

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<tr>
<th>Priority actions</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
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<td>Action Y/N</td>
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