

Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF): Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

June 2010

Audience details: Learning providers, stakeholders

Purpose and scope

This Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document has been produced by the Skills Funding Agency's (Agency) Qualifications and Credit Framework team to sit alongside other materials and resources developed to support the implementation of QCF for providers and other stakeholders, specifically in the context of managing the transition from funding qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to funding qualifications on the QCF.

For ease of use, questions and responses are grouped under the following headings:

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Transition to the QCF

Key points

- From **1 August** the Agency expects that the focus of funding will be on QCF provision for publicly funded provision for post 19 learners in England and will start to turn off funding for new starts on National Qualification Framework (NQF) qualifications from 31 July 2010.
- From **1 January 2011** the Agency expects to be funding a comprehensive offer of QCF provision and, for vocational qualifications, will seek the advice of the relevant sector organisation.¹

1. Are all QCF qualifications publicly funded?

Not all qualifications in the QCF will be confirmed for public funding. Some QCF qualifications have already been confirmed for public funding, and more are being confirmed on an ongoing basis. However, there will be some QCF qualifications which do not receive public funding. Some QCF qualifications will not be funded because they belong to **ineligible** categories (e.g. health and safety related learning delivered as stand-alone provision for employers); or they are **not aligned** to the Agency's funding parameters or the relevant investment and skills priorities (see Question 3 below), or they are **no longer considered to be fit-for-purpose** by the relevant Sector Skills Council (SSC).

2. Who decides which qualifications are funded?

The Skills Funding Agency confirms which qualifications are publicly funded for learners aged 19 or over in England. It does this through its funding confirmation process, which has replaced the previous 'Section 97' arrangements. The new process has been designed to be streamlined, transparent and non-bureaucratic, in order to reduce the time taken to get qualifications to a point where they can be delivered. It will also allow organisations developing qualifications to do so in the knowledge of what will be funded. Further details on the funding confirmation process are available at:

<http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/resources/publications/doc6.htm>.

¹ Except for certain categories of provision (including general qualifications, such as GCSEs and A levels, and Skills for Life) which remain outside the scope of the QCF. Note the separate position for Apprenticeships in Question 9.

3. On what basis does the Agency make decisions?

The Agency's decisions are based on priorities identified by government. Funding priorities for the year are set in the annual Skills Investment Strategy (<http://www.bis.gov.uk/Policies/further-education-skills/funding/skills-investment-strategy>) and the key priorities and budget set for the Agency for 2010-11 in June by the Coalition Government:

<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/aboutus/ournews/news170610.htm>.

For vocational qualifications, the Agency asks for advice from employers, through their Sector Skills Councils, Standard Setting Bodies and Sector Bodies (referred to hereafter as SSCs) in order to ensure that we can prioritise the vocational qualifications that are understood and valued by employers. The Agency moderates SSC recommendations and confirms which qualifications will be publicly funded. For non-vocational provision, where appropriate, the Agency will seek external advice prior to final confirmation. Further details on the funding confirmation process are available at:

<http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/resources/publications/doc6.htm>.

4. How will providers know which QCF qualifications are confirmed for public funding?

The Agency publishes an online list of the QCF qualifications confirmed for public funding at: <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/confirmationfunding/>. The list is updated every two weeks during the period of transition (April 2010 to January 2011) from funding NQF qualifications to funding QCF qualifications. Providers should use this list to identify which QCF qualifications will be funded. Qualification details will also be added to the Learning Aims Database (LAD), although this may take up to a week from when they are added to the online list.

5. What is the timetable for funding only QCF provision?

The Agency's intention is that by **August 2010** the focus of public funding should be on the QCF. Where there is not an appropriate QCF offer accredited and confirmed for funding, some NQF provision will continue to be funded (see Question 6 below for more detail). By **1 January 2011**, the Agency anticipates a comprehensive range of vocational QCF provision will be funded on the basis of the advice of the relevant sector organisation as well as a significant range of non vocational QCF provision.²

More information on the timetable can be found at: <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/confirmationfunding/>.

6. How will the Agency go about ceasing to fund new starts on NQF provision?

The Agency has been working with sector organisations to identify NQF qualifications where funding for new starts can cease. At the start of **June 2010** a qualification list for the removal of funding was published. This sets out those NQF qualifications where funding for new starts will cease from **31 July 2010** as appropriate QCF qualifications have been accredited and confirmed for funding for the new academic year.

At the end of **September 2010** a further list for the removal of funding will be published. The UK Vocational Qualification Reform Programme Board set December 2010 as the timescale for all vocational qualifications to be in the QCF and therefore the Agency assumes that a comprehensive QCF offer will be in place. At this point, the Agency will review whether funding can cease for all new starts on all remaining vocational NQF provision from **31 December 2010**.

² Except for certain categories of provision (including general qualifications, such as GCSEs and A levels, and Skills for Life) which remain outside the scope of the QCF. Also note the separate position for Apprenticeships in Question 9.

The Agency accepts that there may be a need to fund both NQF and QCF qualifications for an interim period, after the publication of the June 2010 list and subject to review at the September 2010 list. However, we will continue to encourage providers to make the switch to QCF provision as soon as it becomes available, taking advantage of the support offered by awarding organisations and also the ongoing Learning Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) programme of support: www.excellencegateway.org.uk/QCF.

The Agency will consider formal challenges to the published lists in specified time slots in June and October 2010 respectively, through its challenge process. Funding for NQF qualifications will be extended only where a challenge is successful, which is at the Agency's discretion. More detail on the timetable and challenge process can be found at: <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/implementation/>.

7. Will this timetable give providers sufficient lead-in time to plan and market QCF provision?

Many providers are already delivering QCF units and qualifications, including integrating this with wider operational aspects such as marketing, timetabling, registration and assessment. However, the Agency recognises the issues that providers may have in terms of lead-in time to plan and market new QCF provision. This is why the first list (published in June) of NQF 'turn off' qualifications is limited to where the QCF offer is accredited and already confirmed for funding.

8. Will there be a like-for-like QCF replacement for a qualification in the NQF that a provider currently delivers?

Some NQF qualifications will have like-for-like QCF replacements. There will also be some QCF qualifications that replace several NQF qualifications, which is an advantage of the QCF as it will allow the qualification offer to be less confusing while meeting learner and employer needs and increasing flexibility. However, there will be some NQF vocational qualifications which do not have a replacement because the relevant sector organisation does not view them as fit-for-purpose any more in terms of giving learners the skills they need for that sector. In these cases, providers will need to look for alternative, fit-for-purpose, provision.

Providers should consult the online list of qualifications confirmed for funding (which is currently being updated every two weeks) to check whether QCF qualifications are already in existence and confirmed for funding: <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/confirmationfunding/>. To understand what is in the pipeline, or if they are still uncertain, they should consult their awarding organisations.

9. How does this timetable apply to Apprenticeships?

The one additional factor for Apprenticeships is compliance with the new Specification of Apprenticeship Standards for England (SASE) from 6th April 2011. The SASE can be found online at: <http://www.apprenticeships.org.uk/About-Us/SASE.aspx>.

The Agency and the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) has agreed that where a current NQF qualification is within an existing Apprenticeship framework, that qualification will continue to be funded for new starts as long as the framework remains current. The ceasing of funding for NQF qualifications where an appropriate QCF offer is accredited and available applies to ALR and to 'stand alone' NQF qualifications in Train to Gain only. The recent QCF Transition Update (June 2010) will give more detailed information:

<http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/implementation/>. The timescales for Apprenticeship frameworks to be SASE compliant is April 2011. However, given that the QCF

is now 60% populated and should be fully populated by the end of the year, we would encourage as many SSCs as possible to start the process of moving towards SASE compliant frameworks as soon as possible and well in advance of the deadline. We are discussing with the UKCES the process of transition and would want to minimise disruption to providers by encouraging SSCs to avoid refreshing frameworks twice (one for QCF and one for SASE compliance).

10. Will the NQF cease to exist from the end of December 2010?

The NQF will continue to operate for a range of qualifications, including general qualifications, Functional Skills and also some vocational qualifications. However, the Agency has been clear that it wishes to focus funding on provision within the QCF, both vocational and non vocational. The independent regulator, Ofqual, has written to all Chief Executives of awarding organisations informing them of the regulatory arrangements surrounding the QCF (dated May 2010 available at: <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/news-and-announcements/127/295>). As the letter indicates, funding decisions are taken independently of regulatory decisions; irrespective of the continuation of the NQF, the Agency will continue to prioritise QCF provision for funding.

11. What will be funded in each delivery programme (Adult Learner Responsive, Train to Gain, Offenders' Learning and Skills Service, Programmes for the Unemployed) and will there be different rules?

As indicated above, all of the Agency's delivery programmes will focus on provision from the QCF. However, providers need to be aware that a qualification may be funded in one programme but not in another. This is because of the different aims and circumstances of the learner, at whom the programmes are targeted, and the different purposes and intent of qualifications. For example, Train to Gain focuses particularly on qualifications providing occupational competence, whereas Adult Learner Responsive provision is suitable for broader vocational qualifications where the rationale is to support the development of skills and support opportunities for progression.

Providers can identify which QCF qualifications and which programme is appropriate, via the online list at: <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/confirmationfunding/>. The recent Coalition Government statement "... for the academic year 2010/11 all colleges, except those with poor performance, will be able to move funding between adult and employer responsive ..." does not change the status of eligibility for the qualifications on the list. Skills Funding Agency Guidance Note 4 clarifies how the freedoms and flexibilities for colleges, training organisations and employers announced by John Hayes on 17th June are being implemented, but the rationale for the inclusion, according to purpose and size of qualifications within particular delivery programmes remains. Guidance Note 4 can be found at: <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/funding/allthelatest/guidancenotes/>. Guidance for use by awarding organisations and Sector Skills Councils, regarding the technical parameters to be used for provision under Adult Learner Responsive, Train to Gain, Offenders' Learning and Skills Service and Programmes for the Unemployed is available online at: <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/confirmationfunding/>.

12. Does it make any difference whether a qualification is made up of shared or restricted units?

A 'shared unit' is a unit that a recognised organisation places in the unit databank and makes available to all other recognised organisations to access for use in the development of its rules of combination and to award credit for³. The Agency wishes to move towards greater use of shared units, as these represent best value for public money, and encourage credit

³ Ofqual (2008): *Regulatory arrangements for the Qualifications and Credit Framework*

accumulation and transfer. At present, QCF qualifications containing both shared and restricted units are being funded, but the Agency will review this position in August 2010 and will seek to begin to actively support greater use of shared and equivalent units from that point on.

13. What is a target-bearing qualification within the QCF?

Target-bearing qualifications are vocational qualifications at Levels 2 and 3 that count as 'full'. Previously, this was defined in terms of qualification types (e.g. NVQ) or size (guided learning hours). Qualifications in the QCF are not regulated by type, and size is measured in terms of credit, so a new definition of target-bearing is required.

Target-bearing vocational qualifications are now based on SSC recommendations. By 2011, target-bearing Level 3 qualifications should be Diplomas, and target-bearing Level 2 qualifications should be either Certificates or Diplomas. This requirement has been implemented for Adult Learner Responsive provision in 2010/11 (with a few interim exceptions), and Train to Gain will follow from 2011 onwards. The online list of funded qualifications, and the Learning Aims Database, will indicate which qualifications are target-bearing. Further information on QCF target-bearing qualifications is available at:

<http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/resources/publications/doc7.htm>.

14. Will Awards at Levels 2 and 3 be funded?

At the moment, Awards at Levels 2 and 3 are not automatically funded. This is in accordance with the decision that funded Level 2 qualifications will be drawn from the Certificate and Diploma band of the QCF and Level 3 qualifications from the Diploma band. However, in 2010/11 some exceptions have been permitted in cases where the relevant sector organisation had previously set a credit threshold for occupational competence in Train to Gain that is in the Award band (i.e. 12 credits or fewer).

15. What about non accredited provision which a provider offers?

Although the Agency has said it wishes to manage down the level of non accredited provision offered and, where appropriate, support the transition of this provision into the QCF, this will not happen immediately. For 2010/11 providers will be able to continue to deliver some non accredited provision, particularly in the context of Specialist Designated Institutions (SDIs). We will review non accredited provision as part of the review leading to the publication of the January 2011 list of provision where funding for new starts will cease from 31 July 2011.

Funding approach

Key points:

- There are no significant changes to the funding methodology approach for 2010/11
- The Agency is looking at how it can ensure that in future funding can support the flexibility of the QCF and so realise its benefits

16. Are there any changes in how the Agency is funding QCF provision?

For 2010/11, the Agency is not making any significant changes in how it funds as a result of the implementation of QCF. However, the Agency knows that it will in future need a new, simplified funding approach to better support the flexibilities in the QCF and to realise the benefits for learners and employers. A review of the funding approach will be carried out, including exploring the options for funding based on credit, with a view to possibly implementing a new approach from 2012/3 onwards as part of the wider simplification agenda. In the meantime, the Agency will be looking at what can be changed within the current approach in 2011/2 to make the system work better as well as looking at the possibilities to test some new approaches to funding.

17. Will providers be funded for delivering units or qualifications, or both?

The Agency will fund both units and qualifications. In 2010/11, funding for units or packages of units will be through the unit funding trials (see questions 25-20 for further information), although these will not be available in every delivery programme in 2010/11.

Going forward, starting from 2011/12 onwards, the Agency will be looking at ways to introduce more and improved options for flexible delivery. The QCF is designed to allow incremental learning and achievement, including progression towards whole qualifications. The Agency will wish to promote both qualifications, delivered in flexible ways, and units, particularly where these assist in engagement and progression.

18. How will the Skills Funding Agency's contracting arrangements be affected?

Part of the transition to QCF means the Agency will now be asking our providers, both existing and new, about their ability to deliver QCF qualifications. At the pre-qualified stage for a new provider a commitment to deliver QCF qualifications in support of the 1 January 2011 implementation date will be taken into account. The commitment given by a prospective provider during this pre-qualified process will form part of the conditions of funding and will be reflected in provider's contractual agreement with the Agency. A provider's performance will be measured on their ability to deliver QCF qualifications confirmed for funding. The Agency will only allocate funding to those providers who have the capability, capacity and resource to deliver QCF qualifications efficiently and in line with the specifications of the framework.

19. How are rates for QCF qualifications being set?

For 2010/11 we will continue to use the existing methodology for setting funding values (rates) for QCF qualifications. The principle of this approach is that funding rates should reflect the directly-incurred costs of efficiently delivered provision. Guided learning hours (glh) are used as the measure of costs incurred for Adult Learner Responsive provision. Activity - delivering provision and assessment in the workplace (together with any associated glh) is used as the measure of costs incurred in Employer Responsive provision (Train to Gain and Apprenticeships). (Learning and Skills Council Funding Guidance 2008/09: Principles, Rules and Regulations paragraphs 20 and 21).

20. What information is required to set rates for QCF qualifications?

In order to set fair and appropriate rates, the Agency needs to know the following information:

- Primary and secondary purpose, as a proxy for mode of delivery of the qualification (either classroom or workplace based, or a mix of the two) to determine its relative size (source UKCES)
- Guided learning hours (glh) or credit value (source Ofqual)
- Activity information, for example to determine funding values in Apprenticeships when there is a material change to the framework (source SSCs)
- Number of pathways available within a qualification, to determine the Standard Learner Number (SLN) for Employer Responsive and SLN glh value for Adult Responsive when the recommended glh covers a range (source Ofqual)
- LearnDirect Classification System (LDCS) code (source the Data Service) or Sector Subject Area (SSA) classification Tiers 1 and 2 (source Ofqual) or 'sub-sector' (source UKCES), to determine the programme weighting factor
- Details of predecessor qualification(s). This allows the Agency to maintain consistency in funding rates where a QCF qualification is very similar to an NQF predecessor. This information also helps in setting programme weighting factors.

21. Why are some QCF qualifications funded at a lower rate than their NQF predecessors?

Some QCF qualifications have lower rates than their NQF predecessors, but others have higher rates and in many cases the rate has stayed the same.

There are a number of reasons why different rates have been assigned:

- QCF qualifications may be larger or smaller than their NQF predecessors, and rates will be set accordingly.
- In Train to Gain, a simple rate structure exists which historically has not differentiated between size of qualifications, except in a small but increasing number of cases. With QCF qualifications the difference between the sizes of qualifications is much easier to identify, which can lead to different rates being set for these qualifications compared to their NQF predecessors.
- In some cases, the information supplied by the awarding organisation or SSC has not been accurate, which has created some anomalies.

22. How is the Agency handling queries regarding the rates for QCF qualifications?

The Agency is responding to individual instances where providers have raised concerns over the funding of specific QCF qualifications. This can involve checking with awarding organisations and SSCs regarding the information that they have supplied, or providing an explanation where there is a known reason for the difference between the rates for QCF qualifications and their NQF predecessors. The Agency is also working with the Association of Learning Providers (ALP) regarding the basis for the funding approach for Train to Gain and Apprenticeships, in the interests of transparency and joint working.

23. What will happen to learners at the 18/19 boundary now that different decisions on funding may now be made for pre- and post-19 learners?

The Agency has committed that learners will not lose access to public funding for qualifications they have already started when they move into post-19 learning. Young people aged 16-18 (by the definition relevant to the particular funding stream year) when they begin a programme of

study will continue to be funded as '16-18 year olds' until they complete that programme. If a learner starts their programme when they are 19 or over, the funding rates and eligibility rules determined by the Agency will apply.

24. How should providers handle Recognition of Prior Learning when the Agency does not provide funding for it?

It is not correct to say that the Agency does not provide funding for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). RPL is the assessment and validation of learning that has not previously been certificated, and is distinct from credit transfer (for existing achievement within the QCF) or exemptions (for certificated achievement outside the QCF). Where credit transfer or exemptions are used towards a qualification, the Agency would not expect to fund for that portion of the qualification.

However, for RPL, the current policy is that a reduction in funding is expected only where 50% or more of the assessment is carried out through RPL, and then there is a 50% reduction in funding for those parts of the qualification achieved through RPL. The full current policy is set out in the funding guidance (<http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/funding/policyandfunding/fundingpolicy/df>) and providers are expected to abide by this. This policy is under review, and any revision will be set out in the Agency's Requirements for Funding 2010/11 which is due to be published in June 2010.

Unit Funding Trials

25. What are the unit funding trials and what is their purpose?

Unit funding trials are part of developing funding and performance approaches that support flexibilities of the QCF, including the ability to deliver both units and qualifications, and credit accumulation and transfer. The objective of the unit funding trials is to test whether flexible delivery can encourage and lead to the achievement of full qualifications, particularly among individuals who would not otherwise engage with learning and progress to complete qualifications.

26. What unit funding trials are operating in 2010/11?

The unit funding trials have been extended into the *Offenders' Learning and Skills Service* (where they are running from January 2010 to July 2011).

The trials will also be extended to test the '*Qualify with a Business*' pathfinder. This was announced in the 2009 National Skills Strategy, and aims to enable adults to develop key business skills alongside their vocational training so that they are both qualified in a vocational area and ready to run a business.

Finally, the Agency is currently reviewing the outcomes and recommendations of the evaluation of the unit funding trials in *Adult Learner Responsive* provision, in order to determine the shape of these trials for 2010/11. Further details will be published in the summer of 2010.

27. Where can providers find out more about the unit funding trials in the Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS)?

The full details, including a list of units approved for inclusion in the trials, can be found at: <http://olass.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/documents/>. The list will be regularly updated as more units are developed and recognised on the QCF.

28. Where can providers find out more about 'Qualify with a Business' and the unit funding trials?

Guidance for providers on Qualify with a Business is being prepared and will be published online at <http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/resources/publications/> in the summer of 2010.

29. What funding is available for the unit funding trials?

There is no new funding available for the unit funding trials above the agreed provider allocations for 2009/10 and 2010/11. Providers are expected to re-focus activity from their existing allocations for Adult Learner Responsive/Offender's Learning and Skills Service (as applicable) to deliver units within the trials.

30. Will flexible delivery increase provider cost?

There is no evidence to date that offering QCF units significantly impacts on providers' costs. However, the Agency is mindful that delivery within the unit funding trials has so far been small scale, and will continue to closely monitor the impact on providers' costs. The Agency is also conducting an ongoing evaluation of the costs and affordability of the QCF and of flexible delivery in general. To date the findings from this evaluation have suggested that whilst there have been some additional costs to providers in familiarisation and training/development relating to the QCF, these costs has been relatively marginal. However, providers are only now beginning to change their practices to deliver more flexibly, and the Agency will continue to monitor the situation, including for example, the impact of awarding organisations' pricing structures.

Learning Aims Database (LAD)

31. How do qualifications get onto the LAD?

Qualification information is received by the Data Service from a number of sources, including Ofqual. This information requires some technical changes to be performed manually before it can be uploaded into the LAD. Once the funding confirmation process has been completed, funding information can then also be added to the published LAD data.

32. Why have there been delays in information appearing on the LAD and what has been done about them?

It is recognised that operation of the LAD has run into significant challenges with the implementation of the QCF and it is not as responsive as is required. The Agency and Data Service are investing in both short and longer-term development to improve the service of the LAD and its dependent systems.

By August 2010, the first round of upgrades to the LAD will be complete. This will include new functionality to make in-year changes to eligibility and funding, additional audit fields, and changes in related data collection systems. The way that the existing IT systems are used will also be streamlined. This will improve productivity, efficiency and ease of use.

33. How long will funding approval take in future?

The Agency has a target to complete its funding approval process and have funding information on the LAD within five weeks of receiving data from Ofqual (and, in the case of vocational qualifications, information from SSCs via UKCES).

34. What is the Learning Aims Database Replacement Project?

The Agency and the Data Service are working on a project to redevelop the LAD for 2011/12 to better support the QCF and to update the existing platform to more current technologies. The Agency and the Data Service would like to engage with providers and software suppliers to

better understand their current use of the LAD and gather suggestions for future improvements which will feed into the LAD redevelopment project. Consultation events have occurred, or are planned, with providers, awarding organisations and software suppliers.

Performance

Key points:

- There are no significant changes to provider performance management for 2010/11. However, it is recognised that current performance approaches are not supporting the QCF and new measures should be developed for **2012/13**
- The Agency is working on QCF success measures and will be testing these from 2010/11 onwards, including through the unit funding trials

35. Is the Skills Funding Agency going to change the way provider performance is measured with the implementation of the QCF?

There will be no immediate changes during the present interim stage of transition to the QCF. However, as the QCF is fully implemented, a change will be needed, in order to capture performance across the full range of provision (qualifications and units) so that providers can deliver in a flexible manner without losing out through the success rates.

The Agency is working to develop two credit-based QCF success measures, to accompany the current qualification success rate:

- a **success measure (credit success rate)**, designed to capture success in achieving units
- a **progression measure (credit progression measure)**, to capture progression towards the learners' ultimate learning aim where this is a qualification.

The Agency plans to begin to trial the QCF success measures in 2010/11, in particular through the unit funding trials. The intention is then to implement them for parallel running in 2011/12 (i.e. based on data from the year 2009/10), using them as additional contextual reports to allow providers and the Agency to become familiar with them and refine how they are applied. Credit success rate measures will then be fully implemented in 2012/13 (i.e. based on data from the year 2010/11).

36. What will happen if learners decide to leave their course having completed some units, but not a qualification? How will this affect provider success rates?

For 2010/11, the answer depends on what has been entered as the learner's learning aim on the Individualised Learner Record (ILR). The Agency's qualification success rate measures are based on successful completion of the stated learning aim. This means that a learner who achieved units but did not complete their intended qualification would not be counted as a success in the provider's success rate (although this should not detract from the fact that the learner has achieved and gained credit). However, if the learner is enrolled specifically on units (through the unit funding trials) then this will not impact the qualification success rate positively or negatively. Scenarios like this are one of the reasons why the more flexible performance measures described above are required.

37. Which provider will be awarded the success when a learner transfers from one provider to another?

Within the qualification success rate, when a learner transfers from one provider to another part way through a qualification, they are counted only within the 'receiving' provider's success rates.

Personal Learning Record

Key points:

- The core changes to the Personal Learning Record (PLR) to support the QCF will be launched at the end of **September 2010**
- The PLR has in the past been referred to as 'the QCF Service Layer', but the name has been changed to 'The Personal Learning Record for the QCF' so that it reflects the full functionality of the service
- A change support package will be available for providers to help in implementing the PLR
- Personal Learning Records are set up for learners when a Unique Learner Number (ULN) is used to enrol for learning and are used to record learning achievements

38. What is the Personal Learning Record for the QCF (PLR)?

The Personal Learning Record for the QCF (available at the end of September 2010) will underpin the QCF by offering a simple means of recording all QCF learner achievement. This free service is intended to empower learners to review their learning, and support them in making the right learning choices. All learners who have a ULN (which includes all learners studying publicly funded provision) will be provided with a Personal Learning Record where relevant. Learners aged 16 and over who have had their identity verified will be able to view all of their QCF achievement data in one place online. Used as part of professional information and advice, the PLR will offer the option to support learners to identify options for future learning, as well as opportunities to transfer QCF credits between qualifications.

39. What is the relationship between the PLR and the Learning Records Service (formerly known as MIAP), in particular the existing MIAP PLR?

The Learning Records Service (formerly known as MIAP) simplifies the way that information about learners, education and training organisations is collected, handled and shared. Services provided by the Learning Records Service include the existing Personal Learning Record, the Unique Learner Number for learners from age 14 in education and training in the UK and the UK Register of Learning Providers, containing details of the legal entities of training organisations in the UK. The existing PLR will be integrated with the QCF PLR from the end of September 2010.

40. Will the new PLR be ready by September 2010?

The core changes to the PLR to support the QCF are currently on schedule to be delivered for the end of September 2010. There is a transition service currently in operation, which focuses on providing an optional service for awarding organisations to ensure that there are processes and technology in place to enable the submission of QCF achievement data to the PLR.

41. What data will be on the PLR when it launches?

There are currently two main sources of data which populate the existing PLR: provider ILR returns and Key Stage 4/5 data from the National Pupil Database. Further to this, from the end of September 2010, when the PLR is enhanced for the QCF, QCF achievement data will be supplied from awarding organisations. The amount of QCF achievement data supplied from awarding organisations is expected to increase as awarding organisations begin to upload data onto the system and more QCF qualifications are undertaken by learners.

42. How will learners access their PLR?

The main way learners will view their PLR is expected to be via Skills Accounts, which are going to be fully rolled out in 2011. Skills Accounts (shortly to be rebranded under a new name) are a single portal for access to many services. Prior to the full roll out of Skills Accounts, learners aged over 16 can access their own PLR via the Learning Records Service Learner Portal, by opening a Learning Records Service Learner Portal account and having their identity verified by a provider or Careers Information Adviser (CIA). Once an account is active, learners will be able to view their entire PLR, including any courses or learning that they want hidden from other viewers of their PLR.

The PLR is being developed alongside the work the Agency is undertaking around establishing the Integrated Adult Careers Service (formerly known as the Adult Advancement Careers Service) to ensure that Careers Information Advisers are supported in their work to help learners plan future learning episodes in the QCF using the PLR.

43. What access will providers, careers advisers and employers have to the PLR?

Only learners will have direct access to their complete PLR. Learners will be able to grant access to the data contained in their record to awarding organisations, learning providers, advisers and any other organisation or individual who has an email address (via the Learning Records Service Organisation Portal). The Information Commissioner has recommended that this access be an explicit 'opt out' process rather than an 'opt in' one (meaning providers and careers advisers will have automatic access unless the learner actively opts out), which should simplify the process. This 'opt out' process will be notified through the Privacy Notice within the enrolment form. The Agency does not take any responsibility for the use that is made of the PLR by learners or their agents.

Learners will also be able to share their record with other third parties as they see fit, such as employers, by being able to grant the third party online access to view a one-time online customised snapshot of the PLR. When creating this customised snapshot of the PLR, learners can remove failures, re-sits and exclude the name of their learning provider if they wish.

44. What are the technical and management information systems implications for providers?

Providers are likely to need to carry out some systems redevelopment to ensure that their existing systems are able to integrate with the PLR (e.g. around verification of learners at registration). In addition, some staff training on the new system, and on interacting with the PLR via the web portal, may be needed.

45. What support will be offered to careers advisers?

As part of the support for the Integrated Adult Careers Service for Careers Information Advice (CIA) practitioners, the Agency is developing tailored support documents on QCF implementation. In terms of the PLR in particular, included in this will be documentation outlining the key messages for advisers to help learners to access and interpret QCF achievement data including planning future learning episodes in the QCF.

46. Does the PLR replace the need for official documentation in the verification process?

The PLR service can be used for discovering a learner's qualifications and credit, but it does not replace the awarding organisation certificate in any way. The awarding organisation certificate is the definitive source of achievement verification.

47. How long does data stay on the PLR?

Data will stay on the PLR for a learner's lifetime. Learners will not be able to change the data held in the PLR, but they can challenge the data for accuracy. If an awarding organisation leaves the service, they may wish to remove their organisation's learner achievement data from the service, which can be done by arrangement between the awarding organisation and the Agency.

48. The PLR is meant to be a 'lifetime record' of achievement, but is it really? For example, it doesn't contain GCSE data

As the enhanced PLR has a defined start date, September 2010, QCF data on the PLR will primarily be built up from that point onwards. The PLR will contain some retrospective QCF data when the service is launched (as set out in Question 40) but this data will not be comprehensive as awarding organisation data will only be available when awarding organisations submit it onto the system.

The PLR does already contain school data - the full submission of Key Stage 4 and 5 data from the National Pupil Database (where the learner has a ULN on the National Pupil Database) is on the existing PLR, but this information is not directly available from awarding organisations. In time, a strategic decision may be taken to add other achievement data may be added to the PLR.

49. Are all school leavers being provided with Unique Learner Numbers, and who issues them?

The ULN is traditionally created by learning providers using the Learning Records Service although it can be created by an awarding organisation. All school leavers are automatically provided with a ULN, (except for private school learners), but it may be the case that the school leaver does not know their ULN. The Learning Records Service is working with schools to improve the communications around this.

50. Who is responsible for ensuring accuracy of the Unique Learner Number?

It is the responsibility of the organisation that uses the ULN to ensure its accuracy. As the ULN is usually created by learning providers using The Learning Records Service for the main funding streams, providers have a responsibility to give valid ULNs and ensure ongoing accuracy.

Further information and support

Support from the Skills Funding Agency	
Funding and Performance	<p>Information about how the Skills Funding Agency is making changes to its funding and performance methods to support the QCF can be found online at : http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/resources/</p> <p>Further information on the Agency's funding approval process is available in one place at: http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/qcf-funding/confirmationfunding/</p>
Personal Learning Record	<p>Further information and support on the PLR is available at: http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/servicelayer/plr/</p> <p>A store of support documentation is also available on the MIAP website: www.miap.gov.uk</p>
Provider conferences	<p>Agency is engaged with providers through events and workshops designed to gather provider input and respond to issues raised. Most recently, the Agency held the 'Managing the Transition to QCF' provider conference in March 2010. Materials from that event can be accessed at: http://qcf.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/resources/publications/doc+8.htm</p>
Service desk	<p>The QCF Service Desk is a dedicated helpdesk for QCF queries and can be contacted by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone: 0870 2670054 (9.00am-5.00pm Monday-Thursday, 9.00am-4.30pm Thursday excluding public holidays) • Email: qcf servicedesk@skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk
Support from other organisations with which the Agency works in partnership	
LSIS	<p>The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) is supporting colleges and learning providers to get ready for the QCF through the QCF Readiness Provider Support Programme. This includes a consultancy service on how to plan for the changes as well as events and information resources.</p> <p>For more information, including advice on how to access support or register for the champions' training programme offered by LSIS, visit www.excellencegateway.org.uk/QCF.</p>
ALP	<p>The Association of Learning Providers (ALP) supports the LSIS QCF Readiness Programme by working with work-based learning providers to help them develop the necessary expertise and systems to get ready for the QCF by December 2010. Information can be found on its website: http://www.learningproviders.org.uk/topics/details/qualificationand-credit-framework-qcf/</p>
AoC	<p>The Association of Colleges (AoC) plays a similar role for further education colleges. Information can be found on its website: http://www.aoc.co.uk/</p>
QCDA	<p>QCDA has developed useful resources that complement the LSIS programme, supporting stakeholders to fully operate in the QCF. These resources are available on the QCDA website: http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_22230.aspx</p>

Skills Funding Agency

Cheylesmore House

Quinton Road

Coventry CV1 2WT

T 0845 019 4170

F 024 7682 3675

www.bis.gov.uk/skillsfundingagency



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